

ALMOGAREN

52/2021



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Abbildung Titelseite:
Begräbnisstätte (Tumulus) der Ureinwohner von Lanzarote,
Kanarische Inseln (Photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich)

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Zitieren Sie bitte diesen Aufsatz folgendermaßen / Please cite this article as follows:

Ulbrich, Hans-Joachim (2021): A preliminary report on a new type of prehistoric tumuli in Lanzarote (Canary Islands).- *Almogaren* Nr. 52 (Institutum Canarium), Korb (BRD), 237-252

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Hans-Joachim Ulbrich

A preliminary report on a new type of prehistoric tumuli in Lanzarote (Canary Islands)

Keywords: Canary Islands, Lanzarote, aborigines, architecture, burial sites, corridor, dry-stone technique, geography, history, Magna Mater Mediterranea, Mediterranean, Near East, North Africa, prehistory, religion, seafarers, step-buildings, tumulus

Abstract:

The Canarian island of Lanzarote shows in all of its scenic parts a special type of pre-hispanic burial monuments which feature not only an entrance but – as particular topic of this paper – also a corridor which leads to the true entry of such a two-stepped tumulus. A more detailed description of these religious dry-stone buildings will follow in one of the next yearbooks, the phenomenon of the bigger step-pyramids then also considered.

Zusammenfassung:

Die Kanaren-Insel Lanzarote weist in all ihren landschaftlichen Ausprägungen einen einzigartigen Typ von vorspanischen, zweistufig gebauten Begräbnisstätten auf, der nicht nur über einen Eingang verfügt, sondern – als besonderes Thema dieses Vorberichtes – auch eine Art Korridor, der zum eigentlichen Eingang solcher Tumuli führt. Eine detaillierte Beschreibung dieser religiös motivierten Trockensteinbauten ist für eines der nächsten Jahrbücher geplant – einschließlich der größeren mehrstufigen Pyramiden.

Resumen:

La isla canaria de Lanzarote presenta en todas sus manifestaciones paisajísticas un singular tipo de sitio de enterramiento prehispánico, construido en dos niveles, que no solo dispone de una entrada, sino también –tema principal del presente avance– de una suerte de pasillo que conduce hasta la verdadera entrada de estos túmulos. Una pormenorizada descripción de estas construcciones de piedra seca con fines religiosos –incluidas las pirámides de mayor tamaño y varios escalones– saldrá en uno de los próximos números anuales de la revista.

1. Situation. All the nine bigger islands of the Canarian archipelago feature indigenous burial constructions with a basic, more or less vertical wall¹ – often simple one-step-tumuli (not considered here are burials in graves and caverns). Especially in the last years the evidence for these tumuli could be extended enormously. When the first Spanish colonists in the early 15th century were confronted with these religious buildings they used the word *majano* ("pile of stones",

¹ Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Gomera, El Hierro, La Palma and also the smaller islands La Graciosa and Alegranza. The map in Ulbrich (2016: 140) is therefore out-dated.

especially having picked-up cobbles in mind) because they did not know how to classify them properly. This term was in the following centuries applied for all of the unknown pre-Hispanic constructions built above ground, practically until now. Actually a peasant creates a normal pile of real cobbles directly at the edge of an arable or – even better – he erects a wall not having to transport the stones to a distant place. **He never deposits cobbles in the middle of a field and he never builds complicated wall systems around strangely formed *majanos*!** But most of the aboriginal buildings were erected exactly within field-like wall arrangements (as in Fig.9)! It is a scientific mystery why the Canarian ethnologists and archaeologists in many cases did not correct this misinterpretation and neglected thus their own history and patrimony. Anyhow: The three rare tumuli presented here can by no means be accepted as profane cobble- or boulder-cairns. Their architectural arrangement is too special and too distinct and points to the Mediterranean (chap. 5 below, the legends of Figs.13/14 and generally Ulbrich 2016).

