

Archaeological Site of the Antequera Dolmens

Network of Cultural Areas in Andalusia

English  
Español  
Français  
Nederlands



Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



Sitio de los Dolmenes de Antequera

Antequera Dolmens Site

Network of Cultural Areas in Andalusia

Monumental and Archaeological Sites:

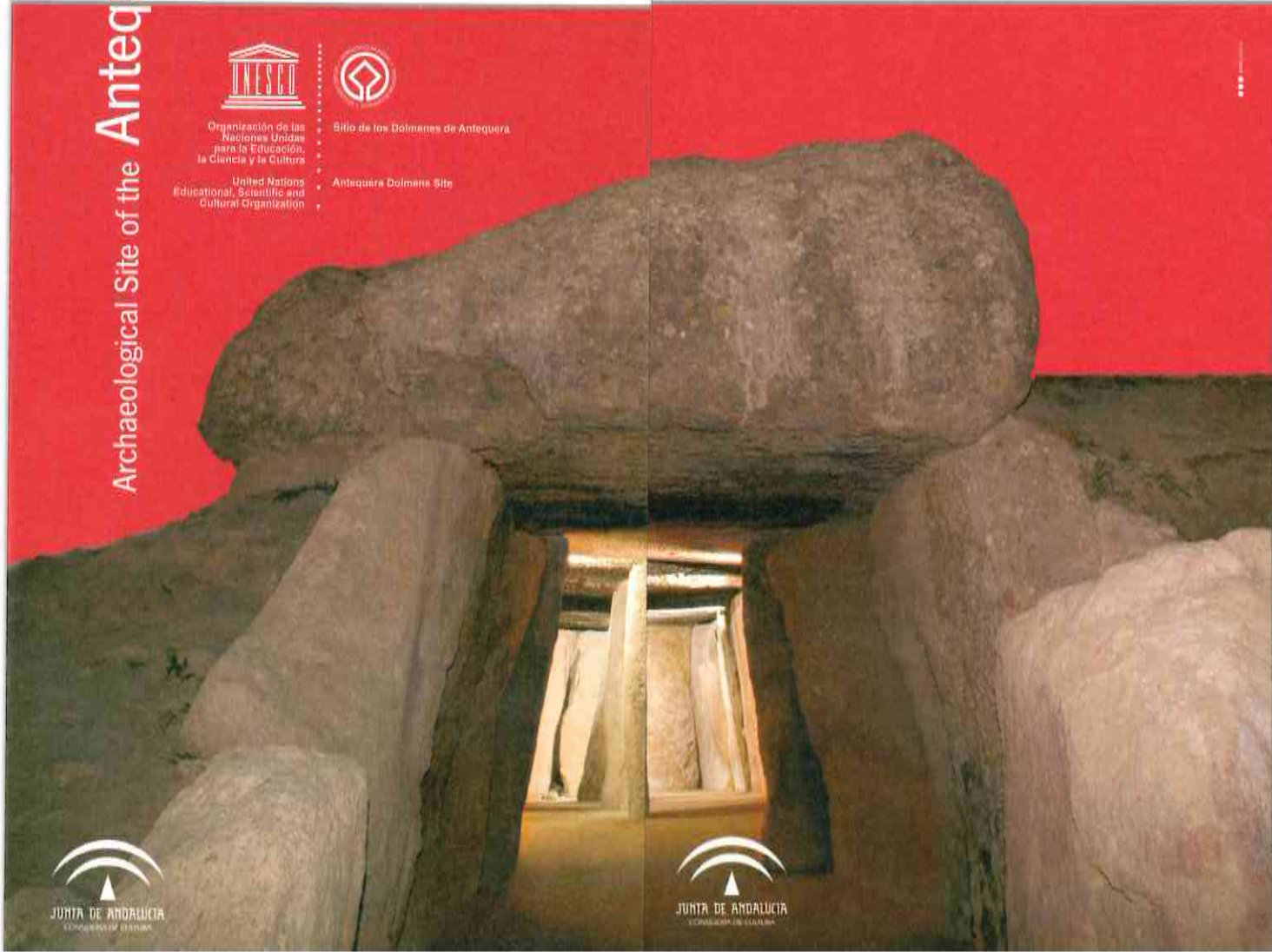
- Conjunto Monumental Alcazaba, Almería
- Conjunto Arqueológico Baelo Claudia, Boleña, Cádiz
- Conjunto Arqueológico Madinat Al-Zahra, Córdoba
- Conjunto Arqueológico Cástulo, Jaén
- Conjunto Monumental Alhambra y Generalife, Granada
- Conjunto Arqueológico Dólmenes de Antequera, Málaga
- Conjunto Arqueológico Itálica, Sevilla
- Conjunto Arqueológico Carmona, Sevilla

