

# Rethinking Megalithism as Heterotopia: Empirical Insights from Alentejo (Portugal)

## Repensando el megalitismo como heterotopía: aportaciones empíricas desde el Alentejo (Portugal)

**KEY WORDS:** Foucault, philosophy, megalithism, archaeology, Alentejo.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Foucault, filosofía, megalitismo, arqueología, Alentejo.

**GAKO-HITZAK:** Foucault, filosofía, megalitismoa, arkeología, Alentejo.

**Mara Beatriz AGOSTO<sup>(1)</sup>**

### ABSTRACT

This article reconceptualises Megalithism through the lens of Michel Foucault's lecture "Des espaces autres" (1967). We frame these monuments as prehistoric heterotopias: tangible places that create specific social relations by juxtaposing incompatible domains, regulating access, and manipulating time. We begin by explaining Foucault's six principles – crisis/deviation, functional mutability, juxtaposition, heterochrony, opening/closing, and relational function. Following this, we propose methodological tools such as sensory phenomenology, archaeoastronomy, GIS (Geographic Information Systems), material biography analysis, and critical ethnography. These tools help transform philosophical concepts into archaeological evidence. We demonstrate how each of Foucault's principles is reflected in the megalithic record through examples such as selective bone manipulation, constructive palimpsests, chambers that connect the sky and the chthonic forces, solstice alignments that disrupt the calendar, cyclically blocked portals, and sites that address territorial tensions or reveal emerging inequalities. Ultimately, we argue that when viewed as heterotopias, they are no longer seen as isolated ritual sites. Instead, they emerge as dynamic entities that manage social crises, negotiate belonging, and inscribe cosmological beliefs within the agricultural landscape. This framework expands the dialogue between philosophy and archaeology, providing a solid foundation for future interdisciplinary research.

### RESUMEN

Este artículo reconceptualiza el megalitismo a través del prisma de la conferencia «Des espaces autres» (1967) de Michel Foucault. Enmarcamos estos monumentos como heterotopias prehistóricas: lugares tangibles que crean relaciones sociales específicas al juxtaponer dominios incompatibles, regular el acceso y manipular el tiempo. Comenzamos explicando los seis principios de Foucault: crisis/desviación, mutabilidad funcional, yuxtaposición, heterocronía, apertura/cierre y función relacional. A continuación, proponemos herramientas metodológicas como la fenomenología sensorial, la arqueoastronomía, los SIG (Sistemas de Información Geográfica), el análisis de la biografía material y la etnografía crítica. Estas herramientas ayudan a transformar los conceptos filosóficos en pruebas arqueológicas. Demostramos cómo cada uno de los principios de Foucault se refleja en los registros megalíticos a través de ejemplos como la manipulación selectiva de huesos, los palimpsestos constructivos, las cámaras que conectan el cielo y las fuerzas cónicas, las alineaciones solsticiales que alteran el calendario, los portales bloqueados cíclicamente y los yacimientos que abordan las tensiones territoriales o revelan las desigualdades emergentes. En última instancia, argumentamos que, cuando se consideran heterotopias, ya no se ven como yacimientos rituales aislados. En cambio, emergen como entidades dinámicas que gestionan las crisis sociales, negocian la pertenencia e inscriben creencias cosmológicas en el paisaje agrícola. Este marco amplía el diálogo entre la filosofía y la arqueología, proporcionando una base sólida para futuras investigaciones interdisciplinarias.