2. A tumulus with "arms". The area around the Mña. Quemada (Fig.1) is known for its vineyards and small fields of vegetables. Some arables are artificially covered by hygroscopic lapilli (Spanish *picón* or regionally *rofe*). The special terrain meant here is preferably known by local people of Tinguatón and Mancha Blanca and perhaps by some inhabitants of La Vegueta; kids can up and on be observed when they play there and leave litter (beverage cans etc). Nevertheless this meadow without any agrarian activities attracts attention: The surrounding walls are broadly of aboriginal and partly of Spanish origin housing four pre-Hispanic constructions; one of these is the spectacular ruin of a burial site and its two-stepped section, indeed a tumulus.

A first small photo was published in León Hernández (2008: 484). The author described it as "refugio" and "taro"; this was correctly a special dry-stone hut with a corbelled vault and a prominently peaked roof built by the aboriginal "Mahos". Unfortunately the author did not mention if he eyed a real *taro* or a Spanish *cabaña* – the latter was also called *taro* in the vernacular of the island. A fan of prehistoric buildings visited the tumulus later in 2014 (see "Klingon" / megalithic.co.uk), also speaking of a *taro*. This interpretation is – I am sorry to say – not convincing and far away from the facts:

- Neither a Spanish farmer nor a Maho builds a *taro* having only a tiny room in mind although the groundplan of the entire construction will exceed such a chamber twentyfold. It is therefore not helpful to call this building "taro" when it is alone through its mass of stones actually more a *majano* (in the Canarian language). But a *majano* has no entrance, no hollow and no stepped ramps! In

² In over 20 years of roaming in all regions of Lanzarote I easily found hundreds of aboriginal tumuli but only a handful of European piles with true boulders and cobbles.



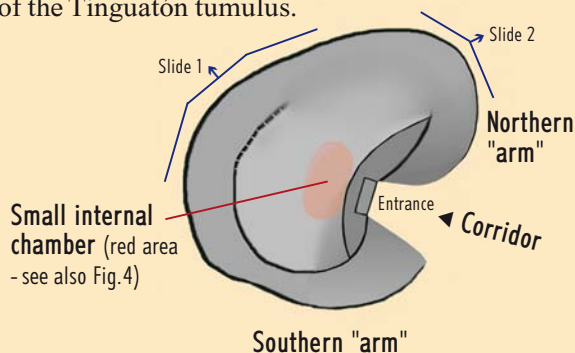
other words: A small chamber which nowhere near enough occupies the interior of a big tumulus cannot be a *taro*; and it is surely not logical to make such huge structural efforts only for ploughing- or gardening-tools.

- Neither a Canarian *majano* nor a *taro* has normally two "arms" which run (left side) from the first step and (right side) from the only step down to the ground (Fig.3), "embracing" the main body of the building and leading to a corridor which is preceding the entrance of the chamber (see sketch Fig. 2). This kind of construction style is – up to now – absolutely unique in the island.
- In the context of pre- and protohistory we know this corridor as varying element of a "keyhole" construction (e.g. Fig.3). In Fig. 13 we see another such groundplan presenting an Extremenian version of geoglyphic pubics. In Fig.14 an exemplary "keyhole" variant from Syria is shown (regarding Fig.9).
- This "tumulus with arms" lies amidst a meadow hopefully not meant to be ploughed at no point of time (after its more than millenarian existence).
- A groundplan is difficult to develop because the terrestrial photos (Figs. 5-6) and specifically the unclear satellite photo of the tumulus show big slides of the



Fig. 3 – This tumulus east of Tinguatón is – regarding the entire island of Lanzarote – an abs

Fig. 2 - Reconstructed groundplan (not binding) of the Tinguatón tumulus.



The higher northern arm (only one step) changes over to the lower southern arm (one step of two), as far as the damages allow to determine this. Also visible is a slight hillside position: S ↓ N. (Sketch: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich)

entire northwestern and northeastern part down to earth level. Fig.2 is therefore approximate.

- Without the stone slidings the maximal horizontal extension measures circa 12,8 m.
- Impressive are the cyclopic "bricks" of the northern wall (Fig. 5).
- Nearby a rare double-USM with oppositely placed wings (Ulbrich 2020). See also Fig.1 and the USMs in Fig. 13.



olute architectonic specialty and allows far-reaching reflections (photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich).



