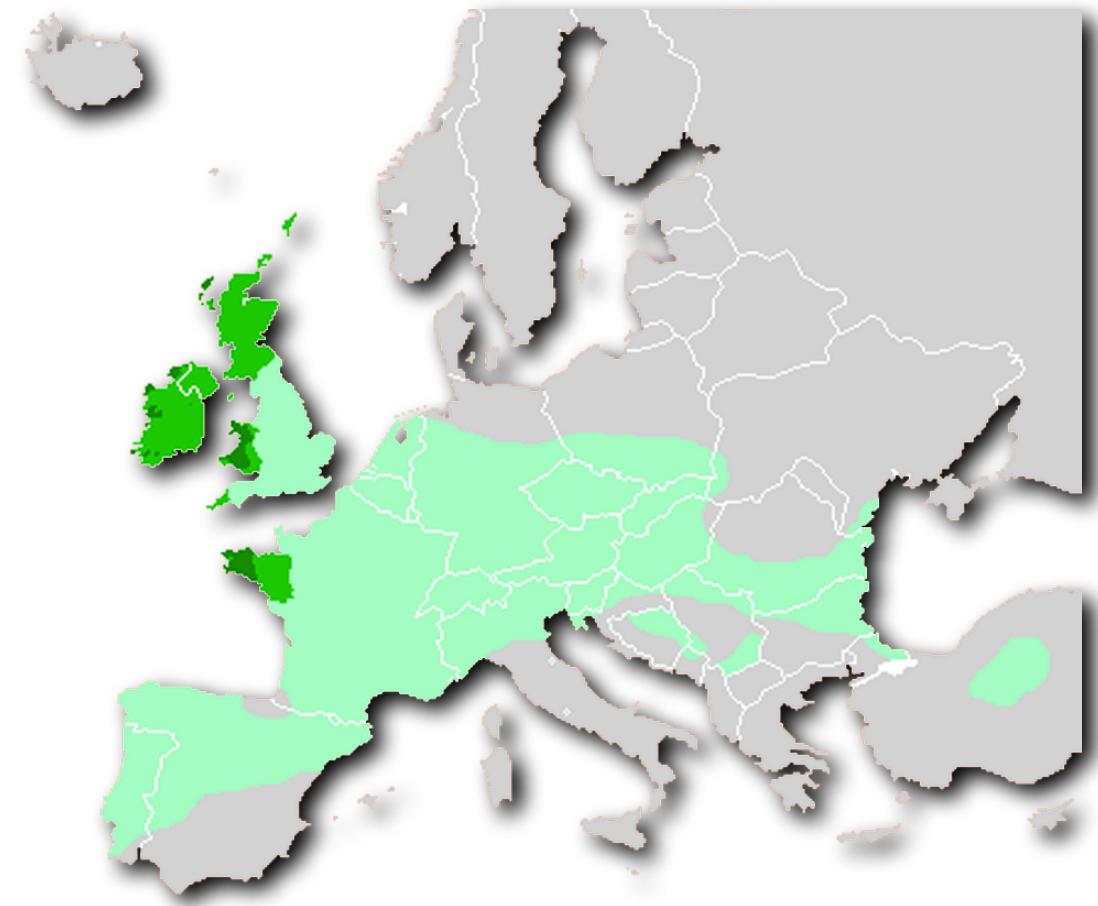


# Celtic Megaliths: Why Were They Constructed?

## What is Celtic?

Megalithic sites can be found all over the world, however the focus of this presentation is on the Celtic sites in particular. Celtic culture of Neolithic times encompasses a large geographic area across Western Europe. Celtic culture spread across the modern United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and areas of the Mediterranean and can be seen today by the remains of large stone monuments.



## Site: Stenness, Scotland

The standing stones on this Orkney Island village are dated to before 4,500 years ago. The site consists of two separate rings of upright megaliths. Unlike Stonehenge, the Stenness monuments lack lintels (or the stones that sit atop the vertical sarsen stones). An even more interesting difference is that the Stenness monuments neighbor a contemporary Neolithic village, a barnhouse, and chamber tombs. The presence of these discoveries demonstrate the possibility of a megalithic site with a more daily life use, as opposed to a more ceremonial or ritual purpose.



## Reasons for Construction:

What were the intentions of the builders of the great megaliths? Although the mystery of the method of construction is less puzzling now, the purpose of their creation is still uncertain. Since there is no written evidence of these people we must infer with archaeological evidence. Some of the most popular hypotheses for creation include ritual and religious beliefs, astronomical uses, and competition between political chiefdoms.

The determination and effort needed create the stone monuments could have been driven by strong religious beliefs. The struggle for basic survival necessities and the increasing spread of tribal violence in the Neolithic period could have harvested a strong dependence on belief in an afterlife. The discovery of burial chambers at many megalithic sites, as well as the evidence of ritual sacrifices, both point to a society reliant of ritual. The Druids, Iron Age high priests, were likely present at many of the sites as it was clergy law for their presence at ritual sacrifices. Celtic history also points to pagan beliefs in gods which may have determined the crucial agricultural success of these populations.

Agricultural factors lead to the possibility of astronomical purposes for the megalithic sites. Archaeoastronomy, a study focusing on this hypothesis, suggest that sighting points at sites like Stonehenge offer perfect alignments with solar positions on the Summer Solstice. The agricultural subsistence which would have been dependent on such factors, make this a believable hypothesis. However believable, there is no physical archaeological evidence for such claims other than the position of the monuments and what can be viewed astronomically from them.

Megalith creation is also being interpreted as having political and ancestral motivations. Monumental architecture requires the order and organization of large populations and political chiefs may have played a part in Celtic megaliths. Even if religion was a factor, the construction would have required a local political leader to move people and resources.

Perhaps the megaliths created across vast Celtic territories were prompted by all of the above hypotheses. Instead of one single motivation being responsible for the monuments, there may be several reasons for their existence. Megaliths may be symbols of a prehistoric technology that demonstrates an innovation utilized in a variety of cultural contexts. Because of the limits of archaeological evidence and the passage of time, the true reasons for the monuments will likely never be determined.



## Site: Temples of Malta

The most recent radiocarbon dates indicate the seven Temples of Malta are the earliest known examples of megaliths in the world, dated to around 5,000 years ago. These Mediterranean-Celts are presumed to have come from modern day Sicily, Italy. Some of the temples also contain burial sites which help archaeologists get closer to understanding the purpose of such impressive monuments.

## Site: Stonehenge, England

This site is undeniably the most well known and most visited of all the Celtic megalithic structures. The beginning of construction began about 4,900 years ago and continued over the next several hundred years. It is known that the stones used to construct the site came from a quarry in Avebury, about 18 miles away. The heaviest stone weighs 50 tons and debate on the method ruction continues today.

According to most experts and scholars, the building of Stonehenge was a daunting task, yet one quite capable of human beings. Many have helped prove the point of capability by reconstructing their own megaliths. Professor of Archaeology, Kenneth L. Feder, falsifies the theories relating to extraterrestrial-aided construction. Even a retired carpenter from Michigan, Wally Wallington, has publicly documented his erection of stone megaliths in his own backyard using simple wooden tools and levers.