- Enclave Arqueológico Las Peñas de los Gitanos, Montefrío, Granada
- Enclave Arqueológico Orca, Granada
- Enclave Arqueológico Dolmen de Soto, Trigueros, Huelva
- Enclave Arqueológico Marroquies, Jaén
- Enclave Arqueológico Cueva de Ardales, Málaga
- Enclave Arqueológico Cueva de la Pileta, Benaolán, Málaga
- Enclave Arqueológico Peñas de Cabrera, Casabermeja, Málaga
- Enclave Arqueológico Alameda, Málaga
- Enclave Arqueológico Cueva de Nerja, Málaga

Prehistoric Sites:

- Enclave Arqueológico Los Millares, Santa Fe de Marchújar, Almería
- Enclave Arqueológico Cuevas del Tajo de Las Figuras, Espera, Cádiz
- Enclave Arqueológico Castellón Alto de Galera, Granada

- Enclave Arqueológico Dólmenes Valencina de la Concepción y Castilleja de Guzmán, Sevilla





# Welcome to the Archaeological Site of the Antequera Dolmens

Aerial photo of Area 1 ►  
Photo: PhotoDrone



To evoke the past is not merely to recover the memory as an element of cohesion in the face of oblivion; it is also to cross the barrier that prevents us from following the trail of lost footprints and to compel ourselves to become aware of a privileged place where the dispersed fragments of life accumulate. We will thus learn to value an archaeological area of extraordinary beauty and fragility. We are ultimately the heirs to a legacy whose preservation will depend on whether or not advocates for development encumber its future.

The Antequera Dolmens is one of the most highly valued and distinguished prehistoric sites in Andalusia, comparable to other large, internationally renowned Spanish sites such as Atapuerca and Altamira. Alongside other temples, tombs and ceremonial spaces such as Orkney and Stonehenge (United Kingdom), Newgrange (Ireland), Carnac (France) and the temples of Malta, the constructions of Antequera are a prime example of the heritage and cultural legacy most characteristic of early European Neolithic societies: megalithism.

During their tour of the Antequera Dolmens, visitors will journey back in time to a society and a way of life that are very different from the present, where the monuments made of large stones were a way of bracing existence in the face of nature's unpredictability, ensuring faith in the future in the presence of difficulties and guaranteeing social cohesion in the face of conflict.

Located at the heart of Andalusia in Southern Spain, the **Antequera Dolmens Site** comprises three cultural monuments: the Menga and the Viera Dolmens and the *Tholos* of El Romeral, and two natural monuments: La Peña de los Enamorados and El Torcal mountainous formations.

At its 40th session (Istanbul, 2016), the World Heritage Committee decided to include the Site on the World Heritage List, as it met criteria (i), (iii) and (iv) for a serial cultural property. The Committee adopted the Declaration of Outstanding Universal Value for the following reasons:

This is one of the world's oldest and most original forms of monumentalization of a landscape by integrating megalithic architecture and nature known in world Prehistory, an important ritual centre whose origin dates back to the first half of the 4th millennium BCE. The megalithic structures are presented in the guise of the natural landscape (buried beneath earth tumuli) and their orientation is based on two natural monuments: La Peña de los Enamorados and El Torcal. These are two indisputable visual landmarks within the property. The colossal scale of megaliths characterised by the use of large stone blocks that form chambers and spaces with lintelled roofs (Menga and Viera) or false cupolas (El Romeral) attest to exceptional architectural planning from those who built them and create unique architectural forms.