### LABURPENA

Artikulu honek Michel Foucault-en «Des espaces autres» (1967) konferentziaren ikuspuntik landutako megalitismoaren kontzeptu berria jasotzen du. Monumentu horiek historiaurreko heterotopiatzat hartzten ditugu: eremu bateraezinak elkarren ondoan jartzean, sarbidea erregulatzearan eta denbora manipulatzearan harreman sozial espezifikoak sortzen dituzten leku ukigarriak. Hasteago, Foucaulten sei printzipioak azalduko ditugu: krisia/desbideratzea, mutagarritasun funtzionala, justaposizioa, heterokronia, irekiera/itziera eta harremanen funtzioa. Ondoren, tresna metodologikoak proposatuko ditugu, hala nola fenomenología sentoriala, arqueoastronomía, SIGak (Informazio Geografikoko Sistematikak), biografía materialaren azterketa eta etnografía kritikoa. Tresna horiei esker, kontzeptu filosofikoak frogatzen arkeologikoki bihur daitezke. Foucaulten printzipio bakoitza erregistro megalítiketan islatzen dela frogatu dugu, hainbat adibideren bidez: hezurren manipulazio selektiboa, palimpsesto eraikitzaileak, zerua eta indar konikoak lotzen dituzten kamerak, egutegia eraldatzetan duten lerrokatze solstizialak, ziklikoki blokeatutako atariak eta lurralde-tentsioak jorratzen dituzten edo azaleratzen ari diren desberdintasunak erakusten dituzten aztarnategiak. Azken batean, heterotopiak aintzat hartzten direnean, jada ez direla aztarnategi erritual isolatu gisa ikusten argudiatzen dugu. Hori beharrean, krisi sozialak kudeatzen dituzten, kide izatea negoziatzen duten eta nekazaritza-paisaian sinesmen kosmologikoak inskrubatzetan erakunde dinamiko gisa agertzen dira. Esparru horrek filosofiaren eta arkeologiarren arteko elkarritzeta zabaltzen du, eta etorkizunean diziplina arteko ikerketetarako oinarri sendoa eskaini.

<sup>(1)</sup> IUNIARQ (Centre of Archaeology of the University of Lisbon) - CFUL (Centre of Philosophy of the University of Lisbon) - FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology, mara.s.agosto@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6269-3277>

“Über’s Eis Richtung Nordpol, dort werd’ ich dich erwarten  
 Werde an der Achse steh’n  
 Aus Feuerland, in harter Traumarbeit, zum Pol  
 wird sich dort alles nur noch um uns dreh’n”  
**Einstürzende Neubauten – Stella Maris**  
*For my Jo Duarte*

## 0. PREAMBLE

On the Atlantic coast of Europe and beyond, communities from the fifth to the second millennium BCE (e.g., Paulsson, 2019: 4) erected colossal stones in landscapes once dominated by natural elements. Dolmens, menhirs and cromlechs were the structures that these communities built. Having a large history of investigations, what we have available today, from the explanations of antiquarians to the modern interpretations of archaeologists, are many layers of meanings and interpretations: they are, in part, like a palimpsest of appropriations and reinterpretations (see Agosto, 2023).

In fact, megalithic monuments represent a considerable effort in constructing funerary spaces in prehistoric Europe. Furthermore, the question of their astronomical alignments only complicates the issue further, requiring a highly refined knowledge of astronomy. Interpretative responses to these steps are often related to death, memory, and cosmologies; and although this logic is not wrong, these interpretations risk seeing megalithic monuments as ritual sites rather than as relational operators in a space and within the community.

It is in this sense that we invoke Michel Foucault’s 1967 lecture “Des espaces autres” (Of Other Spaces) with the concept of heterotopia (Foucault, 1994; Gross, 2020; Çalışkan *et al.*, 2019; Bazin and Naccache, 2016; Saldanha, 2008). These are, in effect, real spaces that are in deliberate tension with the spatial order. They oppose incompatible realms, such as the sacred and the profane, or the domestic and death, or heaven and Earth. They accumulate or cut off time, regulating access through ritualistic codes or constructed boundaries. What we propose in this text is to read Megalithism in light of this concept in order to gain a better understanding of prehistoric communities that built them.

