

MEGALITHS POINTING TO PLACES OF WORSHIP – GOA -21

The concentration of several dolmens in the vicinity of the villages of Cuelim, Cansaulim, Arossim, Verna and Nagoa is not accidental. The early inhabitants were attracted to this area for its fertile soil and fresh water flowing from the springs of Cuelim, Nagoa, and Verna, and the many tributaries converging to form the River Sal.¹

Megaliths M1 to M4 are along the “Three King’s Way” – an ancient trail.² In 2015, when a section of this trail from M3 to M6 was widened and paved, the fallen dolmen M1 got buried under the road.³ The rectangular wells (W) seen at the foothills are also aligned with the trail, convenient for easy transportation. The large stones quarried from the solid rock bed also provided spring-fed fresh water reliably.

The megaliths are mostly located in the fields, and the communities lived nearby on higher grounds in the vicinity of their sacred ritual sites, to assemble for worship and deliberate the issues - similar to the *maands*, presently used by the tribal communities in Goa.

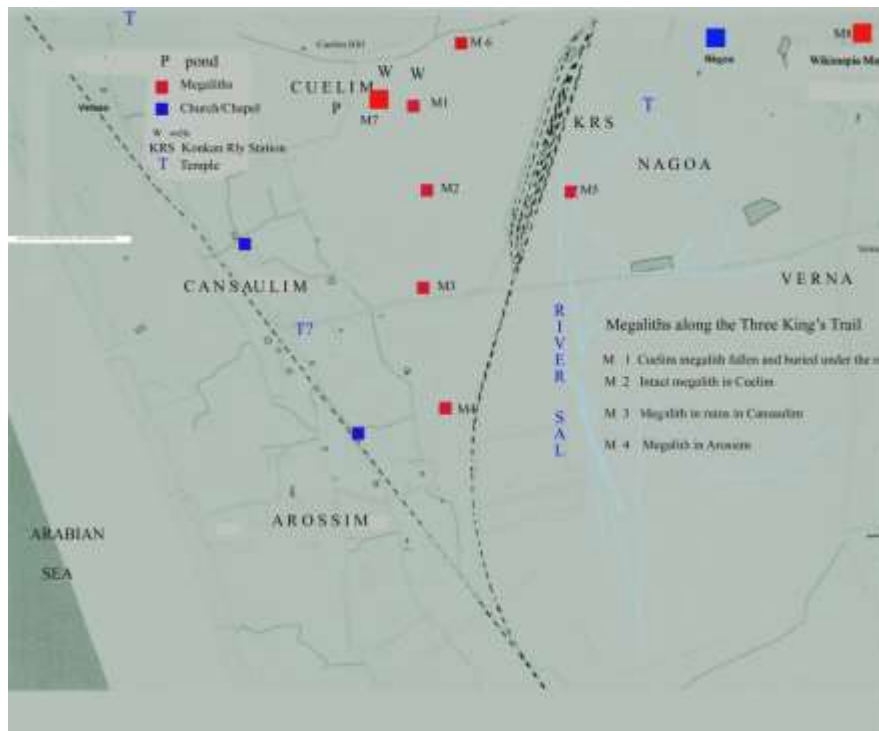


Fig. 1 A map showing the megaliths, churches and temples. SW Railway passing through residential areas and Konkan Railway through the fertile rice fields.

From a cursory inspection of the map it is apparent that the Chapel in Arossim and the Church in Cansaulim are closely aligned with megaliths M4 and M2 respectively. The present religious sites were most likely built on or in close proximity of the earlier temples destroyed nearly 450 year ago.⁴

Historically throughout the world, the invading groups have generally displaced and subdued the earlier inhabitants, and imposed their beliefs upon the indigenous peoples and converted the ritual sites to temples, mosques or churches. Direct pathways along the *bundhs* connecting the earlier sacred sites (now church and chapel) to the megalithic monuments add credence to this hypothesis.⁵ It appears therefore, that the megaliths/mounds were not randomly erected but were sited and oriented with respect to the ritual sites and the sun during the equinoxes and solstices.

On the day of the Feast of the Epiphany (Three King's) the royal retinue from Arossim stops first at the Chapel for blessing by the Chaplain. Then it travels due east along the *bundh* towards M4 and then turns northwards along the ancient trail towards Cuelim hill; the flagman stopping at every megalithic site along the way to pay homage to the ancient stones. On returning from Chapel at the top of the hill by another route, all the three kings stop at the Church before departing their separate ways back home. The connection between the stones and the religious sites appear to be entrenched in the villager's consciousness, although the real significance has long since faded from their collective memories.

Megalith M3, now in ruins, in the proximity of the road connecting Verna and Cansaulim (also a *bundh*), is presently not aligned with any religious site in Cansaulim. However, it is possible that since there were at least three temples like, *Naganatha*, *Santeri* and *Purusha*⁶ in Cansaulim that were destroyed in the 16th century, one of these may have been in the vicinity of the old bazaar (T? in fig.1). Besides, around the foothills of Cuelim there were six temples; *Ozineser*, *Madeu*, *Santeri*, *Gaum Puruso*, *Oizari* and *Quatrepal*. (Foral de Salcete, 1567). Many of the megaliths in this area have long since been destroyed.⁷ However, *Madeu* temple may have been in the vicinity of an existing inland ablution pond, known by the same name.

This relationship, if verified with similar additional examples, it raises the possibility that many of the other megalithic sites may direct to the locations of prehistoric sacred ritual places.

Thus, over the millennia, the oldest man-made megalithic structures extant have been silent witnesses to changing faiths, degradation of fertile fields and pollution of the pristine environment.

References and Notes.

1. With no consideration to the geographical and ecological consequences, a major railway station was constructed by the Konkan Railway despite objections by the local groups. With housing for the staff and workers, the waters are now polluted and a major section of the rich land is out of cultivation.
2. <http://wikimapia.org/7734011/The-traditional-trail-of-the-Arossim-King-to-the-top-of-the-Cuelim-hill>
3. Fig.6 (15°21'35" N 73°54'30" E. Elev. 27 ft. (A photo taken earlier.) (<https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/megaliths-around-source-river-sal.pdf>)
4. D'Silva, Themistocles, *Unravelling History: the Village of Arossim*, Goa-1556. 2015.
5. Not seen in the map, but there are *bundhs* (raised mud causeways) and paths that connect the sacred sites to the megaliths.
6. Gomes Pereira, Rui, Goa: Hindu Temples and Deities, Translated by, Antonio Couto, Printwell Press, 1978. See also A.K. Priolkar, The Goa Inquisition, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1998, p.80. *Santeri* is a cult devoted to the worship of "Roem" or termite hill for the fertility of the soil and *Purusha* to the founder of the settlement.
7. Information by an elderly resident of Cuelim.