

Who We Are #8 — Megalithic Europeans



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Due to Judeo-Christian bias, prehistorians assumed that Stonehenge had been modeled after earlier structures from the Middle East, yet radiocarbon dating shows that henge-type remnants in western Europe date back further than those from the Levant.

by Dr. William L. Pierce

*Scientific Dating Shows Megalithic Culture Originated in Northwest Europe
Megalithic Racial Stocks Were Cro-Magnon, Nordic*

BETWEEN THE INDO-EUROPEAN invasions of Old Europe and adjacent territories, beginning about 6,400 years ago, and the invasions of Greece and Italy 2,500 years later which precipitated the birth of classical civilization, a number of interesting developments took place, both racially and culturally.

The Nordic Indo-Europeans who swept across Neolithic Old Europe also pushed their way deep into Mesolithic areas west and north of the settled region in which farming was an established way of life. And the Nordic invaders were farmers and cattle-breeders as well as warriors. While their advent toppled the Mediterranean civilization of Old Europe everywhere except in the Aegean islands, Crete, Greece, and southeastern Italy, at the same time it introduced the food-producing lifestyle to the farthest corners of northwestern Europe.

Nordic Preemption

Northwestern Europe would certainly have switched from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic lifestyle around 6,000 years ago in any event, because the new and a vastly more efficient lifestyle was sweeping inexorably northward just as fast as the gradually changing climate would allow. But, had the Nordics not invaded the area at this time, it would have been Mediterraneans rather than Nordics who brought the change. Then the relatively empty spaces of the north would have acquired a Mediterranean population base.

As it was, a new Nordic heartland was soon established in Scandinavia and the Baltic-North Sea area, profoundly influencing the further development of all

western and central Europe. Just as the Mediterraneans had earlier swamped the food-gathering Mesolithic population of the Balkan peninsula by having a lifestyle which allowed the land to support a much higher density of population, so the Nordic invaders of the north and northwest greatly expanded their numbers there within a short time, preempting any further Mediterranean expansion.

Failure to Kill

In most instances the Nordics did not kill off the indigenous populations of the Mediterranean-occupied areas they conquered, leaving the land empty for themselves. Instead they enslaved the natives, establishing themselves as a ruling aristocracy.

Thus, only in those areas of Mediterranean settlement which received a very substantial Nordic influx was there a significant change in the racial character of the population. Elsewhere the Nordics imposed their Indo-European language, their religion, and other elements of their culture on the Mediterranean population and then gradually sank from sight into the numerically greater Mediterranean substratum as interbreeding took its toll.

In the north, however, things proceeded differently. For one thing, the largely Cro-Magnon population there was quite sparse, as was always the case where a food-gathering economy prevailed. Secondly, the Cro-Magnon race was not as amenable to being enslaved as was the Mediterranean race — even if there had been enough of them to support a Nordic ruling class with their labors.

Organic Development

The development in the north, therefore, was much more organic than in the conquered lands to the south: Nordics became not only the ruling aristocracy, but the peasantry as well. They blended with the Cro-Magnons, producing local populations which varied from mostly Nordic to mostly Cro-Magnon, but with the Nordic element eventually predominating in most areas.

This transformation of northwestern Europe took place over a period of many centuries, and all its details are by no means clear to prehistorians yet. One outstanding development during this period was the erection of megalithic structures in many areas of western Europe (megalith: “large stone”). Massive blocks of stone, some weighing more than 100 tons, were used to build collective tombs and open-air temples, from the Orkney Islands in the north to Malta in the south.

Megalithic Technology

Megalithic structures vary significantly in style in different areas. Most of those in the north, as well as many in the south, involve little or no quarrying or artificial shaping of stone, but instead are constructed of naturally occurring stones. Even

when artificial means were used to bring stones to the approximate size and shape desired by the builders, in most cases no careful dressing or fine smoothing was done. Nevertheless, a remarkable degree of technological skill is revealed by a study of megalithic remains.

Stonehenge, the celebrated megalithic temple and observatory in southern Britain, although it is exceptional in some ways, provides excellent insight into several aspects of life in northwestern Europe in the period following the first Indo-European arrival there.

The impressive stone monument which we think of today as Stonehenge was constructed about 4,100 years ago. It stands on the site of earlier constructions of similar purpose, however, which may be as much as 200 years older.

Structure of Stonehenge

In its final form, 4,100 years ago, Stonehenge consisted of two concentric circular and two semicircular arrays of standing stone slabs, ranging in weight from less than five tons to more than 50 tons, plus half-dozen or so other large stones outside the circular arrays. The whole was surrounded by a circular bank, flanked by a ditch on the outside, approximately 100 yards in diameter.

