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Moorish Pilgrimage To Ireland

Hakim Bey

I'd asked my friends Gordon Campbell and John Stephenson To find a Beltaine (May Eve) celebration to attend. But the old Celtic holidays are not widely celebrated (although I later found out from Barbara O'Flynn of the Folklore Dept. at University College in Dublin that Nay Fires and May Bushes are still to be seen in Sligo). John discovered that some enthusiasts for Celtic Christianity living on the Arran islands led by one Fr. Dara Molloy, would be having a bonfire, so we set out from Dublin on Apr. 30 for the West. With Gordon's madcap driving we were in Co. Galway by evening in time for the oysters & Guinness at Moran's-on-the-Weir, a famous old pub. Next day we were in Inish Mor (*Mor*, pronounced "moor", means "great" in Irish!), the main Arran island and visited the amazing megalithic "fort" Dun Aengus (the Celtic god of Love). (At each megalith site we visited we had a few pipes, and thus were able to interpret everything in true M.O.C. style.) That evening we trudged up to the "cult" headquarters, an old farmhouse, and took part in the ritual. Fr. Dara turned out to be a very interesting sort of heretic, who told us "Rome is the enemy!" and

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spoke of his friendship with Ivan Illich. The weather was amazing (during the whole trip in fact) and the bonfire was pleasant. Dara gave us copies of their excellent Zine, *Aisling* (available from *Aisling* magazine, Inis Mor, Arainn, Co. Na Gaillimhe, Eire; phone/fax 099-61245).

Next morning we took the ferry to Connemara, the Gaelic-speaking region of Galway, and the village of Carraroe, to meet Bob Quinn, author and filmmaker of *Atlantaeon: Ireland North African and Maritime Heritage*. (*The book can be obtained from Quartet books, 27/29 Goodge St. London wlp lfd. As for the film, Bob gave me a VHS copy which i will try to make available to the faithful.*) Bob and his companion Miriam gave us a warm welcome, although they were recovering from a big conference on Gaelic-language TV accompanied by lots of drink and traditional music dance. Bob told me about his latest research (on "druid" oak-lore) and gave me other interesting material on Irish/Oriental links. In a burst of enthusiasm we decided to found an international scholarly gesellschaft devoted to Irish/Oriental research (esp. Morocco), to be called the Atlantaen Society. We hope to hold a conference in Carraroe around May ! next year, if possible. I'm working on a preliminary newsletter and will make it available to all MSM readers A.S.A.P. This amy well turn out to be the most valuable thing I accomplished in Ireland, and I'm extremely excited about it.

That afternoon we passed south through the fascinating little city of Galway, which has many Spanish & Moorish connections (such as the famous Claddagh ring, originally a moorish design brought back by a goldsmith named Joyce who'd been captured by Barbary Pirates.) Then on to Co. Clare (John Stephens ancestral land) and the Bursen, a barren region rich in neolithic sites. On Bob Quinn's advice we stopped to see the Poul nabrone Dolmen, one of the most impressive.

That evening we arrived in Co. Cork (my own ancestral county) and the village of Doneraile, where Gordon's friends Jim & Fran are renting a Gregorian mansion with an Anglo-

Norman square tower named Castle Saffron. Unbelievably exquisite! The grounds include an iron age fort, overgrown with bluebells, which we investigated. (The rent on all this is less than a small apartment in New York) Jim is a mycologist, and told us about an indigenous “magic mushroom” called liberty caps.

Next day — joined by Gordon’s wife Julie — zoom zoom — we were in Kerry — saw the Paps of Anu (the Mother Goddess), two breast-shaped mountains with megalithic “teats” on the summits — and then visited Staigue — a megalithic or iron age royal residence of great beauty; and then pushed on to Gordon’s village, Ballinskellig, on Kerry’s stunning coast, where he is hoping to build a stone pyramid (if the planning commission allows such heresy!) We checked into a weird hotel run by mad ex-monks, and spent the evening drinking with an old Shanachie, Mick Murphy, who told us that liberty caps are not recent imports but were known to the druids (this would explain a lot). When I told Murphy about the difficulty I’d experienced trying to trace the origin of my great grandfather Patrick Rion, he came up with a memorable line: “Many a man’s had to change his name when he changed his country!”

The Skellig islands, or rather Skellig Michael (— that’s St. Michael Archangel, who likes big pointy hills and islands) were once the home of a monastic community of the Celtic Church; their beehive huts, chapels and tombs still survive. Despite the presence of tourists (we considered ourselves pilgrims) the visit was profoundly moving — and exhausting enough to amount to a penance! So we rewarded ourselves with an amazing meal (fresh seafood & Kerry mountain spring lamb) and a visit to Ballinskellig’s other old shanachie, the bard Michael Kirby.... All to short a visit, as we were in the middle of 18 different fascinating folk-loric subjects we had to leave. Kirby told us, for instance, that the Tuatha De Danaan literally disappeared underground when the Celts arrived, not only into the megalithic mounds but also extensive tunnels (

Viet Cong style). Later, at Knowth in the Boyne valley, we saw such tunnels, although they're dated to the 9th cen. AD and were supposedly used by Christians hiding from Vikings.

Our visit to the Brugh Na Boinne — Knowth, Dowth and Newgrange — was the culmination of our megalithic peregrinations. By great good luck John Stephenson was able to find an artist/archeologist, John Aboud (yes, an Oriental) who had worked at Knowth for 10 years, to give us a tour of the site, which was closed to the public. Astounding! Words fail me! Best of all, an hour in the central eastern chamber, contemplating the megalithic art and the bones of the Tuatha De Danaan! Aboud believes that Knowth was a center for communal festivities, while Newgrange was the secret “Druid” university. (Of course we're talking 5000 BC here, long before the Celts & the Druids *per se* .) But Newgrange has unfortunately been “restored” & opened to the public. Much of it's aura has been dissipated by tourism, not to mention the restoration work, which is very unconvincing.

The rest of the trip was spent in Dublin, visiting lovely old Gregorian mansions (inc. John Aboud's), browsing the book shops & spending all my money, and hanging out at Bewley's Oriental Coffee Shop in Grafton St., the boho center of Dublin. In further issues I hope to describe John Sephenson's plans for an immense celebration of the millennium in Ireland in 2000 AD (very similar to our Jubilee project, but in this case backed by the Irish Ministry of Arts, which seems to have fallen into anarchist hands!). Also, as soon as the Atlantaen Soc. is launched formally I'll send the prospectus to the MSM, and hope for many members. The Church is off to a grand start in Ireland, and the next ten years (at least) promise to be magical indeed.