"Cueva Menga," with Notes on the Chronology of the Spanish Dolmens.

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Spain as a country is rich in dolmens and other megalithic tombs. The writer had occasion to visit one or two while in Spain last summer, and, as a result, to look into the literature on the subject This is profuse, though a good deal of summarising has been done by Dr. Obermaier in a series of articles, partly in Spanish, partly in German.

Tumulus burials of Tardenoisean—that is transitional between Palæolithic and Neolithic—age exist in Spain, and can be compared to a tumulus burial of similar age in Southern England, if the investigations of Mr. Lewis Abbott are to be accepted. I am not proposing to deal with this period; the golden age of the dolmens in Spain commenced at the end of the Neolithic age, and ended with the early Bronze age.

Description.

The word dolmen is used in literature in a very general and vague sense, and it is thus that I use it in the title of this paper. Strictly speaking a dolmen consists of a large table of stone resting on upright stones, and is to be distinguished from the Passage-Grave and the Stone-Cist. There is no need for me to give here any lengthy description of these latter, they are too well-known. I will merely say that the passage-grave consists of a chamber, access to which is gained by a long covered gallery—the whole usually occurring under an artificial hill. The stone-cist may be described as the chamber without the gallery, in other words little more than a large stone coffin.

Several noteworthy variations occur in the construction of Spanish dolmens, and these are important from a chronological point of view. For example in the South West, in the region of the Laguna de la Janda, primitive constructions of what may be described as the true dolmen type occur. Elsewhere we find the passage-grave, sometimes with a long, sometimes with a short gallery; a peculiar variety of the latter case occurs in the "Cueva Menga" (Plate VI.) where the chamber is of enormous size (25.40 m. by 6.10 m. by 2.70–3 m.), and of trapezoid shape, while the gallery is short and wide. A stout celt of serpentine was found in this dolmen.

Even in the construction of typical passage-graves there are important variations. First and foremost there is what I may call the normal type, frequent in Scandinavia, Ireland, etc., where the walls of the chamber and gallery are composed of large upright slabs of rock on which rests the roof—itself formed of large flags. These sometimes become gigantic, as in the "Cueva Menga," where the roof-stones (in some cases 6 m (about) by 7 m. (about) in size) had to be strengthened by a row of supporting monoliths down the middle. It would seem clear in this case that primitive man first set up the wall, then by some means heaved up the "lids" and then covered the whole with an earth tumulus.

But a number of passage-graves are found, the walls of which are not composed of large slabs, but are built up of what one might almost call rubble, sometimes faced with thin plates of stone. Although the walls of the chambers are frequently slightly corbelled, or are dome shaped, the roof-stone is still of great size and weight, and clearly the walls are unsuitable to support it. The procedure for construction seems to have been as follows. A suitable hill was first chosen, and in it a deep trench was dug, at the bottom of which the chamber and gallery roof-stones were laid. The trench was then filled in. Next under the roof-stones a passage and chamber were dug considerably smaller than the covering lids, which therefore remained resting on undisturbed ground. Light walls were then built merely to finish off the whole. These so called cupola dolmens often have one or more extra chambers to the side of the main chamber or gallery. A sort of transitional form occurs, where the gallery walls are formed of stout slabs, and only the chamber has the rubble walls typical of the second mode of construction.

Stone-cists tumuli are round, but these simple structures do not allow of much variation from the normal.

DISTRIBUTION.

Two main areas may be distinguished:

1. A northern area focussing round the southern slopes of the Pyrenees and closely connected with the French dolmen culture. They follow the normal construction, and with them I am not concerned in this paper.

2. A southern section, including Portugal. Thanks to the explorations of Siret, Obermaier, and a number of Spanish investigators, the contents of many of the dolmens of this Spanish Group have been published. It has been found possible to make out a sequence, especially in the extreme south. This part of Europe,

owing to its early discovered mineral resources, enjoyed a very prosperous Copper Age corresponding in time to our Beaker Period. Not only do beakers occur in some of the dolmens, but also stone and copper implements of very fine workmanship. On going North however, copper gets rarer and rarer, and dolmens of exactly similar structure, and considered to be contemporary with some of those further South containing metal, have not themselves yielded any trace of it. In considering Spain as a whole, the pre-historian must once again remember the difference between cultural and time ages. The following is the tentative suggested chronology compiled from one or two of Dr. Obermaier's papers.

