



### 1 2000 years before Stonehenge: the Almindres megalithic site

The Almindres site is the largest megalithic monument in the Iberian Peninsula and one of the oldest of Humanity's monuments.

It was, it would seem, built around 7000 years ago, at the dawn of the Neolithic, the time when the first communities of shepherds and farmers were emerging in Europe.

The Almindres site, whose original layout was, very probably, a horseshoe shape, open towards the east, seems to have been added to and altered: the monument's current shape, which is relatively complex, is partially the result of these old interventions and, also to more or less recent amputations and disturbances. The monument currently comprises around a hundred monoliths, some of which are decorated.

The choice of the places where the monuments were positioned surely took into account the physical structure of the landscape, especially the river network as well as the most notable astronomical phenomena, relating to the annual movement of the Sun, Moon, on the horizon.

On the outskirts of Évora, in a restricted area to the West of the city, there are two other sites of the same type: Portela de Mogos and Vale Maria do Meio. This group makes up the largest concentration of menhirs in the Iberian Peninsula, demonstrating the special role that this region played in the origins of European megalithism.



### 2 The solitary stones: The Monte dos Almindres menhir

As with most of the European megalithic regions, in this area there are a large number of isolated menhirs, some of which appear to be spatially oriented with the sites and generally contemporaneous to them.

The Monte dos Almindres menhir is an a long oval-shaped example, which is a characteristic of the menhirs in the Évora area and has a crosier engraved in shallow relief on the upper part of the side which now faces west.

The shepherd's crosier is the most frequent subject on menhirs in the Alentejo region (and is also often apparent on menhirs in Brittany); it is a subject that clearly evokes the Neolithic economy in which herding had a central role; it also reflects the foundations of the Neolithic ideology, in which the domination of nature, the domestication of animals and plants, was one of the dominating themes.

Some of the menhirs were decorated with motifs that generally reinforce the respective anthropomorphic character: we are, in fact facing the first statues, three-dimensional representations on a large-scale, of the human body.

The location of the monument is clearly related to the Almindres site, as it corresponds to an elemental astronomic direction: the menhir as seen from the site indicates the positions in which the sun rises, on the longest day of the year, the day of the Summer Solstice.



### 3 The megalithic cathedral: The Large Zambujeiro Dolmen

Dolmens are collective funereal monuments that correspond, generally, to the second phase of regional megalithism; they were built for the most part at the end of the Neolithic, less than six thousand years ago.

The funereal megalithic monuments that came before dolmens were formally similar although smaller in size and without a corridor and corresponded to individual burials.

The Large Zambujeiro Dolmen is, probably, the tallest in the world, with large granite supports that reach up to 6 metres in height. The stone structure of the monument is made up of a chamber defined by six supports (plus a closing stone over the entrance to the chamber) is a long corridor. The group was covered with monolithic covers; the covering slab of the chamber currently lies over the *mamoá*, on the western side.

The monument also preserves a large part of the *mamoá*, the small mound of stones that covered and originally hid, on the outside, the stone structure. On the edge of the *mamoá* a containment ring was built with fixed supports.

On the outside of the support that flanks the entry, to the South side, several sinuous parallel lines can be seen that are arranged longitudinally and which are one of the relatively frequent themes on menhirs in Alentejo and Algarve.

The monument's currently hazardous state is the result of an old intervention that, due to having removed part of the *mamoá* drastically reduced the stability of the group of rocks; it was therefore necessary to build a provisional covering and stabilise some of the more sensitive points of the structure, while a more definitive recuperation of the monument is not possible.

Apart from the dolmen itself, next to the monument there are two large enigmatic granite blocks; one of them, which is parallelepiped, at the entrance to the corridor, and another close by, with an exposed side dotted with dimples.



### 4 The pre-historic origins of the city of Évora: the village o Alto de S. Bento

Alto de S. Bento is the large natural viewpoint over the city, to the East, and over one of the best preserved landscapes on the outskirts of Évora, to the West, where in fact the main monolithic monuments in the region are located.

On top of hillock since the 19<sup>th</sup> century evidence of a pre-historic village has been collected, whose oldest phase is from the beginning of the region's Neolithic period (about 7000 years ago) and whose occupation carried on at least until the Calcolithic (about 5000 years ago).