There were 80 or so stones of the five-ton size, arranged inside a circle of 30 much larger stones, averaging about 25 tons, which were capped with a ring of lintel stones weighing about seven tons each. The diameter of the ring was just under 100 feet. Finally, inside that ring was a semicircle of 15 very large stones, some weighing more than 50 tons and standing nearly 30 feet high. These last were arranged in groups of three (trilithons), each consisting of two uprights joined by a lintel.

Today many of the original stones are missing, having been removed to be used for other purposes in past centuries, their former presence attested only by the holes in which they once stood. Others have fallen over. All are badly weathered and scarred by the passage of more than 40 centuries.

Remarkable Feat

Originally, however, Stonehenge was a work of exceptional order, precision, and craftsmanship. Unlike most megaliths, the stones of Stonehenge were carefully shaped. The lintel stones were fitted to the uprights they capped by mortise and tenon, precisely cut into the exceptionally hard material.

The heavy slabs of stone were carried to their destination as far as 240 miles over land and water. They were erected with a precision that resulted in a maximum error of only four inches in the positions of stones in a 100-foot circle. It is estimated that 1.5 million man-days of labor were required in the building of Stonehenge — quite a feat of management, logistics, and engineering for those days.

Solar Observatory

Even more impressive, however, is the purpose for which Stonehenge was used. The alignments of the trilithons and other stones in the structure prove conclusively that it was laid out precisely to facilitate the ritual observation of certain astronomical events: sunrise and sunset on the days of the summer and winter solstices and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and the northerly and southerly limits of the moon's rather more complex pattern of rising and setting. There is also evidence that Stonehenge was used as a rather sophisticated astronomical computer to predict solar and lunar eclipses.

White “Barbarians”

Until a few years ago most prehistorians took it for granted that the builders of Stonehenge — and of all other megalithic structures in western Europe — copied earlier megalithic models in the eastern Mediterranean. Some believed that Mediterranean immigrants to northwestern Europe carried their skills with them, while others held that it was only the knowledge itself which had traveled northwestward, but all agreed that the White “barbarians” of Europe couldn't possibly have managed a feat like Stonehenge by themselves. It had to have been done — or, at least, the know-how furnished — by some Levantines, some clever Semites.

Such an assumption followed naturally from the Judeo-Christian bias of the 19th century, a century which was still greatly under the influence of the Old Testament, with its Middle Eastern locale: all human culture originated in the Garden of Eden and spread out from there.

Radiocarbon Dating

Even with the advent of radiocarbon dating in 1949, the notion of cultural diffusion from the Middle East was maintained by many. It was not until the calibration of radiocarbon dates against the absolute tree-ring calendar in the late 1960's that the insidious tyranny of the *ex oriente lux* (light from the East) doctrine was finally overthrown.

This recent revolution in prehistoric dating and the changes it caused in our understanding of the roles of various races in the cultural developments upon which our civilization rests is so important that it deserves a brief excursus.

Radiocarbon dating depends upon the presence in all living organisms of a radioactive isotope of carbon, C-14. This radioisotope is formed in the atmosphere (primarily in the stratosphere) as a consequence of cosmic ray bombardment.

Neutrons freed from atmospheric atoms by cosmic rays combine with the nitrogen of the air to cause a nuclear reaction which yields carbon of atomic mass number 14

(naturally occurring carbon atoms have mass numbers of 12 and 13). The C-14 nucleus is unstable, and it decays into nitrogen again by emitting a beta particle (electron). The rate of decay is such that exactly half the atomic nuclei in any given sample of C-14 will emit electrons and become non-radioactive nitrogen nuclei in a period of 5,600 years.

Carbon Equilibrium

Meanwhile, however, the C-14 being continually formed in the upper atmosphere combines with atmospheric oxygen to form radioactive carbon dioxide, which diffuses throughout the atmosphere and enters into the respiration of plant life, along with its non-radioactive carbon dioxide. Eventually an equilibrium is reached, with the proportion of C-14 to C-12 and C-13 reaching a constant value in all living organisms, which undergo a continuous exchange of carbon with the environment.

When an organism dies, however, respiration ceases. If the dead organism (or portion of an organism) does not undergo organic decomposition, then the proportion of C-14 in it will gradually decline, with a half-life of 5,600 years. Such is the case with charcoal, for example. Likewise, wood is sometimes preserved for quite a while after it has died. The prehistorian can often determine the age (i.e., the time since death occurred) of a bit of charcoal or wood or other carbonaceous material of organic origin by measuring its radioactivity — that is, its relative C-14 content.