Fig. 4 - Part of the southeastern side with the chapel entrance (photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich). One can see that the chamber is rather small and has not much depth. The corbelled vault is roughly built. Any hints upon the place of the corpse are missing.



Fig. 5 - Oblique view at the northern side with the intact part of the basic wall; next to it on both flanks the severe damages (photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich).



Fig. 6 - View W → WSW. Right hand parts of the damaged first and second step (Photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich).

What we see here (Figs. 3-9) is in fact a tumulus type which belongs to the wide-ranging group of "*tumuli à chapelle*", a French term initiated once by Gabriel Camps (see here chapter 5) for the northwestern Sahara.

3. A tumulus with a short corridor. A small valley near Máguez hosts with more than two dozens of minor and bigger, simple and complex tumuli a paradise for the researcher. The rocky northern ridge with the tumuli was little used for agriculture while the low southern hills are occupied by a Spanish *finca* (farm). The selected tumulus (Fig.7) has an unsymmetric structure like the one in Fig.9. In the zoom-in (Fig.8) we see left hand a short intact corridor of ca. 80 cm length formed by two opposite walls which lead to the narrow portal. The chamber itself could not be checked because of danger of collapse.

The high monument density in this valley lets suppose a kind of necropole or at least a cluster of burial buildings which have enough positive conditions. Demands like the type of the landscape, the geological and meteorological usability, the satisfaction of transcendent /religious needs and other aspects surely played a role. In any case it is remarkable that such centers occur all



Fig. 7 - A highly interesting scenery: practically all kinds of tumuli side by side (



Fig. 8 - Left hand the entrance with the short corridor; right hand the high walls and the two steps (photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich)



photo: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich). The tumulus of chapter 3 is marked with an arrow.

over the island and we can suppose that they exist also under the lava of the heavy 18th c. eruptions (León Hernández 2008). Conditions for the following tumulus described here deals with such natural circumstances.

4. A tumulus with a long corridor. In the hinterland of the village "El Golfo" at the western coast of Lanzarote we can find abandoned fields and pastures immediately near zones of volcanic activities of various times. The region is apparently old Maho land. Enclosed therein is – as third example – a one-step tumulus (Fig.9) whose corridor reaches not only by its length into the flank of the actual pyramid agglomeration but also has the same height of the latter. The expanse of the corridor measures around $9,2 \text{ m}^2$ ($1/5$) of the whole groundplan (hor. extension ca. 46 m^2). The right front-wall is intact while the left front-wall is totally destroyed – perhaps by a tremor or through a pyroclastic bomb. The inner entrance could not be examined because of security con-



Fig. 9 - Lanzarote: a rare tumulus type with a strikingly emphasized corridor (ph

cerns. The "pyramid" itself has approximately the shape of a hip roof (German *Walmdach*; Spanish *tejado a cuatro aguas*) what occasionally can be found regarding prehistoric tumuli in the Canary Islands [a conic version in Fig. 12].

5. Parallels to the "tumuli à chapelle". In 1984 Gabriel Camps (1927-2002), the well-known expert for North African ethnology, protohistory and archaeology, published a highly interesting paper on a group of particular tumuli in the non-coastal Sahara, regarding especially Morocco and partly Algeria [first mentioned 1936 by E. Battestini]. These monuments feature – besides the essential burial section – also a kind of "chapel" or sanctuary which does not have a connection to the funerary part; this added room with separate entrance is situated at the periphery of the tumulus but is nevertheless fully integrated into the groundplan. Even more interesting: Camps found out that these tumuli and also their "chapels" were designed and erected by the Getules, a nomadic



oto: Hans-Joachim Ulbrich). The terrain is slightly sloping (left side downwards).

desert folk of horse riding herdsmen (ca. 500 BC to 500 AD). These people were not seafarers! The Getules used the chapels (Figs.10, 11) to practise the consultation of their deceased to get divinations and advice – through dreams.