This article will therefore be structured as follows: 1) a brief conceptual presentation of the idea of heterotopia, 2) followed by a consideration of the methodologies that allow archaeologists to assess the utopian realities of megalithic monuments, and 3) finally, each principle of heterotopia will be applied to European megalithic realities with a special focus on Alentejo.

This article, therefore, aims to answer the following question: how can the concept of heterotopia be applied to prehistory? Does it make sense to apply it to contexts that are so distant? How can this concept, born in post-Enlightenment Europe, contribute to our understanding of communities that are not? How do heterotopias apply to megalithic contexts? What methodological tools do archaeologists have at their disposal to assert the conceptual validity of heterotopias?

The vitality of the union between archaeology and philosophy can make valuable contributions to the understanding of prehistoric communities and the archaeologist’s considerations, as well as provide philosophy with its much-needed empirical basis. However, following the plan outlined in this article, it is essential first to define what a heterotopia is.

## 1. CONCEPTUAL BASIS: WHAT IS A HETEROOTPIA?

Foucault coined the term heterotopia to designate real sites that operate as sites contrary to the spatial order of everyday life, or that reflect on them. They are therefore neither imaginary spaces like utopias nor transparent extensions of everyday life. They are other spaces where social norms are suspended, inverted, intensified, or subject to inspection. In his lecture “Des espaces autres” (Foucault, 1994: 752–62), Foucault establishes six deliberately broad principles to allow for their non-dogmatic application.

First, before we get into the six principles, Foucault establishes the mirror as a metaphor (Foucault, 1994: 756). The mirror is a utopia because the space reflected does not exist, but it is simultaneously a heterotopia because it is materially anchored: it shows where you are and where you are not. This oscillation between the real and the unreal, the here and the there, captures the paradox of heterotopia. This focuses on mobility, reflection, and relatability.

After considering this, it is essential to conduct an analysis of the six principles of heterotopia. These should be understood as coordinates rather than a map, which will also be important when we consider and apply these theoretical principles to the prehistoric reality that is the Megalithism phenomenon (Foucault, 1994: 756–62):

1. Crisis and deviation – Foucault mentions the so-called *heterotopias of crisis*, spaces set aside for individuals during extreme biological or social moments, such as puberty, menstruation, or death. He later codifies these heterotopias into *heterotopias of deviation*, where individuals who deviate from the norm are sequestered or exposed in psychiatric hospitals, prisons, or clinics. The central idea here is that certain bodies or states cannot circulate freely in common space, but require quarantine, processing, or a public spectacle. In a broader view, this duality of crisis and deviation is related to how society treats exceptionality – whether biological, moral, or altered states;
2. Functionality changes throughout history – heterotopias do not perform a single function. A heterotopic site can change its function because of its “otherness” and its regulation. A monastery becomes a

museum, and a cemetery migrates from the city centre to the outskirts. This principle prompts us to consider the biography of spaces. In archaeology, where centuries are condensed into each stratigraphical layer and mutability is quite frequent, this is particularly evident. This principle also makes us think that instead of asking *what this is for*, we should ask *how this was reconstructed and remade*;