END OF PURE NEOLITHIC AGE.

1. Precursors of the true dolmens in the form of rectangular boxes or circular enclosures. No lid, if there ever was one, has survived. Little tumulus over the construction.

2. Simple chamber dolmens constructed of rough flags of a quadrangular or polygonal shape.

Contents: Sharpened axes of stone with massive round bodies. Ordinary Neolithic flint tools often geometric. Simple points, awls and chisels of bone. Simple pottery (cups and beakers) with a few simple circles or pointillé engraved on them. A few poorly made ornaments such as bored teeth, shells or fragments of bone, etc.

3 Dolmens with small entrances and little covered galleries.

Contents: Same as 2 only better workmanship. Armlets made from Pectunculus shell. The first appearance of a simple form of schist idol.

EARLY COPPER AGE.

1. (*a*) Large passage-graves. (*b*) Big roofed galleries (the latter often of trapezoid shape).

Contents: Sharpened axes often made from choice stone. Flint arrow-heads trimmed over their whole surface, often with tangs or simple basal wings. Large fine dagger blades. Pottery with rich linear decoration—geometric pattern, wavy lines or spirals, etc. The first appearance of bell beakers. Beads of callais, schist idols; amulets of animal phalanges. In the South of the peninsula first appearance of copper.

FULL COPPER AGE.

(Two zones—one in the South; the other in the North).

1. South Zone or better South West. Cupola dolmens with or without entrance galleries or interior annexes. Also ordinary dolmens with entrances and covered galleries.

At the beginning of this time appears the change in building. Formerly, as has been said, the uprights of the chamber and gallery supported the roof, but now the excavation method is employed. However, locally the simple passage-grave with the old technique continues to exist.

Contents: Similar to the previous cases. Sharpened votive axes. Fine daggers and blades of flint. Arrow-heads, some with long tangs and tail like basal wings—either willow or reed shaped. Bone beads and round-eyed needles. Tools and weapons of copper —flat axes and blades. Pottery of the Ciempozuelos type with bell beakers. Decoration purely geometric or figurative—sun pictures, conventionalised animals, eye ornaments, etc. Painted vessels (rare). Beads etc. of gold, silver copper, gilded lead, ivory, amber, amethyst, turquois, callais. Armlets of ivory or thin stone plates. Palettes. Human shaped flat idols of stone; schist idols often with rich engravings of rough representations of humans—frequently painted. Cone shaped idols of alabaster, limestone, etc. Ointment jars. Idols made from phalanges bones, often richly painted or engraved.

2. North Zone. Short passage-graves and cist-shaped chambers.

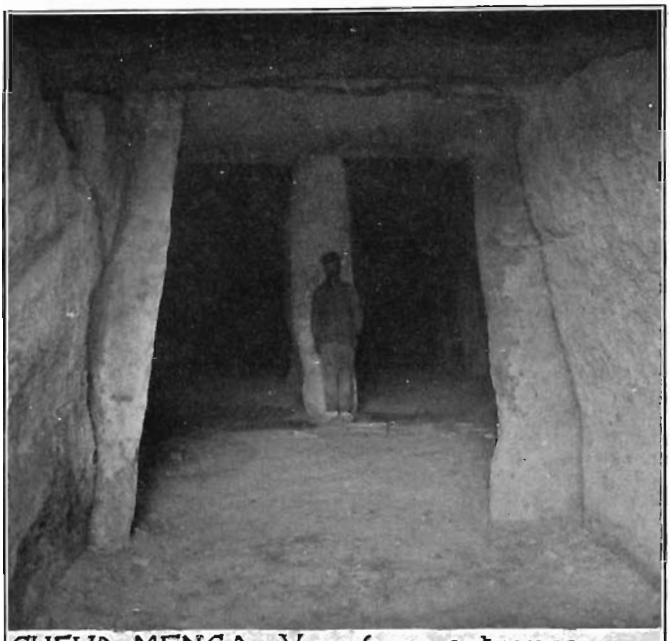
Contents: More or less similar to above with finely worked flint arrow-heads, sometimes tanged and with basal wings, sometimes leaf-shaped. Fairly rich copper finds. Pottery slightly decorated with patterns of Ciempozuelos type. Bell beakers. Beads of stone and mussel shell. Small ornaments of gold, silver, copper, amber. Rare examples of trepanning.