The three Antequera megaliths conserve all their constitutive elements and still conserve their unitary character. Therefore they are of adequate size to express their universal value as outstanding examples of megalithic architecture. The three monuments are in good condition and their original structures are almost entirely intact, both the interior rocky structure as well as the tumuli that cover them.

In terms of protection, the Menga Dolmen was the first element from the Site to be acknowledged by way of the Royal Order of 1st June 1886 which declared this element a National Monument. Today, the five properties that make up this Site have the legal consideration of Property of Cultural Interest with the category of Archaeological Area and are under the protection and valuation of the Andalusia Regional Government through the institution of the Archaeological Site of the Antequera Dolmens.

The heritage unit that forms the Antequera Dolmens Site is one of the finest and most well-known examples of European megalithism. The megalithic monuments feature a wide range of architectural techniques and solutions but are generically characterised by the use of large blocks of stone that form chambers and enclosed rooms covered by a lintel (dolmen), characteristic of Atlantic cultural tradition, or by a vault built in masonry (*tholos*), typical of Mediterranean tradition, and used for ritual and funerary purposes.

The megaliths are the first forms of monumental stone architecture from European Prehistory and date back, according to information currently available, to the beginning of the 5th millennium Before Common Era (BCE) during the Neolithic period or, in other words, between 6,500 and 7,000 years ago. For the first agrarian and shepherding communities in Western Europe, megalithic monumental architecture was an ideological means of marking their presence and the roots of their society on the land. As burial chambers, some megaliths are true storehouses of cultural and genealogical identity; and as temples and ritual spaces they were also used for holding propitiatory ceremonies, often linked to the fertility of nature and the commemoration of ancestors.

The communities who constructed the megalithic monuments of Antequera wished to express their symbolic connection with land elements and the cosmos by establishing different alignments with the axes of their corridors. Thus, the architectural project was based on two main lines. The first is





▲ The Menga Dolmen  
Drawing. Damián Álvarez

defined as the orientation of the corridor of Menga towards a peculiar geographic landmark as is La Peña de los Enamorados. Later on, the *tholos* of El Romeral is positioned on the path of the Viera-Menga-La Peña axis and its corridor is oriented towards another distinct geographic feature, the El Torcal mountain range. The second line is established by aligning the axis of the corridor of Viera towards sunrise during the equinoxes.

Contemporary research first recognises these connections starting with Lady Louisa Tenison who visited Menga in 1851 and noticed the relationship between Menga and La Peña. Later on, Manuel Gómez-Moreno clearly described the Menga-Romeral-Peña visual axis in 1905 and Wilfrid James Hemp published the first photograph of La Peña from the entrance of Menga in 1934, also marking the presence of the tumulus of El Romeral on the plain. Michael Hoskin, –whose research on thousands of megaliths in Europe and Africa have highlighted the exceptional nature of the three monuments in Antequera–, was, in 2002, the one who confirmed the orientation of Menga towards a terrestrial object as well as the first to verify the equinoctial orientation of Viera and the terrestrial orientation of El Romeral.

