A major new megalithic complex in Europe

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Introduction



Figure 1. *The Muhittin Baba Mountain from the North.*

The megalithic complex of Carnac is world-famous for the enormous scale and intricate planning of its standing stones, avenues and circles - the best-known site in the megalithic world of north-west Europe for over 3000 years (Burl 1993). Now, a new megalithic complex has been discovered, second only to Carnac in size and importance in Europe. Set in the forested hill-country of the Istranca Mountains in Turkish Thrace, clustered around the sacred mountain of Muhittin Baba (figure 1), lies a group of standing stone complexes of comparable complexity and size, with the total number of individual stones reaching over 2,000 (compared to Carnac's 3,000). The complexes were discovered so recently that there have been no excavations as yet; their date is tentatively set in the Iron Age (800 - 100 CAL BC) with continued use into the Ottoman and Recent periods.

The history of research into south-east European megaliths began at the end of the nineteenth century (Shkorpil 1890; Slaveikov 1891). However, the existence of standing stones was unclear until the 1960s. Standing stone complexes of Kirikköy, Hacilar and Eski Mezarlik were published by S. A. Kansu and he suggested that Turkish Thrace standing stone complexes were reminiscent of the cromlechs of Western Europe (Kansu 1969). During the survey of the Prehistory Department of Istanbul University in the 1980s, about 25 standing stone complexes were documented (Özdogan 1998). However, only one of them - Kirikköy - has been published in detail (Erdogu *et. al.* 2002).

Finding standing stone complexes and recording them was the main focus of our research. However, dolmens, rock-cut niches and cup marks on rocky outcrops were also documented. We investigated a small (8x4 km) area in the Lalapasa region of Edirne, around the villages of Hacidanisment and Vaysal. So far a total of six standing stone complexes have been recorded - Berberoglu Ayazmasi (590 surviving stones), Türbe Mezarligi (ca. 300 surviving stones), Eski Baglar Mezarligi (ca. 400 surviving stones), Çesmeüstü Mezarligi (419 surviving stones), Hacidanisment Eski Mezarlik (80 surviving stones) and Cevizlik (ca. 300 surviving stones). In this region, the most dramatic and memorable landscape feature is the Muhittin Baba Mountain. It has a rocky summit and surrounding boulder spreads, visible from a distance. All the standing stone complexes are situated around the mountain. The relationships between the mountain and standing stone complexes as well as dolmens are complex, and it seems all were symbolically linked.

Some parts of the standing stone complexes have been used as a Muslim cemetery since the Ottoman Period. Complexes are important for present people in a spiritual way: standing stones are accepted as ancestral gravestones. Sometimes they are removed by local people and are brought to modern cemeteries.

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This may be explained by the connection to the ancestors through standing stones. That makes complexes living monuments from the prehistoric period to the present.

The most prolific and promising standing stone complex in this area is Berberoglu Ayazmasi. This complex is made up of well over 600 undressed stones.

Berberoglu Ayazmasi

The megalithic complex is located about 5km north-east of the Hacidanisment village, about 15km north of Lalapasa in the province of Edirne. It is situated on the Western part of Istranca Mountains. Rocky outcrops around the complex consist mainly of gneiss. However, in some areas these are overlain by marble, quartzite, granite and diorite (Ternek 1987: 55). Present-day vegetation immediately surrounding the complex comprises mostly oak forest with some pine trees.



Figure 2. *A part of the Berberoglu Ayazmasi Complex.*

The complex lies in a rocky outcrop north north-east of the Muhittin Baba Mountain. The whole complex covers an area of about 100x50m. A total of 590 stones have survived (Fig. 2, 3 and 4). On the west and the north-west side, there is a narrow gulch that has partly damaged the complex. The southern part of the complex has also suffered from recent predictions. There is a spring on the south-eastern part of the complex.

The surviving stones of the megalithic complex can be divided into two parts - northern and southern. Between them there is an empty area which may be a courtyard. There are also topographic differences between the northern and southern parts of the complex, with the southern part being higher than the northern part. The general plan seems to consist of multiple rows of standing stones. There is a marked preference for a north-east to south-west orientation. However, there are angle differences between groups of stones: some groups are oriented at 230 degrees, while others are at 220 and 240 degrees.