3. Juxtaposition of incompatible spaces – for Foucault, it is a space that joins spaces that otherwise would be mutually exclusive – such as a Persian garden as a microcosm of the world, or a theatre stage where several plays are performed at the same time. The power of heterotopias, therefore, lies in their co-presence and compression. Applying this principle to prehistory, we are led to consider how different types of architecture – domestic, funerary, etc. – are interconnected;
4. Heterochrony: accumulated vs. fleeting time – Foucault invites us to think about heterotopias that accumulate time, such as museums, libraries, ossuaries, and those that exist in bursts, such as festivals or fairs. Both, in any case, cut time out of the daily flow. In prehistory, we can read heterochrony in two distinct ways: as solidified extracts that accumulate duration, or as astronomically guided structures that punctuate time. In this way, the essential thing here is to reconstruct rhythms, whether deep or punctual;
5. Systems of opening and closing – in heterotopias, entry is always effectively coded; a person does not simply enter the heterotopia, but is admitted by initiating a ritual, paying a fee, or breaking a taboo. It is a space that is protected by doors, borders, and rules. In megalithic terms, this materialises in passages, in blocking stones, in hidden art, in the same way as celestial knowledge and these monuments as gating devices;
6. Relational function (illusion or compensation) – finally, the last principle of heterotopias is that they demonstrate the surrounding space as illusory or compensate for its flaws by establishing an alternative order. This is the most political principle of all, and it questions what problem outside this place it reveals or solves. From a prehistoric perspective, this compensation can manifest in the construction of megalithic monuments to foster community identity or ease growing inequality (e.g., see Bueno Ramírez, 2018; Hinz, 2011; Pearson and Willis, 2011; Sherratt, 1990; Trigger, 1990); from the point of view of illusion, it can mean projecting cosmic order onto somewhat confusing subsistence cycles. The key is relational specificity: this monument compensates for that tension, or unmasks that contradiction. Without such specificity, the principle dissolves into rhetoric.

It is also important to note that these principles form a heuristic grid, as it is not required that all heterotopias equally exhibit all six principles, nor that these principles

be read equally across cultures, but rather that they make us question how the dimensions of otherness are articulated, how they are materialised, and how they shift over time.

Similarly, some theoretical precautions must be taken when applying philosophical concepts to prehistory. The first of these is anachronism. However, if we view this concept not as dogma but as a heuristic tool, we can adapt it to new realities. Similarly, we must be careful not to fall into the generalisation that all megalithic monuments are the same; in fact, the heterotopic aspects of a large dolmen (such as the Anta Grande do Zambujeiro, in Évora, Alentejo, Portugal (e.g., Soares and Silva, 2010)) or a very complex cromlech (such as the cromlech of Almendres, Évora, Alentejo, Portugal) (Calado, 2004; Alvim, 2021) would be substantially different, which only shows that heterotopia must be analysed on a case-by-case basis and modelled according to the reality in question.

That said, it is therefore important to understand how this concept materialises in Megalithism.

## 2. HOW TO ASSESS THE MEGLITHIC HETEROPIAS? METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The first line of inquiry to access heterotopias is related to the body – to a true phenomenology of movement and sensory experience. Each passageway is a choreography, each moment of darkness is not an absence of light but a play between light and darkness. All these elements were taken into consideration in the construction of the monuments. From an empirical point of view, researchers can not only try to enter these monuments but also digitally reconstruct their interiors and try to understand how posture is forced to change, how light diminishes, and how echoes multiply. Acoustic tests can also map the dynamics of this material in the monuments, while analyses combining architecture and astronomy can understand how light enters at a given moment.

Similarly, heterochrony must be demonstrated, not assumed. In this sense, cultural astronomy provides tools to understand whether alignments have meaning or are mere coincidences (Aveni, 2016; Baity, 1973; Cerdeño *et al.*, 2006; Hoskin, 2001, 2015; Hoskin and Calado, 1998; Silva, 2010, 2012, 2014; Ruggles, 2015). Indeed, reconstructions of ancient skies can simulate exactly when the sun, moon, or stars aligned specifically with architectural points. On the other hand, sequences of radiocarbon dating and Bayesian models can show us the rhythms of opening and position that correspond to calendar rhythms or broader social circles (Paulsson, 2019; Griffiths *et al.*, 2023).