▼ The Menga chamber  
Photo. Antonio Miranda Fernández



## Recommended itinerary

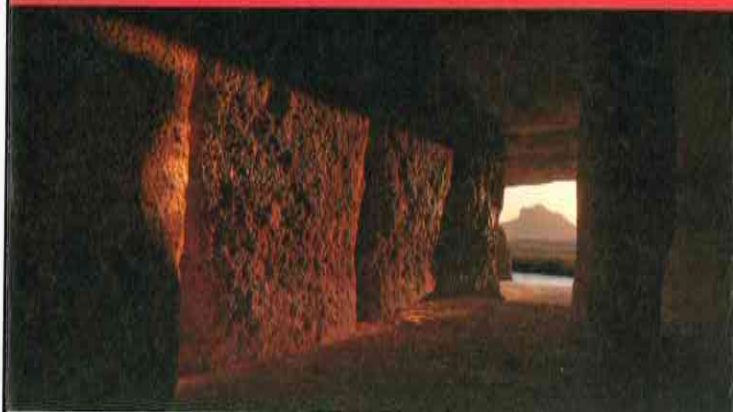
After visiting the Reception Centre where you can view the documentary "*Menga: The Building Process*", we will continue on to the Michael Hoskin Solar Centre, named as such in recognition of the archaeoastronomer from the University of Cambridge. This space is laid out according to the four points of a compass, thus giving its elements a mission that is twofold: functional and astronomical. The cylindrical wall incorporates the profile of the eastern horizon of the plain of Antequera, with the silhouette of La Peña de los Enamorados, in addition to points indicating where the sun comes up (sunrise) during the summer and winter solstices as well as during the spring and autumn equinoxes. On the pavement we can observe the orientations of the main megaliths on the Iberian Peninsula.

On the western side of this space, closing the circle, is the Memorial of the Dolmens: the Centenarian Olive Tree that stood inside of Menga for many years. A living memory and a silent witness to the footprints of the many people who have passed through Menga, it was chosen as the focal point of the Memorial. A series of monoliths, forming a timeless cromlech, is a reminder of all those who have contributed to protecting and valuing the Antequera Dolmens.

Continuing along we will come upon the Field of Tumuli from which we can observe the plains of Antequera, the Cerro de Marimacho hills, the *tholos* of El Romeral and La Peña. From here we can confirm the similar altitudes of the natural promontory of Marimacho at 501.84 m and the height of the tumulus of Menga and Viera at 500.76 and 502.24 m respectively, once again demonstrating the relationship between the monuments and the landscape.



Bronze Medallion ►  
Photo. Javier Pérez González



The sun in Menga ▲  
Photo. Javier Pérez González

Once we have seen the Menga and Viera Dolmens the visit continues on to the *tholos* of El Romeral, located at a distance of about 4 kilometres. You will need to go by car. Take Road A-7282, passing through the industrial park until you reach a large roundabout with a fountain in the middle. Here you will turn left, taking Road A-7283 towards Cordoba. Turn left again at the next roundabout and follow the signs which will indicate access to the monument.

Michael Hoskins Solar Centre ▼  
Photo. Rafael A. Gallardo Montiel



## Address and visiting times

### Antequera Dolmens Site

Ctra. de Málaga, 5  
29200 Antequera (Málaga)  
Telf. Reception Centre: 952 71 22 06/07 - 670 945 453  
[www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura](http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura)  
[visitasdolmenesdeantequera.ccul@juntadeandalucia.es](mailto:visitasdolmenesdeantequera.ccul@juntadeandalucia.es)



▼ The Menga Dolmen. Photo. Javier Pérez González

#### Access

#### Menga and Viera Dolmens

Ctra. de Málaga (Málaga Road), 5, 29200 Antequera MÁLAGA

#### Tholos de El Romeral

A-7283 road (in the direction of Córdoba)

#### Open to the public

To confirm schedule, see:  
[www.museosdeandalucia.es/cultura/museos/CADA/](http://www.museosdeandalucia.es/cultura/museos/CADA/)  
The groups have to book the time of visit

#### Guided Tours

Please request in advance by post, e-mail or telephone. Educational material may be requested by contacting the Archaeological Site.

#### Price

Admission is free.



## A history of the research

Engraving. Interior of Menga, 1853 ▶  
Lady Louise Tenison  
Dolmens of Antequera Archive



## Singularities of the Site

Schematic  
anthropomorphic figure.  
Peñas de Cabrera.  
Digital replica.  
Rafael Maura Mijares



It is not easy to find an emblematic prehistoric site, of those considered the "classics", whose historiography dates back almost 500 years. In this regard, the case of Antequera is highly exceptional, the first written reference to Menga, of which we have records, appears in a text from 1530.

