

Irish Inscriptions Confirmed by Archaeoastronomy

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The crest of Slíbh-na-Cailliagh (Mountain of the Sorceress) rises 900 feet in the pastoral landscape of County Meath in central Ireland. As bumps on the ridge materialize into large cairns, Elizabeth Sincerbeaux and I know that we have reached the Loughcrew Mountain area that is studded with cruciform burial tombs of pagan Ulster kings.

The primary purpose of our journey is to explore and to photograph Cairn T, traditionally known as the tomb of Ollamh Fodhla, famous Irish monarch, law giver, and poet. His death in 1277 B.C. is recorded in the ancient Irish book, THE FOUR MASTERS.

However, it is not an interest in Ollamh Fodhla that draws us to the Slíbh-na-Calliagh. Instead, it is a great curiosity to examine the engraved stones set into the passage and chamber walls of his tomb. Warren Dexter's recognition and Dr. Barry Fell's decipherment of Libyan Tifinag script engraved on these stones has brought the site to the attention of the epigraphic world. (ESOP, Vol.11 Part 2,1983.)

Dr. Fell's translation of the inscriptions in the Old Irish language forecasts solar, lunar, and stellar events, indicating that the cairn functioned as a celestial calendar. Archaeologists estimate that Cairn T was constructed about 3500-3200 B.C. If the Tifinag alphabet is from the same time period, Irish written history may be over 5000 years old.

Fell's decipherment of the Cairn T inscriptions was independently confirmed by Martin Brennan, an American of Irish parentage, and a team of American and Irish observers. They recorded the celestial phenomena at ancient Irish tombs at Loughcrew and in the Boyne Valley over a seven year period. Brennan sets forth the archaeoastronomy of these amazing sites in two books, THE BOYNE VALLEY VISION (1980) and THE STARS AND STONES (1983). His work was unknown to Fell and Dexter at the time of Fell's decipherment.

Martin Brennan and Jack Roberts watched with fascination as the equinox sunrise cast a beam of light through the entrance of easterly oriented Cairn T. It struck a carving incised on the rear wall of the west chamber. (see photo) They observed that several days before and after the equinox the sun's rays travelled down the long passage of the chamber and moved across the elaborately carved sun signs on the stones. The golden light is rectangular in shape due to the placement of the chamber stones, and it frames precisely the petal-like sun figures as the sun rises. Brennan and his colleagues have concluded from site observation and astronomical computations that Cairn T and other area tombs were built as celestial observatories.

They suggest that these observatories were used for burials of important people at a later date.

The Loughcrew cairns are unmortared stone structures. Those that are still intact have domed ceilings in the central area. Large slabs roof the rectangular passages and chambers. Cairn T is covered by a large earthen mound and cobbles. The exterior of Ollamh Fodhla's tomb was faced with quartz, which was found in quantity at the base of the mound when archaeologists excavated the site.

Early histories of Ireland have provided some clues to possible origins of the Libyan Tifinag and Ogam scripts that occur together on some of the Cairn T carvings. The noted antiquarian, Richard Rolt Brash (1817-1876), established through painstaking research that Ogam script occurred in Ireland many centuries before the advent of Christianity. Brash proposed that Ogam script was introduced in Ireland by the Tuatha De Danann, commonly considered to be mythical people. But, Brash suggests that the Tuatha De Danann were a small tribe from Gaul or Britain, who arrived in Ireland at a remote time. They influenced the native Irish with superior arts, arms, and organization and established a powerful system of religion, which included burial in chambered tombs in the Boyne Valley and to a lesser extent at Loughcrew. Dr. Fell connects this culture with the Beaker people, who invaded Ireland about 2200 B.C. He believes they were Celts, who introduced the Gaelic language in Ireland.

Brash and others suggested that the Tuatha De Danann were a druidic priesthood with great knowledge of the occult sciences and magic. Danu (Byanu) was the mother goddess in their sun/fertility pantheon. Ogmios, the traditional inventor of Ogam letters, was reputed to be one of their number. He was known also as Ogma Grianeus and Ogma Grian-Aineach (Ogma of the sun-like face), thereby connecting Ogam with sun worship.

Tribes from western Europe identified the Gaulish deity, Ogmios, with the mythical Hercules. Ogma of the Gaedhil was probably a tradition passed to the Irish by their Gaulish ancestors, a branch of whom conquered Ireland. Brash noted that traditional stories about Hercules' migrations closely parallel migrations of the Gaedhil through Crete, Africa, Egypt, Libya, Iberia, Europe, and the British Isles. Did the Gaedhil bring the Libyan Tifinag alphabet to Ireland? Were the Gaedhil the mythical Tuatha De Danann that may be the source of Irish Ogam as well? Perhaps, ESOP readers can help clarify this puzzle.

Warren Dexter and Barry Fell are to be congratulated for recognizing and deciphering the Libyan Tifinag texts found in Ollamh Fodhla's tomb. Their work is an epigraphic event likely to spawn lively debate in archaeological, historical, and epigraphic groups for years to come. Fortunately, Martin Brennan and his colleagues have taken a giant step in archaeoastronomy that helps to confirm the epigraphy in the tomb/observatory of Ollamh Fodhla as well as in other cairns in the Loughcrew Mountains.



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Boyne Valley, Ireland: Tomb of Ollamh Fodhla: Carvings on rear wall of West Tomb, Cornwell Stone No. 14 .

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