Good to 50,000 Years

If, for example, the activity is half that of a living sample, then the time since death has been 5,600 years. If the activity is down to one-eighth, then the age is 16,800 years (three half-lives). Reasonably accurate measurements can be made out to about eight or ten half-lives (50,000 years or so).

The technique of radiocarbon dating has been greatly refined since 1949 and has become an invaluable tool for prehistorians, since a presumptive date can be established, with a relatively small margin of error, for any prehistoric site from which a piece of charcoal or wood can be recovered. Until the late 1960's, however, the technique suffered from a major flaw: it depended critically upon the assumption that the cosmic ray bombardment of the earth's atmosphere has not varied significantly in the last 50,000 years. That assumption turned out to be incorrect.

Tree-Ring Chronology

The discovery that the relative abundance of C-14 in the earth's atmosphere has fluctuated in the past was made by measuring the C-14 content of very old samples of wood whose exact age was known from a count of seasonal growth rings.

In particular, the bristlecone pine, a very slow-growing and long-lived tree native to parts of the western United States, has some living specimens which are more than 4,000 years old — the oldest living things on earth. Only the outermost layer of these trees is alive, however. The inner layers died off over the millennia, one layer per year.

By counting growth rings inward from the living layer on a core plug taken from such a tree, the absolute age of any given layer of the wood can be determined exactly. A measurement of its C-14 activity then provides a calibration correction for any other sample, anywhere in the world, with the same C-14 activity.

Prehistory Pushed Back

By matching up sections of the growth-ring patterns of living bristlecone pines with sections of the patterns in even older specimens from long-dead trees, an absolute chronology stretching back nearly 8,000 years has now been established. When applied to sites in northwestern Europe of the megalithic period, the effect of the new tree-ring calibration is to push radiocarbon dates back about 500 years. Thus, a radiocarbon age of 3,600 years for Stonehenge has been corrected to 4,100 years.

Other megalithic henge-type remnants in western Europe date back more than 5,600 years, and there are megalithic stone tombs in Brittany more than 6,000 years old. The oldest massive-stone structures in the Mediterranean region, the Egyptian pyramids, are about 4,700 years old. And the megalithic tombs of Malta and Crete, which were once thought to have been the models for similar tombs in northwestern Europe, are many centuries younger.

Megalithic cultural diffusion, if it took place at all, was from northwest to southeast, not the other way.

Megalithic Race

For us the most interesting question is the racial character of the megalith builders of western Europe. Actually, the remains found in the megalithic tombs belong to a range of subracial types. If there is any single common denominator it is a type which has been named Atlanto-Mediterranean.

But the Atlanto-Mediterranean was not at all Mediterranean, in the sense that the short, gracile inhabitants of the Middle East and the Mediterranean coastal regions were. He was much taller, more rugged skeletally, and less pedomorphic. The word “Mediterranean” is part of his name only because it was earlier assumed that the megalith builders had to be Mediterraneans, who traveled by sea from the eastern Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar and up the Atlantic coast to Brittany, Britain, and Scandinavia.

The Atlanto-Mediterraneans, in fact, were derived from the two basic subracial stocks of northern Europe: the Cro-Magnons, who had been there for 35,000 years;

and the Nordics, who began arriving just before the beginning of the megalithic period. This conclusion is supported by everything we know about the megalithic society of northwestern Europe.

Indo-European Traits

It was, in the first place, not a typically Mediterranean society. It was, as indicated by Stonehenge, a society of sun-worshippers, a typically Indo-European trait. And it was a hierarchical society ruled by warrior-chieftains, as indicated by the rich grave goods, including bronze weapons, found in megalithic tombs. Again, this indicates Indo-European rather than Mediterranean influences.

Of course, the racial situation in megalithic Europe was fairly complex, and it was by no means uniform. Some Mediterraneans undoubtedly found their way into northwestern Europe and formed an element in the megalithic population. But they probably came by land, from the portions of central and southeastern Europe disrupted by the Indo-European invasions from beyond the Black Sea, rather than by sea.

No Mediterranean Import

The Nordics did not, by any means, fill up all of northwestern Europe and convert the entire region into a new Nordic homeland. Mediterranean groups were observed in this part of Europe by the Romans (the Silures of Wales, described by Tacitus as having dark complexions and curly hair, were one such group).

But it is clear that the megalithic culture was a native European development and not an import from the Mediterranean.

Northwestern Europe was not the only region on which Indo-European warriors exerted a decisive influence. We shall soon follow their expeditions of conquest and culture-building into prehistoric Italy, Greece, and India.