Rafael Mitjana and Ardison's book entitled **Memoria sobre el templo druida hallado en las cercanías de la ciudad de Antequera** (Report on the Druid temple discovered in the vicinity of the town of Antequera), published in 1847, is one of the first scientific works on this megalithic phenomenon to ever be published, thus marking a turning point in the study of the Antequera Dolmens. In fact, many subsequent references follow this work very closely, including the eminent Andalusian pre-historians Manuel de Góngora and Marín and Francisco María Tubino and Oliva. In 1853 in her book **Castile and Andalucía**, Lady Louisa Tenison identifies the shaft that Mitjana had found some time before; this is the first clear written reference of this shaft, one of the most surprising architectural elements of the Menga Dolmen whose existence would only be confirmed during the excavations carried out in 2005.

In 1903, the brothers Antonio and José Viera Fuentes discovered the dolmen which has carried their name ever since. Furthermore, their explorations the following year led them to locate a third megalith, in this case some four kilometres to the east, at a place which was then known as Cerrillo Blanco; today we know it as the *tholos* of El Romeral. The importance of these finds explains why they were immediately described in 1905 in two publications, one by Ricardo Velázquez Bosco and another by Manuel Gómez-Moreno Martínez. The 1920s saw one of the greatest periods of research activity at the site. From 1919 to 1922 up to four works by distinguished researchers were published that, to a greater or lesser extent, referred to this necropolis. These were the works of Hugo Obermaier, Pierre Paris, Adrian de Mortillet and Cayetano de Mergelina. A few years later it would be Wilfrid James Hemp, Simeón Giménez Reyna and Georg and Vera Leisner who would study it in depth.

Over the last two decades of the 20th century, excellent research has been led by José Enrique Ferrer Palma and Ignacio Marques Merelo from the University of Malaga. Currently, ongoing scientific research converges in the **General Research Project entitled 'Societies, Territories and Landscapes in the Prehistory of Antequera'**, coordinated by Leonardo García Sanjuán and including the participation of the Universities of Seville, Granada, and Alcalá de Henares from Spain, the University of Southampton from the United Kingdom and the Archaeological Site of the Antequera Dolmens.

The construction of Menga and Viera correspond to the Late Neolithic (c. 4200-3200 BCE), when the agrarian communities of the fertile lands of the Guadalhorce Valley began to experience important demographic and economic growth; meanwhile, the *tholos* of El Romeral was built during the Copper Age (c. 3200-2200 BCE), the period during which metallurgy was developed and long-distance contacts and social complexity were consolidated.

In the mountain ranges of El Torcal and Molina there are a series of caves which were used by the first Neolithic groups that occupied these lands. Among these caves is the remarkable Cueva de El Toro in El Torcal, where work carried out over the last 40 years by a team coordinated by Dimas Martín Socas and María Dolores Camalich Massieu from the University of La Laguna – within the framework of the project entitled **The Neolithic in the Region of Antequera** – indicates an initial occupation during the Early Neolithic (5400-4700 BCE); this work has revealed the characteristics of these first herding, agricultural and artisan communities. After being abandoned for approximately 500 years, this cave was intensely occupied once again during the end of the Neolithic (4300-3800 BCE), aided by a sharp increase in economic activity which was not only associated with agriculture and livestock, but also with crafts, dominated by pottery and textiles. These first communities from the mountainous *Lands of Antequera* can be considered the predecessors of the communities that constructed the megaliths.

In the plains of Antequera, and as a result of business archaeology, various settlements from the Late Neolithic and the Copper Age have been identified and studied such as Arroyo Saladillo, Huerta del Ciprés, El Sillillo or El Perezón, located within a radius of 6 km from the dolmens, or the Piedras Blancas I site, located in La Peña. Cerro de Marimacho, which was inhabited during the Copper Age, faces the hill where Menga and Viera stand. The Archaeological Site of Peñas de Cabrera (Casabermeja) is from the same period of time, boasting an important collection of schematic rock paintings and whose settlement is known. In general, it is rather unlikely that any of these Neolithic or Chalcolithic communities would have individually taken on the formidable task of building the enormous megalithic monuments. This job would have required close cooperation between numerous communities with common religious practices and a shared sense of belonging to a tribe or a clan.





