

The «berrões», protohistoric stone statues of the boars,  
worshipped as idols, object of zoolatry (1)

Os «berrões», estátuas de pedra proto-históricas de porcos,  
venerados como ídolos, pura manifestação de zoolatria.

«Berrão» is the popular Portuguese word for the male pig, otherwise called a boar in English, and is the name that archaeologists have taken for the protohistoric stone statues of the boars after generalized to other animals the most of them bulls.

About half of the fifty eight of these statues, found in northern Portugal, are known to have been found or brought from «castros».

The «castreja» proto-historic culture in northern Portugal as we shall see, had the boar as an idol, which was worshipped and paid homage to.

Mankind maintains the capacity of living from the fundamental elements of life, which essentially are «air», «water» and «food». These, basically are plants and animals.

Water was considered by the ancients as a divine gift.

---

(1) Fui convidado, em Dezembro de 1981, a participar no XI Congresso Internacional das Ciências Antropológicas e Etnológicas a realizar no Canadá, em Québec e Vancouver, de 12 a 25 de Agosto de 1983, e a propor tema para um Simpósio que seria por mim organizado com a participação de colegas internacionais.

Dei parte deste honroso convite a várias entidades nacionais salientando os avultados gastos da viagem e da estadia de 15 dias no Canadá, Nenhuma das 5 entidades oficiais a quem me dirigi pôde conceder subsídios. A Fundação Gulbenkian dispôs-se a conceder-me 100.000\$00 e a Comissão organizadora do Congresso conceder-me-ia à minha chegada ao Canadá 1.000 dólares canadianos.

No decorrer do ano de 1982 procurei organizar o Simpósio sobre *Zoolatria pré e proto-histórica*, tema que propuz e foi aceite.

Infelizmente um forte e arrastado ataque de reumatismo não me permitiu participar no Congresso

Preparei a minha comunicação que não pude ir lá expor e defender, mas enviei, e que agora se publica. (S. J. Setembro de 1983).

All over the world exist water springs, fountain, wells (eg Jacob's Well) and even rivers (eg the Ganges River) to which waters were attached rare and exceptional virtues, and, so, were worshipped as in some cases are even still objects of cult and veneration.

In Portugal, as in other regions of the world there are places with names of Holy Waters.

There are also many plants, and above all trees, some of which are till considered by the people of various regions of Portugal as sacred trees.

Meat has been part of the human diet for a long time. Logically, animals were considered to be of enormous usefulness that Nature put at the disposition of mankind.

Hunting and fishing were, in certain periods of human evolution, fundamental activities to ensure a food supply.

Many paintings, engravings and sculptures of animals have been found in pre-history and proto-history periods.

During the Neolithic period, man, escaping from the casualty of hunting, fishing and simple picking of wild vegetables and fruit, start to sow harvest and breed animals. He then became a farmer and shepherd.

In the evolutionary animal breeding, the pig is the most important animal because of the quality of its meat and its facility for breeding in captivity, either in pig-sties or in fields by pasturing.

### THE PICOTE BOAR

In April 1952, in «Castro do Poio», in the parish of Picote, and borough of Miranda do Douro, Province of Trás-o-Montes, northeast Portugal, a boar made of granite was discovered in the middle of a circular place with stone walls, followed by a corridor of 9 metres in length by one metre and a half in wide. The granite boar had no head which apparently had been broken by hammering; it has one metre and fourty four centimetres long, maximum width at the back of fifty four centimetres and seventy five centimetres in height.

Together with the base it reaches a little over one metre in height. It is a male pig for breeding, a boar, in other words a «berrão», as can be seen by its testicles well sculptured. It was standing, well upright, with the head pointing towards the corridor, and fixed on a ballast or bag of stones, well balanced on the sides by big and small stones.

The back legs have folds to which people give the name of «ronchos», and which are a particularity of the domestic pig, when fat.

### SPOIL

In the excavation effected a few stones were found at the base of the wall in the circular place, which was almost destroyed when removing the «berrão».