It is a true "megalithic" village, in that it was occupied throughout the whole period in which menhirs and dolmens were built in the region, and also because there used to be large granite outcrops here, which have since been reduced due to quarrying.

In fact in central Alentejo that are numerous dwelling places from that period, in which the most notable characteristic is the presence of large granite rocks that obviously evoke the true megalithic monuments.

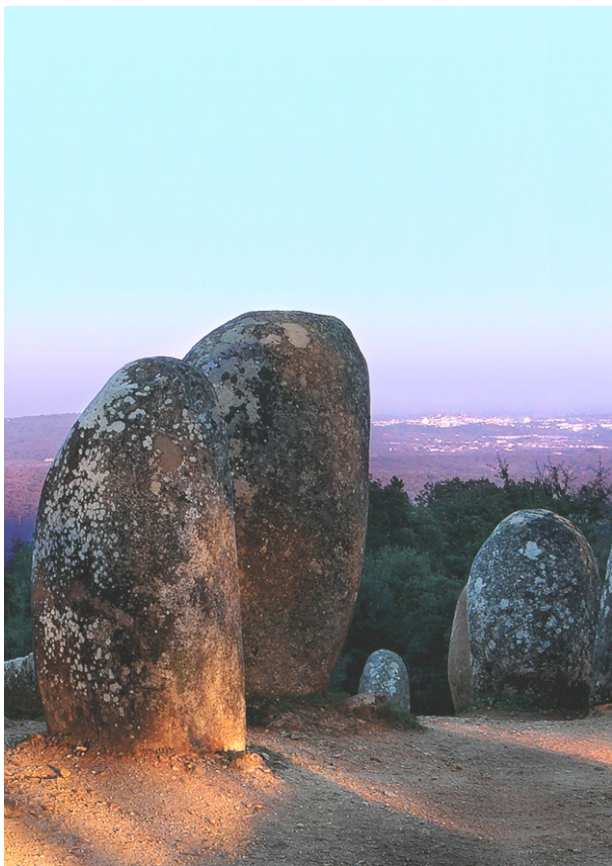
In the case of Alto de S. Bento we can truly talk about the earliest origins of the city of Évora. In fact, the village expanded, especially at the end of the Neolithic, to the surrounding areas, particularly into the village of S. Caetano, to the Southwest, and Quinta do Chantre, to the East; if we consider the various known centres, we are, without doubt, looking at the largest pre-historic village known in the area, and one of the largest in the region.





# Évora

## capital of the Iberian megalithic



The outskirts of Évora, and especially the land immediately to the West of the city, make up the most diverse and monumental megalithic landscape in the Iberian Peninsula.

The amount and size of the megalithic monuments in Évora is related, first and foremost, to the area's privileged location in terms of natural travelling routes: in fact, on the outskirts of the city we can find the only place at which the hydrographical basins of the three largest rivers in the South the Tagus, the Sado and the Guadiana meet.

The structural role, for primitive road networks, of waterlines and hills the lines dividing the hydrographical basins was certainly a determining factor in the exceptional nature of Évora's megalithic heritage.

Megalithism apparently emerged as a phenomenon rooted in the cultural practices of the last hunter-gatherer communities, reflecting profound ideological changes, originating in the eastern Mediterranean, along with a new agro-pastoral economy. The specific character of the area around Évora seems, in this context, to be a consequence of the dynamics of the megalithic communities which, in the Tagus and Sado estuaries, just as in Brittany, two of the most important centres of the European Atlantic seaboard.

The monuments/sites proposed in this itinerary are not isolated. Just in the Évora district, there are currently more than ten known megalithic sites, almost a hundred single menhirs (or associated in small groups), around eight hundred dolmens and some four hundred and fifty "megalithic" villages. There are also some rare examples of related monuments, the *tholoi*, and, in the area of the Alqueva Dam, an extraordinary rock engraving sanctuary was discovered, which is now underwater. There are also around a hundred rocks with indentations, mysterious monuments that are almost certainly related to megalithism; in effect, the indentations often appear on megalithic monuments.