Since heterotopia is a space of the other, this otherness is relational. In this way, geographic information systems enable us to visually and physically demonstrate the features that connect the monument to its

landscape (e.g., Bueno Ramírez, 2004; Cabras and Cicilloni, 2017; Calado and Rocha, 2007; Cabrero-González, 2023; Cerrillo Cuenca and Bueno Ramírez, 2019; López López, 2020). Visibility analyses show which horizons were visible through the entrance of the monument, which rivers or passages were visible through an alignment of menhirs, and how one monument sees another (e.g., see Cabrero González, *et al.*, 2024; Cerrillo-Cuenca, 2017; García Sanjuán *et al.*, 2006; Wheatley and Gillings, 2000). Moreover, archaeology favours sight as the primary sense in the archaeological analysis (see Thomas, 1993). Least-cost path and network analyses turn clusters of sites into graphs of movement and encounter (e.g., Hazell and Brodie, 2012; Ogburn, 2004): who would pass which stone *en route* to which gathering? Similarly, by combining the spatial position of these monuments with other climatic and geological evidence, we can see which monuments lie between biomes, boundaries, and geological changes, showing which positions are open to negotiation, compensation, or simple demonstration.

On the other hand, megalithic structures have agency and a biography (e.g., Scarre, 2005 [2002]; Gosden and Marshall, 1999; Joy, 2009; Kopytoff, 1986; Ramírez, 2021; Tejedor Rodríguez, 2015). One of the points of analysis of these monuments may be precisely to try to understand where the orthostats came from, possibly from sites laden with meaning. However, the discussion on this matter is already long in the literature (e.g., Aranda Jiménez *et al.*, 2018; Boaventura *et al.*, 2020; Calado, 2004; Cummings, 2002a, 2002b; Dennis, 2004; Harris, 2018; Linares Catela, 2020; Lozano Rodríguez *et al.*, 2023; Navajo Samaniego, 2023; Pearson *et al.*, 2020; Scarre, 2020; Sjögren, 2020; Thorpe and Williams-Thorpe, 1991). However, considering monuments as agents, we must treat these biographies as part of their heterotopic operation: the monument is not a static stage but an actor whose materiality requires continuous renegotiation. Moments of repair or alteration make the constant feedback between people and stones very visible – the very loop heterotopia tries to theorise.

Finally, although ethnography is a delicate tool that should be used sparingly, historical ethnographic analyses can help answer some questions related to megalithic monuments (Bora, 2023; Rabha, 2023; Poyil, 2013), such as who has the power and ritualistic authority to open these monuments? Who can interfere with and manipulate the social power of these monuments? Or how were the bones moved or arranged? Of course, the Neolithic and Chalcolithic in Europe do not share their cosmology with the modern West, which is why conceptions of death would be very different from those of today. However, this comparative move is merely heuristic: deploy it to design field questions and interpretive tests, then strip it away if it begins to dictate answers. Critical ethnography becomes a scaffold, not a template.

### 3. MAPPING HETEROtopic PRINCIPLES onto MEGALITHISM

The concept of heterotopia in archaeology, and particularly in Megalithism, should be viewed not as a simple checklist but as a sequence of problems. We will then proceed to map each principle applied to Megalithism:

1. Crisis and deviation (managing exceptional bodies and moments) – this aspect is easily found in Megalithism, since heterotopias deal with spaces and people on the margins of social definition – such as patients in a psychiatric hospital or the dead in a cemetery – Megalithism constrains that which cannot circulate freely, its situation being very similar to that of the contemporary cemetery. Therefore, the decision to contain a dead body within a large stone and earth architecture, or only part of that body, marks these remains as exceptional and in need of special treatment.

Indeed, archaeological reality confirms this principle, as many of the human remains in dolmens are not undisturbed primary burials. Instead, we see carefully arranged assemblages whose practices involve post-mortem itineraries, either through the exposure of the corpse outside the megalithic monument or its partial inclusion within the monument: all of this is a social process that constructs the ancestors (see Silva *et al.*, 2017; Valera *et al.*, 2014; Evangelista, 2019). These manipulations materialise the deviation of the dead: they are no longer normal people and are not mere waste or rubbish; their bones are powerful and require a funerary choreography. Type and DNA analyses are increasingly revealing layers of selection in the Centre and South of Portugal that go far beyond the mere question of location (Waterman *et al.*, 2014, 2016).