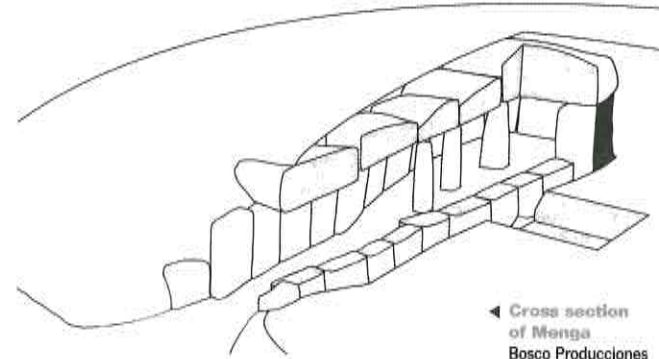
▲ The Viera Dolmen Tumulus and La Peña  
Photo, Javier Pérez González

## La Peña de los Enamorados

One of the most relevant elements of the Antequera Dolmens Site is the magnitude of its landscape, the most outstanding feature of which is its relationship with a prominent natural rock formation of great cultural significance in the region of Antequera: known as La Peña de los Enamorados (Lovers' Rock), the silhouette of this mountain resembles the face of a person who is asleep.

Research has shown that Menga's orientation is exceptional as it does not face sunrise as is standard in the immense majority of Iberian megaliths; this is explained by the powerful presence of La Peña among the landscape of Antequera. On the north face of this mountain, where Menga's axis of symmetry points, there is a space which boasted a special symbolic and religious significance during the Neolithic period. This area includes the small cave of Matacabras, with schematic-style rock paintings, which was likely a sanctuary, as well as Piedras Blancas I, perhaps a gathering spot related to this sanctuary and the mountain. The visual and landscape relationships between Menga and La Peña are possibly one-of-a-kind in European Pre-History.

▼ El Torcal  
Photo, Javier Pérez González



◀ Cross section  
of Menga  
Bosco Producciones

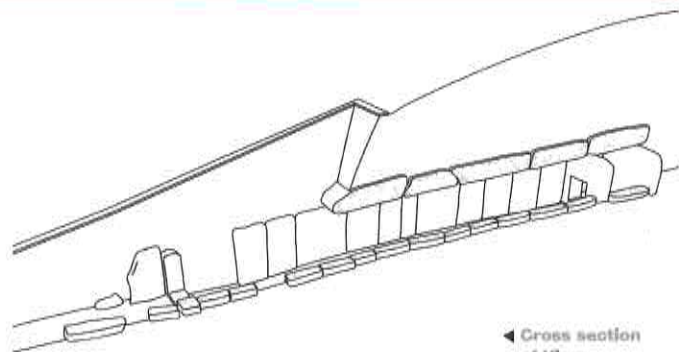
## The Menga Dolmen

The Menga Dolmen is a gallery megalith in which an atrium open to the exterior leads to a second, rectangular area that, acting as a corridor, leads to the oval-shaped chamber. The transition from the corridor to the chamber is marked by a slight change in alignment on both sides. This dolmen was built using the orthostatic technique and spans a length of 27.50 m, including the initial part of the atrium. The height increases from 2.70 m at the entrance to 3.50 m at the headstone. The maximum width of 6 metres is reached in the last third of the chamber, where the most recent excavations have uncovered a 1.5-metre-diameter, 19.5-metre-deep shaft cut into the sandstone. This shaft is aligned with the three pillars that coincide with the union of the roof slabs. Each of the tomb's sides is made up of 12 orthostats (upright stones), while the headstone is formed by a single stone. The roof is made up of five slabs; a sixth, which would have formed the entrance, is now missing. The tomb is covered by a fifty-metre-diameter tumulus and faces northeast (45° azimuth); in other words, it faces towards the north of sunrise during the summer solstice, an orientation that is completely exceptional in Iberian megalithic architecture. The reason, however, is the alignment with La Peña. It is not exactly clear as to when Menga was built, although there is data suggesting that it may have been constructed during an early phase of the Late Neolithic, between 3800 and 3400 BCE. Later, it was continuously utilised as a sacred space or a funerary site during the Copper Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Nowadays, the cemetery of the city of Antequera is located in this same area, thus manifesting the continued existence of value and cultural significance over the course of almost six uninterrupted millennia with the funerary use of this space.

