

Moorish Tag Day Update

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The Manifesto of the Black Thorn League is essentially a meditation on Noble Drew Ali's mysterious teachings about Ireland as "once a part of the Moorish Empire"; St. Patrick's banishing of the snakes as a mask for the expulsion of the Irish Moors; and the Celts as an "Asiatic race". Since writing that text we have discovered a vast amount of material relating to this legend, although we still do not know how it reached Noble Drew -- revelation? Perhaps -- but we now believe even more strongly that the legend itself is far older than Drew Ali's recension, and we suspect he heard it from authentic "folk" sources. Mixed African/Irish communities are far more common in the "New" World than we knew or expected -- to give 2 examples : the Black Irish of Jamaica (descended from Cromwell's Irish serfs who intermarried with slave and maroon groups in Barbados and Jamaica); and Seneca Village, a settlement of squatters -- Irish, Black and Native American -- who in 1853 were forcibly driven out of the area of Manhattan now occupied by Central Park. The story of the 1741 St. Patrick's Day Riot in New York may have survived in some community as a legend of African-Irish connections. But the story goes back, back, back, -- unbelievably far back.

Our first breakthrough -- the first indication of a whole school of history devoted to the Irish/Moorish question -- came with the purchase of a book in Dublin, by an Irish journalist named Bob Quinn (*Atlantean: Ireland's North African & Maritime Heritage*, Quartet books, London/NY, 1986). We hope to meet Quinn this year during our next visit to Ireland. His book is not scholarly, but it is wonderfully enthusiastic. Nearly every chapter throws light on what I've now come to think of as the Quest. Impossible to give a full precis.

Leaving aside all the material Quinn has collected on, say, Egyptian influence on the early Celtic Church -- or Hispano-Moorish-Irish maritime connections -- or the Barbary Pirates (Quinn missed the fact that Irish pirates converted to Islam and took part in the Sallee Republic, a Moroccan corsair utopia)-- in other words, leaving aside the historical era, we get to the gist of Quinn's hypothesis: the "Irish" and the "moors" are the same people (he never says it outright but it's clearly what he's thinking). But who are they?

Quinn's first clue is music -- the eerie similarity between Moroccan Berber music and Irish *seannos or chant-style singing. We explore this on our radio show, the Moorish Orthodox Radio Crusade, using folk music collected by Sean O'Riada (the late great Irish composer) and comparing it with Gnaoua, Jajuka, High Atlas Berber and other Moroccan forms. The similarities are

indeed stunning. But even more astonishing (how did Quinn miss this?): Ireland and Morocco have the only pentatonic scales west of China and Java!!

Quinn's second clue is language. A number of linguists and philologists, ranging from Morris Jones at the turn of the century to Heinrich Wagner (in *The Celtic Consciousness*, NY 1981) have attempted to isolate the pre-celtic substructure in Irish. Too complicated to explain here. The result? Connections between Irish, Berber, and ancient Egyptian! (pardon the exclamation points — just can't help it!) This school of thought is poo-pooed by the Academic Boss Class — but it refuses to go away. It's not mere crankism, either (not that we have anything against cranks) — but as far as I can judge, it is daring, but thoroughly "scientific".

The third clue is — Megaliths. Now so far in life I've resisted "Megalithomania" (as John Michell calls it) but here I'm afraid I've succumbed. I've read about 20 books on the subject so far, and am developing my own...crackpot theory. Quinn suggests (as does the turn of the century scholar, T. W. Rolleston, in *Celtic Myths and Legends*, 1917) that the pre-Celtic population of Ireland and the rest of the Insular or thalassic-Atlantic world, the people who built the megaliths, were not wiped-out but absorbed by the late-coming Celts, who preserve significant "megalithic" strains of folklore as well as music and language; that these people are even more clearly represented in the modern world by Berbers (who have not been absorbed by the Arabs). Quinn and Rolleston go so far as to imagine that megalithism arose first in Morocco and that the proto-Berbers (as in Iberian and Hibernian, the Classical names for pre-Aryan aborigines of Spain and Ireland) were in fact the "Megalithic Missionaries" envisioned by certain archaeologists.

Quinn complains with complete justice that academic Megalithologists never discuss North Africa, even though it's apparently crawling with menhirs — and I immediately noticed the Euro-centric bias to most of their work. The politics of all this are complex. People used to believe that the megaliths were Celtic ("druidic") in origin, and that they were pale, the distant echoes of Crete, Greece, Egypt, the great Near Eastern Neolithic civilizations. Gordon Childe, for instance, believed that the "Megalithic Missionaries" were Greeks or Egyptians. Very recently, however, carbon dating has exploded the "Near Eastern diffusion" theory. The earliest megaliths are older than the pyramids — as old as Jerico and Catal Huyuk.