The architecture amplifies the management of this exceptionality, as the entrances force the living body to mimic the liminal state of the bodies; the narrow corridors require stooping or crawling, sudden constrictions that slow progress, and thresholds marked by stones that must be stepped over, climbed or moved. All this choreography insists on a ritualistic logic that makes these monuments a theatre for the processing of crises.

By their very nature, megalithic monuments are spaces of exceptionality, spaces of selection over other ways of facing death, which also existed in the third millennium BCE. It is therefore important not to necessarily include the notion of crisis in the funerary, as the idea of deviation can encompass behaviours or conditions that threaten the common order – madness, violence or ritualistic impurity. Megalithic monuments can help process all of this, and through the deposition and rituals surrounding or involving the monuments, *sublimate* (in the psychoanalytic sense of the term). All of this is a way of disciplining bodies: whether those of the dead or the living, in an exceptional space, in a space of the other.

2. Functional mutability, or the long biography of structures – if heterotopias remain while their roles

change, megalithic monuments are paradigmatic. Indeed, if monumental stone fixes memory, what the site does is constantly renegotiated. And more than a vision that sees these palimpsests as disturbances, the heterotopic lens treats this evidence as proof that communities have re-entered, re-signified and reappropriated these spaces.

Throughout Europe, there are multiple cases of modified corridors, chambers with additions, and megalithic moments that, at their core, have a strong constructive dynamic and use of space (Gonçalves, 1999; Bradley, 2022; Morgan, 2021; Darvill, 2006; Laporte and Bueno Ramírez, 2016; Laporte *et al.*, 2014, 2017; Richards, 1996; Scarre, 2020; Thomas, 1990); chambers that once served as collective burial sites are now used to accommodate individuals, as was often the case in the Bell Beaker phenomenon of southern Iberia (e.g., Herrero-Corral *et al.* 2019; Leisner and Leisner, 1955; Robles *et al.*, 2013; Liesau *et al.*, 2020; Cardoso, 2014-2015). All these architectural changes are not simply random maintenance: they recalibrate who can enter, what is seen, and how monuments relate to the outside space.

These changes can also be identified in the realm of material culture: from Bell Beakers introduced into earlier megalithic monuments (see Sommer, 2017), to copper daggers appearing alongside polished stone axes, or even later intrusions into body deposits. Even absences can be seen as a heterochronic pause that preserves potential: the site is seen as an option, ready to be revived when disturbances in the social system need sublimation. Once again, a monument is configured as a compensatory regime.

And once again, the mutability of megalithic monuments transcends prehistory; stones are reused for other constructions by later populations, before being rebuilt as chapels (e.g., Almeida, 2018; Oliveira *et al.*, 1994; Rocha, 2015). Ethnographically, these chambers are laden with tales and legends, such as the enchanted *moiras* (e.g., Oliveira, 1999, 2001). Antiquarians excavate these monuments, and finally, heritage conservationists install protective equipment and interpretive panels (Agosto, 2023: 21). Each new phase instils new codes, new narratives, new audiences. Heterotopia does not end with the last prehistoric burial – it simply changes its audience and functions, constantly being reappropriated (Agosto, 2023).

The biography of the monument is a central aspect here, as is its capacity to be re-signified and reappropriated.

3. Heterotopias are mechanisms of spatial contradiction: they bring together domains that in principle repel each other and force them to coexist. Megalithic monuments reveal precisely this type of juxtaposition. Indeed, stone and earth architecture such as megalithic monuments – thus revealing a chthonic and terrestrial position – is linked, through stellar and solar alignments,

to the celestial world (e.g., Silva, 2012, 2014; Hoskin and Calado, 1998; Alvim, 2021; Gonçalves, 1992). Similarly, the agrarian landscape adds an additional element to this discussion, as many monuments are positioned along access routes and water divisions essential to daily subsistence, thus establishing a dialogue between these realities and the megalithic monuments (e.g., Criado-Boado, 1989, 1993; Criado-Boado and Vaquero Lastres, 1993; Criado-Boado *et al.*, 1986; Carrero-Pazos *et al.*, 2020; Cerrillo Cuenca, 2011; Fábrega-Álvarez and Parcerio-Oubiña, 2007; Murrieta Flores *et al.*, 2011; Rodríguez-Rellán and Fábregas Valcarce, 2017; Tilley, 1994).