So we have the situation that some of the Lanzarotian tumuli are similar to the ones of the Getules but in several aspects still are quite different:

1. The "chapels" are considerably simpler (one austere room) and often smaller.
2. This room was most likely used for Mother Earth worshipping where one could communicate with her – special dream methods then not practised by the Mahos. For example: The Goddess could give directives (through a shaman) to a visitor how to accomplish rebirth and how to use her holy places (*queseras*, *podomorfos*, concentric circles, USMs etc.). We know about Lanzarote the use of geoglyphic spirals in distinct rebirth-rituals. Furthermore the ancestors and their burial sites were generally very respected among the pre-Canarians.
3. The ancient constructors in Lanzarote must have been sailors and they belonged to an earlier period than the heyday of the Getules! These sailors must have had enough time to reach – starting from eastern Mediterranean shores – Sicily, the Canary Islands and the Azores inter alia (legends Figs.13/14).
4. And last but not least: These sailors must have had time and chances to settle in all Canarian islands and to develop their own special culture which for example is quite distinct to the much later one which the Phoenician, Punic and Roman entrepreneurs initiated when they brought Berber labourers to the eastern part of the archipelago to collect dying lichens (Ulbrich 2015: 62).

De nada sirve esconder la cabeza en la arena.

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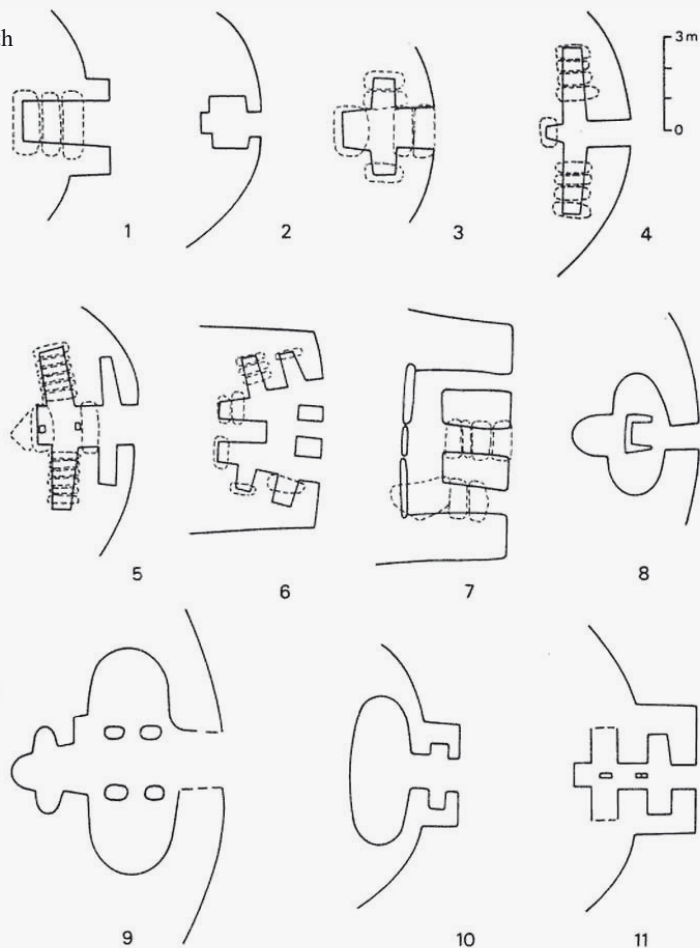
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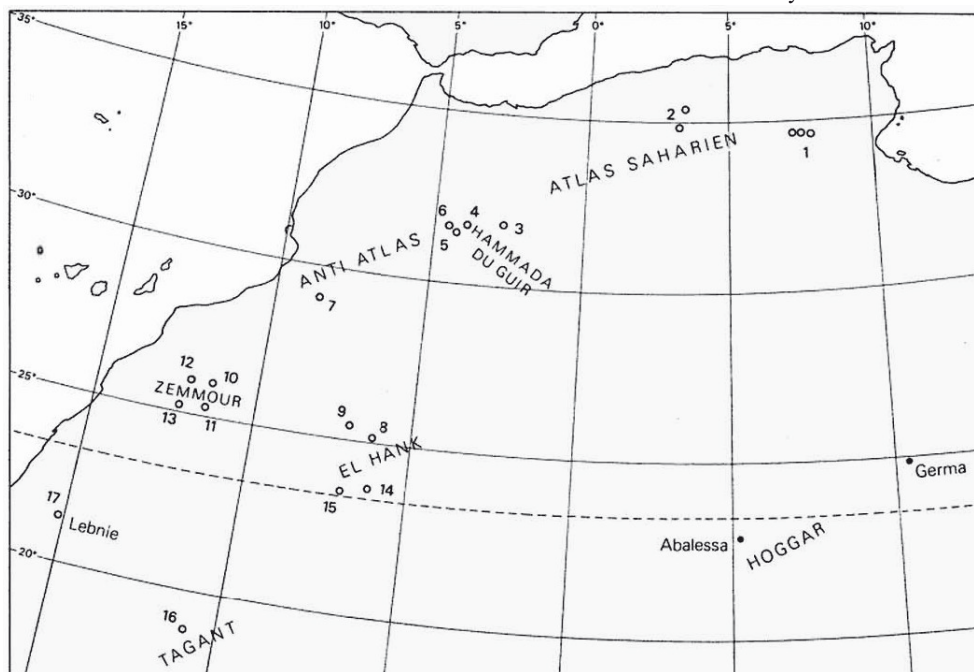
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Fig. 10
Tumuli with
"chapels"