Carbon dating suggests, in fact, that Meagalithism arose in Spain or Brittany around 5000 BCE, and spread from there to Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia and the Baltics, and to Sardinia, N. Africa, S. Italy, Malta and Egypt! (Almost no carbon dating has been done in North Africa so Quinn's suspicions about Moroccan origins may still prove correct.) But in light of carbon dating the academics have renounced ALL forms of Diffusionism. To listen to them now you'd think prehistoric humans were too dumb to travel at all. Everything is now explained according to the theory of Parallel Development — i.e., everyone invented megaliths separately and on their own, because they'd reached the "right stage of development".

Lord, what horseshit! OBVIOUSLY people traveled — by sea, as Quinn points out — as far back into the Paleolithic. The Neolithic Atlantaeon or Atlantic peoples were OBVIOUSLY very cosmopolitan (linked by ceremonial "gift" routes along which they traded exquisite ceremonial stone axes — and Megalithic "doctrines" too, no doubt).

Without going into arguments, I will assert here that Megalithism was a religion based on the calendar (the *first ideology) and on agriculture. It bears great similarities to the super-ancient agricultural religion of the Near East (explored by T. Gaster in his magnificent *Thespis*), but with several major differences. For one thing, the megaliths themselves were not temples (Near Eastern style) but observatories, calendars. ritual dance/theater sites, fairs for gift exchange, and

colleges for higher learning, all in one. (Classical authors called the megalith builders Hyperboreans, and their shamans, the Boreates — note the B'R root. Again!) For another thing, the megalithic people were less hierarchically structured than the Near Easterners. They retained a tribal or “segmentary” social structure based on the categories of sept, chief and shaman, rather than city, king and priest. This can be shown both archeologically and by examination of 20th century megalithic cultures in, say, Sumatra or Madagascar....

I could go on (and I will) — but here I'll skip to the subject of folklore. The so-called “Celtic” calendar of Ireland is very likely megalithic in origin (see K. Danaher in *The Celtic Consciousness*) The megaliths are obviously pre-Celtic in origin, so that all “Celtic” folklore about them must be sifted out; what's left might contain hints about megalithic culture. I need access to certain key early texts (long out of print or horribly expensive), such as the *Book of Invasions*, to carry out this task. So far, I believe I've located a complex of pre-Celtic themes in the myth of the Fomorians, the one-legged, one-eyed giants who were already in Ireland when the Celts (the Tuatha de Danaan) first arrived — although in some versions the Fomorians came from the sea. (Note: Amur, an ancient name for Morocco or Mauritania; Amoriga, ancient name for brittany, and Fomorians.) Even the late “druidic” legends of the megaliths are worth studying; yet more promising, however, are the non-learned, non-aristocratic traditions embedded in, say, the Fenian Cycle and the legendary history of Munster (see Rees & Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, London, 1961); and Breton peasant lore and fairy tales (see J. P. Mohen, *The World of Megaliths*, NY 1989).

Recently I borrowed and read the entire 1,238 pages of Westermarck's great *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (Quinn also missed this). To my amazement I discovered that in the 1920's the Berbers were still building stone circles and erecting menhirs! Westermarck devotes hundreds of pages to Moroccan stone cults, holy wells and mountains, snake cults, and other pre-Islamic survivals. The Berbers perform (on Midsummers Eve!) a burlesque version of the ancient Neolithic Calendrical drama, described by Gaster, and also found in Britain as the “Mummer plays and Morris (i.e. Moorish) Dances”.

In short, I believe that a fairly complete reconstruction of megalithic culture is possible, based on a revised Diffusionism and comparative folklore, which will amply support Quinn's hypothesis of a pre-historic link between Morocco and Ireland. Once this link has been thoroughly researched, I believe that one of Noble Drew Ali's craziest ideas will turn out to be sheer fact, expressed in religious metaphors. We still need to do a tremendous amount of work — on snakes (and Dragons) for example — on Irish and Moroccan prehistorical archaeology — on music (I'm no ethnomusicologist) — even on the Barbary Pirates. I'm writing this to solicit help. The story of Moorish Tag Day is expanding into an epic. I'm foundering in a dozen swamps of bibliography. A project like this should be multidisciplinary. The Black Thorn League needs active researchers!

In closing: — Our Moorish Deacon of Paris, Wm. Strangmeyer, brought to my attention the fact that a “Count of the Black Thorn” plays a minor role in one of the Arthurian romances, Hartmann Von Aue's *Iwein* (NY/London, 1984), a book I haven't seen yet. On this basis, however, we should claim an ancient and honorable lineage for the Black Thorn League. History, after all, is a game. The point is to be knights — not pawns.

“ I lay you under prohibitions, and restrictions, and death, and destruction, to go and bring me the King of Morocco's bay filly that outruns the wind and leaps over the wall of castle-bawns.” — From “The Greek Princes and the Young Gardener”, in Patrick Kennedy, *Irish Fireside Folktales*, collected in the 1860's in Co. Wexford

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