

Megaliths – Skeletons of Primordial Mounds/Anthills - 28

The megaliths in the rice fields, at the source of River Sal¹, are revered as well as feared by the local tribal residents. Being warned by the elders the young avoid even touching these ancient stones, fearing that these are inhabited by snakes or from some undesirable consequences. This is the main reason that these large stones have survived for millennia.

Besides, during the processions of the Three Kings, along the ancient path through the fields, connecting these standing or fallen stones, all the flag men temporarily stop in front of them to pay respect by waving the flags. Reportedly, in earlier times, at certain occasions, even liquor was also poured on the stones. These are some of the exterior manifestations practiced that are deeply ingrained in the collective memories of the nearby farming community.

In 2015, when one of the sites was partially excavated, to determine the height of the stones, the local tribal helper initially hesitated to dig, later he regretted his action and quit working, even though there was no snake in the vicinity.

Further south, in the village of Arossim, the single standing megalith has an S-shaped scar at the upper end of the northern face, with an inlaid piece of quartz. It appears that initially the entire figure of the snake was of quartz. (Figs. 1 and 2)



Fig.1. Quartz head of a snake still inlaid in the stone



Fig. 2 Enlarged section of the quartz snake or serpent head

Snakes are carved on the rock-bed at Usgalimal and anthropomorphic stone snake artefacts have been found in the region. This is indicative that snake worship and natural mounds, believed to be abodes of snakes,² were considered gods and have been worshiped by the earliest settlers. This practice continues presently in Goa and elsewhere in India, as the festival of *Naga Panchami*.

It becomes apparent that the large standing stones may be the structural remains of the mounds, built to emulate the termite hills, as their gods. With passing of time, and change of religions, neglecting to maintain erosion of the mounds after the rains, the practice was forgotten, but the memories of ancient past have lingered.

The one at Cuelim was likely sited with respect to the position of the sun at sunrise during equinoxes can be seen in figure 3.

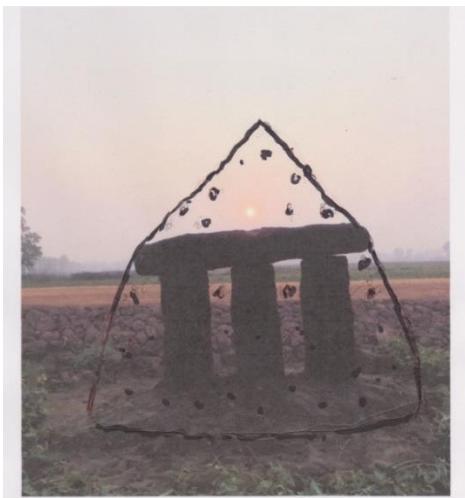


Fig.3 Soil eroded from man-made primordial mound to expose the interior supporting stone framework



Fig. 3a. Sunset behind a mountain at Udayagiri on December 26th. 2018 (source Wikimedia Commons)

The Egyptian metaphor for the primordial mound was "island of flames," an allusion to the dawn, when the sun appears to rise out of the mound itself. As in *Udayagiri*, or the peaks on which morning sunlight falls first, are sacred place names in India.³

The megalith in `Arossim, located due East of the Chapel, also aligns with the confluence of the tributaries, the source of River Sal - a

very sacred area for the early settlers, as it is today to the believers of *Triveni Sangam*. (See map below, fig.4.)



Fig.4 Alignment of megaliths/earlier anthills erected at the Source of River Sal

From the location of this megalith, it is now apparent that the original site of assembly for social and cultural life, *maand*,* of the megalithic people of Arossim, may have been in the vicinity of the Chapel. In support of this hypothesis, there is also a direct raised walkway or path[#] from the Chapel to the megalith. Besides, all the *bundhs* (raised causeways) built through the rice fields converge to the *maand*/temple/Chapel. In earlier times, these causeways also belonged to the temple, and most likely, still earlier to the Neolithic community's *maand*. Some of these *bundhs* are now inherited by the Chapel. This ancient landscaped topography has remained unchanged to this day.

These megaliths do not appear to be sepulchral because the rice fields, which get flooded during the monsoons, are not suitable sites for burials. It is however possible that sacrifices may have been offered there and/or bones deposited in the spaces between the vertical stones. No metallic buried artefact was detected at the sites which were partially excavated.

It appears now that they were strategically located in the fields with cosmic and religious significance. The one located in the village of Cuelim, bordering Cansaulim, the sun appears to rise out of the mound itself, at dawn on spring equinox. This mound may have helped the

people determine the change of seasons, and the time to prepare the fields for sowing, as seen in fig.3.

Many of the excavated sites of the megaliths, concentrated in the subcontinent, were found to be non-sepulchral. Perhaps some of these may also be the structural remains of primordial mounds.³

To the devotees, the deity does not represent the anthill, the anthill is the deity, and the deity is the anthill: mound and deity are regarded as one.⁴

The clay from the real termite hills brought up from deep underground by the termites, also played an important part in the consecration of temples, the warding off of evil, ritual destruction of an enemy, calling divine witness and as antidote against snake bites.

The worship of anthills takes the form of ritual circumambulation (*pradaksina*), involving "sun-wise" circulation around the mound with prayers of supplication. This is a solar rite by which the worshiper identifies with the course of the sun for its life-giving energy.

References.

1. See also, <https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/megaliths-pointing-to-places-of-worship3-4.pdf>
<https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/megaliths-around-source-river-sal.pdf>
<https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/megaliths-constructing-dolmen-goa-docx-1.pdf>
2. In arid areas, the humid and cool interior ducts and channels of the termite mounds are attractive to reptiles.
3. Irwin, John C., **The Sacred Anthill and the Cult of the Primordial Mound**, *History of Religions*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (May, 1982), U. of Chicago, pp. 339-360. (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062329>)
4. Analogous to the Stupa. The mound itself is said to represent the form of the seated Buddha.
* *Maands* are still being used by tribal communities in the hinterlands, where stone seats are arranged in a circle for the elders to meet and deliberate community affairs as well as for religious rituals.
- #. This path is now the starting route of the procession from the Chapel, of the Arossim "King", leading up to the Cuelim hill, on the Feast Day of the Three Kings.