In megalithic monuments, none of this is accidental: just as the chthonic and celestial forces unite in a single moment, so too do the worlds of the living – through rituals – and the dead. Through these juxtapositions, communities could negotiate tensions without dissolving; they are therefore spaces where contradiction is not resolved but orchestrated.

4. Heterochrony, thickening time, slicing time – time simply does not pass through megalithic monuments; it is encapsulated, folded, rationed, and theatrically released. Heterochrony names this ability of heterotopias to generate or punctuate time, to be reservoirs of duration or moments of eruption. In effect, megalithic monuments serve both purposes. They are repositories of ancestral time – they are chambers where the bones of successive generations coexist, where heirloom pots circulate back into deposit centuries after manufacture (e.g., Hinz, 2011; Parker-Pearson and Willis, 2011; Scarre, 2002, Tilley, 1994). But they are also stone calendars, created so that a ray of sunlight on the solstice can reach the interior of the chamber for a few minutes a day.

At that moment, the monument ceases to be inert and becomes a temporal conjunction that connects the community to the cosmos. Archaeologically, this heterochrony appears as a temporal sequence both from a stratigraphic point of view and in terms of the construction phases of the site.

In this sense, Bayesian models allow us not only to see dates, but also rhythms, and these reopening events can be aligned with more pronounced cultural changes, climatic anomalies or demographic shifts. Heterochrony also works socially, as the reopening of the monument after decades is in itself a performative act that engenders genealogies. Thus, monuments are not only containers of human remains but also of temporality: those who can access time – those who know when the sun will align with the monument or when the monument's door will be opened – control the community's relationship with the past and the future. In turn, periods of dormancy do not erase their heterotopic capacity, but intensify it. Indeed, when a sealed chamber becomes a repository of waiting, a future past is close to being tapped when crisis or opportunity demands. Thus, megalithic monuments transform linear decay into

a cycle of return and episodic revelation. They make time palpable, manageable.

5. Opening and closing: technologies of threshold and control – no heterotopia is simply open, because control over when, how, and by whom is always a reality of these monuments, which are also technologies of control and limits, experimental filters that shape the body into a choreography. They are not simply ergonomic accidents, but architecturally written social scripts. Crossing certain boundaries involves social formulas, offerings, or the presence of authorised mediators – elders, lineage heads, ritual specialists – whose authority is visible and reinforced in every act of opening or closing the monument.

Moreover, this opening and closing does not have to be purely physical, as knowledge can itself be a gateway: knowing when the sun will penetrate the passage/corridor or when a chant will wake an ancestor is also a form of control (e.g., see Hoskin 2001, 2015; Hoskin and Calado, 1998). In this way, we can think of this logic of threshold technologies in three registers: 1) architectural (doors, passages, visibility lines), 2) performative (ritual sequences, bodily behaviour), and 3) epistemic (calendrical and mythic knowledge).

6. Relating to the outside: compensation, illusion, negotiation with landscape and society – heterotopias are important for what they do to the rest of the space. Indeed, Foucault's final principle insists that these spaces demonstrate how the outside world is illusory or compensate for its deficiencies by establishing an alternative order. Indeed, in Neolithic and Chalcolithic communities dealing with sedentarism, the accumulation of goods (surplus), and emerging hierarchies (e.g., Soares and Silva, 1996, 2010; Wunderlich, 2019), megalithic monuments could have both functions.