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Figure 3. *Some large tall stones of the Berberoglu Ayazmasi Complex.*



Figure 4. *The Berberoglu Ayazmasi Complex. Rows consist of medium size stones.*

The Northern part is also sub-divided into two parts - again north and south. The north is the best preserved section. Some lines consist of large and tall stones, while others consist of small or mixed stones. There is no obvious pattern. Following the lines in the south is more difficult since most of the stones have been removed.

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The southern part of the complex is also sub-divided into at least four parts. However, stones from the middle of the southern complex have been removed. The south (20 stones) is topographically divided from the others and is located at a higher level than others. On its very edge, there are very tall worked stones, while the west consists of only small pairs of stones. The north is more complicated with lines of large and tall stones surrounded by lines of small stones. In the east, lines are made up of tall or small stones.

The standing stone complex has been constructed using different kind of stones, such as granite, quartzite, quartzite diorite, micaschist and marble. In general, grey granite is dominant. Occasionally the rocks contain dark veins. Quartzite occurs inside some diorite rocks. Some of the stones have been worked, however, unworked stones are dominant. Some stones have been worked as head and shoulders, with anthropomorphic connotations. Only a few stones are decorated with cup marks.

The stones are divided into different types of cross-section - rectangular, trapezoidal, triangular, rounded and irregular, and have different types of top - flat, pointed, pointed flat, rounded and irregular. Rectangular cross-sections and flat and pointed shapes of tops are predominant.

Discussion and conclusion

The Berberoglu Ayazmasi complex, like others in the region, is an example of the long-term creation of sites where it cannot be assumed that the overall plan represents a single-phase of construction. The general plan is composed of several lines of standing stones. The dominant orientation of lines of stones are north-east and south-west, the importance of a link is due not only to the place of the setting sun but also the Muhittin Baba Mountain. Mountains are not only physical and geographical landmarks but also part of the spirit world (Carmichael 1994). They share in a spatial symbolism of transcendence (Eliade 1958:99). It seems that there is a link between the Muhittin Baba Mountain and the megalithic monuments around them. The mountain also contains cup marks and rock-cut features in its highest points, and these features are still explored by the myths and stories of the present local people.

The complexity of the Berberoglu Ayazmasi complex is a good example of the social implications of the ordering of space. According to Tilley (1995), the stone circles enclose and delimit a space for activity and event, while the stone rows create a line across space. Both types of monuments demarcate spaces to cross, to go beyond, spaces to move into and out of, to move between, look at and look beyond. He argues that these are stones by which to learn, to remember, to orientate and to think. All these offered the potential for ritually charged structures to enable the establishment and reproduction of social inequalities. Ritual process took on a variety of different forms and achieved its most subtle expression at major ceremonies and processional sites: the stone circles and stone rows (Tilley 1995: 21). The stone rows were intended for sequential ritual processions. A procession is an act of proceeding (Thomas & Tilley 1993: 287), and more specifically, this is realised through groups of people moving in an ordered and directional manner. Processions are generally ceremonial in character, taking place to mark an event or to enact a ritual (Johnston 1999: 39). I suggest that the stone rows of Berberoglu Ayazmasi complex could be intended for sequential processions.

Ethnographical studies in Madagascar show that standing stones are erected for many different reasons, such as death in formal tombs, the boundaries of different groups' territories, marks for important events, communications between the living and the ancestors (Parker Pearson & Romilisonina 1998). The stone is erected after death to commemorate a man whose body has not returned to his ancestral tomb or alternatively to celebrate a well known individual who is buried in his ancestral tomb. The commemorative stone is a text which informs us about the person remembered. It is also the nexus of communications and exchanges between the living and the ancestors. Requests for supernatural help can be made to the ancestor at his stone (Pearson & Romilisonina 1998). Standing stones in the Berberoglu Ayazmasi complex may represent ancestors, and act as the commemorative stones: a link between the living and the ancestors.

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