

MEGALITHIC MUSINGS

by Maxine Dunn

Recently, while undertaking the distinctly pleasurable task of creating my European itinerary for later this summer, I decided that while in England this time, I simply must see Stonehenge.

Being the avid researcher I am and wanting to know more about its origins, I was drawn past Stonehenge and down the rabbit hole of exploration into the Neolithic Age and its birth of megalithic art in Europe.

Megalithic art refers to the use of megaliths, or massive stones, in art and architecture. Megalithic art is one of the most formidable art forms in recorded history considering its thought-provoking architectural assembly of colossal proportions, its permanence and durability, mysticism, and scientific application.

During the burgeoning period of megalithic art in England and France, roughly 5000 - 1500 BC, although human housing was certainly not weatherproof and communities were even squalid, primitive and disorganized, there was simultaneously a tremendous effort to assemble gigantic blocks of stone for artistic purposes.

And these astonishing sculpture gardens were created with the utmost in professional artistry and precision.

The many years of sustained effort by these megalith builders is testimony to the social support, intense determination, and the great significance these Neolithic societies placed upon this art form.

These megalith sites involved shifting hundreds of thousands of tons of earth and chalk and stone, transporting monstrous rocks across many kilometers, gathering slabs of stone that had been strewn about the countryside, deposited by glacial movement and placing them in disciplined patterns.

Then balancing and aligning them in such ways that it is almost unimaginable how it could have been accomplished at such a primitive time in our world's history.

Thousands of slabs of granite set in absolutely perfectly straight lines. A single stone more than 30 feet high, erected on its end. Rock gardens of intricately arranged monoliths that cover over a thousand acres, each chiseled to a very particular shape. A single stone in a megalithic group in Brittany weighing more than 350 tons.

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How did they do it? Why did they do it? Who were these designers? Was it to study the heavens and astronomy and to make sense of the celestial bodies at a time when there was no knowledge of astronomy?

After all the sun still shines through the exact same space between the stones at Stonehenge as it did over 5000 years ago. Were they ritualistic burial grounds? Were these carefully arranged stone circles and gardens the birth of mathematics?

Although Stonehenge entered written history in AD 1129, its first megalithic creators started work in roughly 3200 BC and work continued until 1600 BC. Stonehenge was a constantly evolving work of art for almost 1600 years.

I am fascinated by the enigma that is Stonehenge and these feats of human artistry and stamina that encompassed thousands of years.

And who knows, I may just have to add France to my itinerary this summer as well.