They could have a compensatory function (see Trigger, 1990) because they mobilise labour between several houses and several seasons, forging solidarity precisely when agrarian lifestyles risked privatising effort and produce. Thus, a monument forms a unity: everyone sees the stones, everyone remembers the work, and it is therefore a mechanism of social cohesion. Sharing a common ancestry, the monument materialises a genealogy greater than a simple lineage, compensating for centrifugal tendencies. Similarly, its architecture and astronomical position, with allowance for the unpredictability of the weather or harvests, assert that the cosmos – and by extension society – can be ordered.

In turn, megalithic monuments could have the function of exposing this very illusion. Indeed, given the amount of work that such a monument requires, it could expose differences in access and accentuate the gap between the ideal and the real, reminding those left out of the fragility of the social order. On the other hand, megalithic monuments can expose the fiction of individual autonomy by disassembling bodies and recombining them communally.

But megalithic monuments also serve as an element of territorial negotiation, mediating the various zones of use. Cromlechs and menhirs, for example, strengthen landscape flows, creating paths as ritual vectors that can serve as elements of negotiation and calm social tensions within a community, as well as between communities.

#### 4. SYNTHESIS

This article proposes that the concept of Megalithism be interpreted through Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Instead of viewing simple megalithic monuments, such as dolmens, menhirs, or cromlechs, as merely ritualistic structures, we seek to understand these structures as realities of otherness that mediate relationships between the living and the dead, between heaven and Earth, and between the everyday and the exceptional. Using the Megalithism of Alentejo (Portugal) as an empirical basis, we aim to make another contribution to the understanding of megalithic phenomena from the fifth to the third millennium BCE.

Indeed, heterotopia, for Foucault, is neither utopia nor a common space: it is a real place where norms are suspended, inverted or intensified. To define this concept, he offers six heuristic principles – which are by no means dogmas, but rather conceptual tools that allow us to think about reality and, above all, otherness –: crisis/deviation, functional mutability, juxtaposition of incompatible spaces, heterochrony, systems of opening/closing and relational function (illusion/compensation).

To ensure that the concept is not merely abstract, concrete methodological approaches have also been proposed, namely a phenomenology of movement and the senses that allows the body to be measured as an object choreographed by narrow passages; archaeoastronomy and temporal modulation, which allow us to perceive whether celestial alignments are intentional and may allow us to glimpse reopenings through Bayesian models and absolute dating; the use of geographic information systems and visibility and network analyses can reveal how these monuments relate to border paths, geological realities or other settlements; Similarly, we must bear in mind the notion of the biography of these structures and the agency of monuments with orthostats that are chosen, moved and re-erected, and how this monument is re-signified and reappropriated over the millennia. Finally, it is believed that a critical use of ethnography can be a valuable asset when analysing Megalithism.

Finally, in terms of the application of the principles outlined above and the methodological basis constructed, it is believed that the idea of crisis as deviation manifests itself in the management of exceptional bodies and bone manipulation; mutability is seen in architectural palimpsests and in post-prehistoric re-appropriations; while juxtaposition condenses cosmic and agrarian funerary realities into a single device; heterochrony appears both in the stratigraphic accumulation of various moments and in the astronomical phenomena with

which these monuments are compacted; the idea of opening and closing is controlled through devices of liminality, such as doors, and ritualistic and astronomical knowledge; and, finally, the relational function of these monuments can compensate for social tensions and project order onto agricultural chaos or fix territories and flows in the landscape.

Thus, applying heterotopia to Megalithism is a productive exercise that is grounded in archaeological evidence. In this way, monuments emerge as active spatial technologies that organise crises, times, access, spaces, communities, and landscape relationships. In fact, when applied with the methodological and empirical care required by archaeology, philosophy does not obscure our knowledge of prehistoric communities, but rather illuminates the ways in which, in this case, heterotopias (other-spaces) and mechanisms of otherness were produced in a world then in continuous turmoil, as was the (post-)Neolithic world.

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