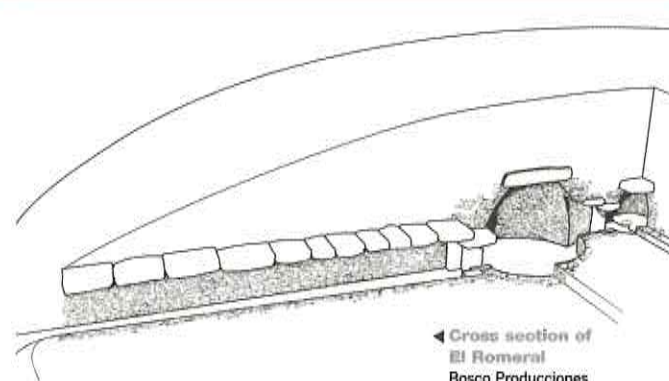
▼ The Menga and Viera Dolmens  
Drawing, Damián Álvarez







◀ Cross section of Viera  
Bosco Producciones



◀ Cross section of El Romeral  
Bosco Producciones

## The Viera Dolmen

The Viera Dolmen is a corridor tomb consisting of a long corridor divided into two sections, at the end of which there is a square chamber which is entered through a square door cut into a large stone slab. Built in the same way as Menga, with an orthostatic technique, it spans a length of over 22 m. Its average interior width is fairly regular, varying between 1.30 m at the beginning and 1.60 m at the end of the chamber. Each side of the tomb must have been made up of 16 upright stones, of which 14 are preserved on the left side and 15 on the right, while the headstone is formed by a single slab. In terms of the roof, five full capstones remain as well as fragments of two others. We can also infer that there were four more capstones, although they have long since disappeared. The average interior height is a little more than 2 m. The tomb is covered by a fifty-metre-diameter tumulus which faces slightly southeast (96° azimuth), thus following the standard pattern of Iberian megalithism in this aspect. The date of construction of this monument is unknown, although it was likely erected during an advanced phase of the Late Neolithic, after Menga, later being used as a place of worship and burial during the Copper Age, the Bronze Age and Antiquity.

▼ The Viera Corridor  
Photo, Miguel Angel Blanco de la Rubia



## The *Tholos* of El Romeral

El Romeral is a *tholos*-type tomb with two circular chambers. It has a trapezoidal corridor with masonry walls and is covered by a lintel of which 11 slabs remain; it presents a maximum surviving length of 26.30 m, an average width of 1.50 m and an average height of 1.95 m. The chamber, with a vaulted roof consisting of rows of stone, is elaborated with masonry and finished with a large horizontal slab; it is circular and has a diameter of 5.20 m and a height of 3.75 m. At the rear of this space there is an opening that leads to a small corridor ending in a small chamber which reproduces, on a smaller scale, the morphology and building technique of those that we have already described. Only the doors that lead to the chambers were built with the orthostatic technique. The total preserved length of the tomb is just over 34 m and is covered by an 85-metre-diameter tumulus. Facing an azimuth of 199° or, in other words, the south-southwest octant of the horizon, this tomb is one of the exceptional examples on the Iberian Peninsula that faces the western half of the sky. Its axis points exactly to the highest elevation on the El Torcal mountain range, known as Camorro de las Siete Mesas. Given its construction style, El Romeral must correspond to the Copper Age (c. 3200-2200 BCE); however, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date of its construction as this monument has never been scientifically excavated.

▼ El Romeral chamber  
Photo, Javier Pérez González

