



Island of the Setting Sun: In Search of Ireland's Ancient Astronomers

Anthony Murphy, Richard Moore

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Around 6,000 years ago a most sophisticated and enigmatic community of people began to arise on the island of Ireland. They were the megalithic builders of the Stone Age, cunning engineers and master astronomers who systematically assembled a vast calendrical and astronomical scheme which would stand intact over five millennia. Today, the individual monuments which each form a part of that complicated astronomical assembly lie decaying in the landscape, straddling the Boyne river, which in ancient times was named after the Milky Way galaxy and was considered its earthly equivalent. Archaeologists have been probing individual sites over the last fifty years, and have been revealing intriguing information, carvings, artefacts and dating material which, as well as answering many questions, pose even more about the purpose and genesis of these great monuments. Perhaps more importantly, some of the ancient stone sites continue to function more than five millennia after they were constructed, with famous examples, such as Newgrange and Dowth, featuring alignments to the Winter Solstice sun. In "Island of the Setting Sun" a greater story of their genesis can finally be told. As these sites awaken from the slumber of five millennia, we can more definitively describe their true purpose - to track time, vast periods of time, to bring the sky down on to the ground in a grand astronomical scheme. The authors' exploration of the sky-ground system is taken from an array of perspectives, most notably through the ancient stories about these places - some of which may be as ancient as the sites themselves. Within the complex layers of myth, folklore and placename stories lies a concealed astronomical language. Interpreting these coded cosmological messages, the authors have found that together the landscape, the astronomy and the myth reveal the true intent of the megalithic master builders of a time when giants were said to rule the land. In this lavishly illustrated book many disparate things are explored, including the invasion myths of Ireland, the link between the ancient astronomers and St. Patrick, the "pleasant plain" among the stars, the true inspiration behind Newgrange's white quartz facade, the migratory patterns of Whooper Swans, the female reproductive system and its importance to the mound-builders, the eight-year Moon-Venus cycle, and a plethora of stories about such things as underwater spears, giant hounds, tragic drownings, cruel murders, vast battles, strange animals and the Irish cyclops. In short, "Island of the Setting Sun" provides a revision of how we look at prehistory in Ireland.

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