[Fig.3 after G. Camps 1984] Différents types de chapelles cruciformes: 1. Taouz n°6; 2. Taouz n°7; 3. Bouïa n°3; 4. Taouz n°5; 5. Taouz n°1; 6. Taouz n°4; 7. Bouïa n°2 (P. Besseriani); 9. Fedj el Koucha; 10. Djorf Torba; 11. Beraber Sud.

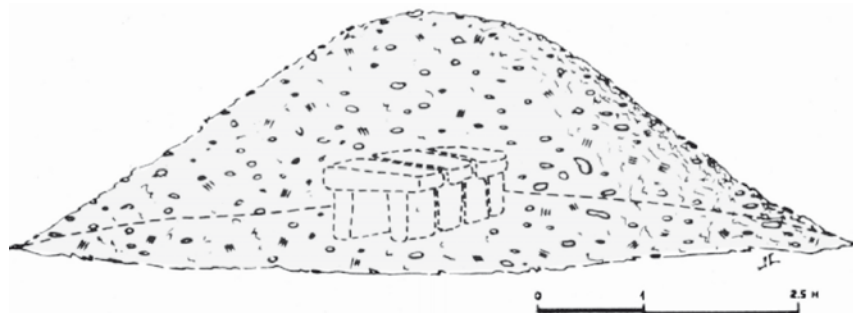
Fig.11 - One can easily recognize that the "tumuli à chapelle" were not built near coasts. Nevertheless the constructors of these tumuli once were influenced by seafarers.



[Fig.1] Carte de répartition des tumulus à chapelle (G. Camps 1984)

Fig. 12

This simple Moroccan tumulus type with a more or less conic silhouette is astonishingly not predominant in Lanzarote and forgoes a surrounding vertical wall. Comparing it with the tumuli of the chapters 2-4 the latter show obviously a wider architectonic complexity. In not one case the content (skeleton, sarkophagus etc.) of a Lanzarotian tumulus has been investigated and determined in-depth.