EARLY BRONZE AGE.

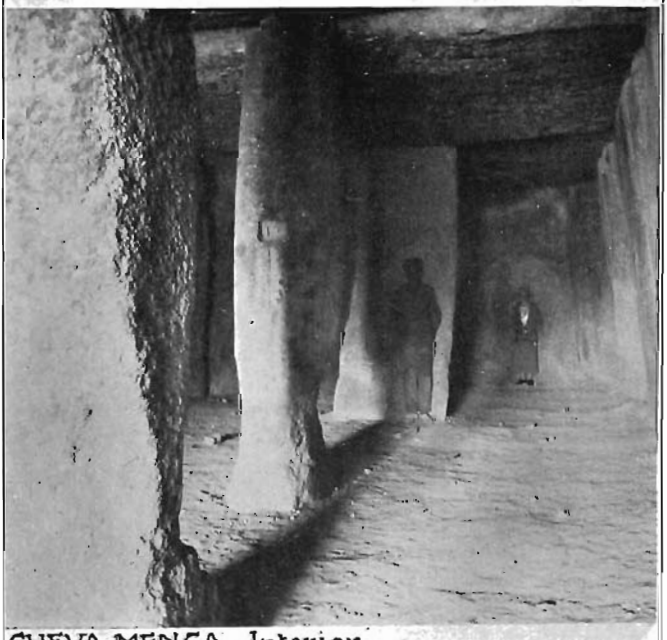
1. Small stone cists with covering lid.

Contents: Falling off in the flint industry. Rich in copper tools along with which Bronze becomes more frequent. This industry includes awls, chisels, thin flat axes with curved edges, sword blades and triangular daggers, rings and armlets. Plain matt pottery of the El Argar type. Square shaped bone beads. Ornaments of gold, silver and amber.

Two points remain to be noted. (1) Art as occurring on dolmens. (2) Comparison with megaliths occurring in Scandinavia, and the North. It is out of my province to do more than touch on these interesting subjects, but I may say that the paintings found sometimes on dolmens in Portugal can be compared with many of the conventionalised paintings in rock shelters of the Spanish



CUEVA MENGA, View from entrance



CUEVA MENGA, Interior

PLATE VI.

third group style. Similar paintings do not occur on dolmens in Spain proper, but the engravings on pottery and the phalanges idols, etc., found in the dolmens can equally be compared with the Spanish third group art. Again the painting of a queer figure, on the headstone of the burial tomb at Gangas de Onis, can be correlated with that on the rock at Peña Tu (Asturias); and the little flat schist idols found especially in Portuguese dolmens must not be forgotten in this connection.

In respect to the comparison with megalithic buildings further North, it is necessary to be even briefer and more tentative in correlating. I will only say that the succession of megalithic buildings in Scandinavia is as follows. (1) Dolmens (earliest). (2) Passage-Graves (a very long period. Hallström told me that occasional traces of copper have been discovered). (3) Stone-Cists (overlapping with the true Bronze Age). I need not remind my readers that the use of copper came late to Scandinavia, though there is no reason to suggest that the Southern culture was not already having an influence in the North at an earlier date. The lack of metal was due to the absence of suitable ores.

To sum up, the study of the dolmens in Spain leads strongly to the conclusion that they belong to that splendid and still only partially realised copper age, which was so especially flourishing in the South of the peninsular. A careful typological study of the very beautifully made flint implements from this Eneolithic culture of South Spain may perhaps throw a little more light on the age of some of the surface finds in East Anglia, which in part are probably of the same date. Already for one type at least the veil has been slightly lifted by Mortimer, when he discovered large leaf-shaped flint tools in some of his Barrow diggings. The richer finds of Spain may be the means of helping us still further in the determination of these rich surface industries.