

THE PREHISTORIC MONUMENTS OF BRITTANY. BY PROFESSOR A. B. MÁC-ALLUM.

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(Abstract.)

The menhirs, dolmens, and tumuli of Brittany, though much discussed, still offer problems for solution which are of importance in determining features of the Neolithic and Bronze periods. The age of these monuments also is undecided, for Fergusson⁽¹⁾ believes that they are all post-Roman, while others claim for them an anterior origin. The difficulty in this matter is due to the fact that the remains were not, until the close of the last century, thought worthy of reference by writers who must have seen them. Cæsar, who was in the neighbourhood of Carnac when the sea fight between his galleys and those of the Veneti took place in the Gulf of Morbihan, makes, in his description of that battle, no reference to the thousand menhirs, which, if they were there then, he must have seen also at the time. On this ground Fergusson regards them as of later date, but one cannot depend very much on such a line of argument, for Madame de Sevigné visited Auray and the Carnac region in 1689, and although she wrote copiously about everything that apparently came under her observation then, she makes no reference to the existence of these monuments. Are we, therefore, to conclude that they were erected in the eighteenth century? On the other hand, the site of a Roman camp has been discovered in the area covered by the menhirs of Kermario, in the neighbourhood of Carnac, and some of the menhirs were used in the construction of the wall, while others inside the enclosure are blackened with soot, probably due to the legionaries using them as hearthstones. This clearly indicates an Ante-Roman date for the foundation of these monuments. In regard to the age of the dolmens of Brittany, the character of the skulls found in them is decisive—while the skull of the tribesman of Brittany in Cæsar's time was brachycephalic, that of the dolmen-builders was sub-dolicocephalic, or mesaticephalic. From this it is concluded that the dolmen builders were a race which preceded the Celts in Western France. How far back in time dolmens were first erected it is impossible to say, but it must be recognized that in North Germany, in Norway and Sweden, and in Ireland dolmens were erected in the Christian era.

In regard to the significance of the menhirs, nothing as yet has been definitely determined. Remains of human skeletons, accompanied in some cases by flint implements, have been found at the foot of some of them, and hence it is inferred that they are the equivalents of our burial headstones. This explanation must appear doubtful to anyone who has examined the "alignements" of Carnac. Here very few human remains have been found in connection with them, although there are thousands in the district. The view that the "alignements" were connected with sun-worship or with herpetolatry, postulates first of all an explanation of the function of the isolated menhirs in other parts of France and in Great Britain. Sun-worship undoubtedly obtained amongst ancient British and Gallic tribes, but the founders of the menhirs have yet to be shown to be of Celtic or Belgic affinities. There is very little evidence to show that serpent-worship obtained amongst these

(1) *Rude Stone Monuments*, 1872, chapter 8.