[Fig.3] Tumulus à caisson de Lalla Mimouna (G. Souville 1959)

Fig.13a - Surely not a corral but a cultish monument northeast of Albuquerque (Province Badajoz / Extremadura). Coordinates: 29SPD8272254950

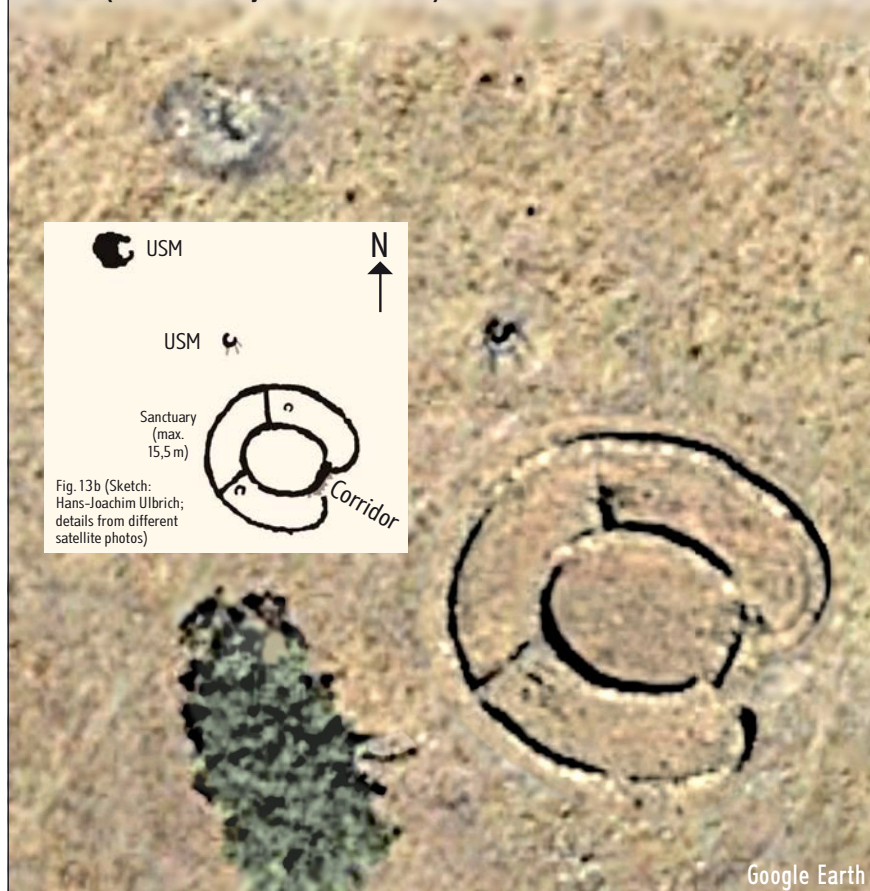


Fig.13 a/b - This partly damaged sanctuary (or burial site ?) – most likely symbolizing the pubics or the entire lower abdomen of the Magna Mater Mediterranea – shows nearly the same rotund groundplan as the tumulus of Tinguatón (Lanzarote) with its "arms" and the unusual narrowing "corridor" (Fig.2). This must not mean a direct relationship between both buildings, but it demonstrates that it would be scientifically not correct to search only parallels in the nearby North African coasts while the Iberian Peninsula delivers also highly interesting paradigms. Adjacent are two small U-shaped-monuments (upper part of the photo) whose characteristic understrikes the simultaneity with the big structure of the sanctuary. Two more minuscule USMs seem to exist in the eastern segments, but the satellite photo is not very clear (see sketch). The whole scene lies in a plain solely used for livestock-farming, so that the above depicted monuments have absolutely no agrarian function (one can see that the cattle trails do not stop at the circle or at the USMs). See also Fig.14 and its legend offering another keyhole version.



Fig. 14 - This classic "keyhole" monument (max. length 35 m) was detected in Syria. It shows a longish corridor with parallel walls leading to a circle-like target element, probably a tumulus. It belongs – as well as the curvy non-parallel corridor in Fig.13 – to a group of groundplans which used the feminine pubics, especially the clitoris region, as paragon. The prehistoric Lanzarotian corridors of tumuli reflect with their straight (Fig.9) or narrowing design (Fig.3) the wide spectrum of variants found around the Mediterranean and especially in the Near East. Another keyhole monument – not described here – deals with versions which combine both elements: feminine and male.