Also found was about half of a circular millstone of granites, a hand millstone, also of granite, with a well-polished surface worn out by milling, a beam millstone, and some smaller granitic stones, also with polished and smooth surfaces, rolling millstones of the hand mill.

During the earth-sifting process some teeth and many bones, very fragmented were found. The bones were studied by Dr. Ivo Soares, Professor of Anatomy of the Higher School of Veterinary Medicine in Lisbon, who classified them as belonging to oxen, goat, sheep and rabbit.

The small bone pieces gave the idea that they had been used in food preparation.

In the classification of the one hundred and four of those bones, I repeat, considered as food remains, fifty one were considered as belonging to ox, forty four of sheep or goat, six of pig and three of rabbit. Some bones were so thin and friable that could not be classified—but were considered bird-bones.

It was in the corridor that the largest quantity of bones were found. Also found were coal, and lots of ceramic fragments, a few hand-made pieces of pottery and others of earthenware. Of the latter were found some-pot-bellied high

vases suitable for liquids, and others of the lower and flat type, like flat-plates, suitable for solid substances like meat, fruits of food.

In the circular place at one metre and a half deep and above fifty centimetres of the bottom, a small bronze coin in bad state of conservation was found, which, however, it was possible to attribute probably to Constâncio II, made in the Mint of Constantinopla by the monetary workshop 188 of Cohen, coined in the fourth century. Also found were a sewing needle made of bronze six centimetres long, without point, bent at two centimetres of the eye of the needle, a crushed fibule, tweezers and some small unidentifiable bits of bronze.

Two pieces of iridized glass were also found; one is a piece of a neck of a vase, the other is unidentifiable.

On the light of the above we may conclude that the «Berrão» of Picote, found in the middle of the circular place followed by a corridor of nine metres in length, was an idol, a false god, and object of devotion.

The many bits of ox bones, of small ruminants, sheep or goat, and also perhaps of birds, found mainly in the corridor, suggest that even oblations in food cooked with meat from the a false god, and object of devotion.

Also found in the corridor were broken pieces of post-bellied high vases made of ceramic, used for liquids, and pieces of flat plates that were used to put meat, fruit or other food.

We can therefore assume that the veneration to that idol was mainly done with ritual ceremonies, among them the offering of oblations.

The «Berrão» of Picote, the only one found in Portugal *in situ*, is an archaeological document of great interest, which explains to a certain degree something of the zoolatry of the «berrões».

It is possible that other animals were worshipped in multiple manifestation of zoolatry either in pre-history or in protohistory.

Another «berrão», or boar, was seen in the province of Galicia northwest of Spain, somewhere in the district of Corunha, by a Franciscan Friar Antonio Montero O. F. M. Monastery of Saint Francisco, Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain.

This Friar who was present at a conference presented by me in June 1977 at the Museum of Pontevedra, about «The Culture of the «Berrões»» in the northwest of the Iberian Paeninsula, north Portugal and Galicia, told me that he had seen a «berrão» about twenty years ago, at a parish of the district of Corunha, where he was in apostolic mission. In 1978 he wrote me a letter of which I report above this opinions.

Based on observations made by the keen-sighted friar, Antonio Montero twenty years ago, we can conclude that.

- a) the big stone statue of the boar of Galicia was found in the middle of a semicircular place surrounded by walls of one metre high;
- b) at the centre of the circular place there was a heap of stones making a base or pillar to support the statue of the boar;
- c) the statue and the walls were burnt by fire of pyre;
- d) the statue of the boar had the male sexual organs exaggeratedly sculptured.

The Friar, Antonio Montero, wrote that he had no doubts that the boar was over the pillar or «podium», and that he thinks it was meant to be an altar where the boar was worshipped as a god.

This information given by the Friar Antonio Montero confirms, as it were, the discovery of the «berrão» of Picote.

Instituto de Antropologia «Dr. Mendes Correia»  
Faculdade de Ciências — Universidade do Porto  
24 de Junho 1983.

J. R. DOS SANTOS JÚNIOR \*  
Prof. Emeritus of Antropology and Sociology  
of Fac. of Sciences-University of Porto

\* Quinta da Caverneira — Águas Santas — 4445 Ermesinde