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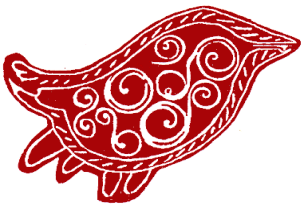

Title: Review: "Survey of the megalithic tombs of Ireland, Vol. V: County Sligo", by Seán Ó Nualláin (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1989)

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Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland, Vol. V, County Sligo. By Seán Ó Nualláin. Stationery Office, Dublin, 1989. £40. Pp. xvi + 152. 89 figs, 36 plates. ISBN 0707600804.

This is the fifth volume in the series published under the auspices of the Ordnance Survey detailing all the megalithic tombs in Ireland. The west, midlands and south-west are now published in the series which began in 1960. Only Co. Donegal, the eastern counties and the passage tombs remain to be published. The total number of sites published is now 1,448, comprising 391 court tombs, 174 portal tombs, 229 passage tombs, 465 wedge tombs and a further 189 unclassified, and in this volume lists and distribution maps are given for each group. Since the volume went to press other sites have been found, so the total is probably now nearer to the 1,500 mark.

Co. Sligo contains a splendid selection of megalithic tombs, for example the court tombs at Creevykeel and Deerpark which are among the most impressive examples of that particular group. However, as has been the policy in these publications, the passage tombs are not included in the corpus and the important passage tomb cemeteries of Carrowmore and Carrowkeel are only presented in summary form. There is only brief mention also of the excavations carried out by Burenhult and his team of Swedish archaeologists at Carrowmore in the 1980s, work which resulted in considerable controversy over the early dates from radiocarbon samples on the sites. There has been almost no other modern excavation in Co. Sligo. The county was well served by antiquarians such as George Petrie with the Ordnance Survey in 1837 and Col. Wood-Martin who published a book on the monuments of the county in 1888. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Sligo Field Club, and in particular Michael Cahalane and Pat Kitchen, were very active in recording sites. One of the first modern excavations was carried out by Hencken at Creevykeel in 1935 as part of the Harvard Archaeological Mission to Ireland.

The court tombs are probably the most interesting sites described here, with a wide range of forms being present — central, dual, transeptal, lateral subsidiaries and twin parallel galleries. The arguments proposed originally by de Valera for a western point of entry for court tombs are repeated here, the diversity and elaborate plans being taken as indicating primacy in this area over the court tombs of east Ulster. But the problem of explaining the occurrence of elaborate full court tombs early in the suggested sequence is not tackled, and certainly nothing like these is to be seen in continental Europe or Britain.

Among the well-preserved court tombs is Crowagh (Sl. 66) with internal revetments within the cairn. Could this be a revetment to a primary mini-cairn designed to stabilize the corbelling over the roof, as known in corbelled passage tombs?

As usual the sites are shown in relation to basic geology and soil maps but the omission of the passage tombs skews the overall impression and takes from the value of this exercise. However, it is noted that the court and wedge tomb builders show an 'overwhelming preference for thin soils above a limestone bedrock and a marked avoidance of the heavier drift deposits'.

An added bonus with this volume is the provision of a complete list of tombs in Ireland, including new sites in counties already published, and a reference is given for each site. Many new tombs have been found — for example the Cork Archaeological Survey has been able to add a number of new wedge tombs to the list published in Volume IV of the Megalithic Survey.

Elizabeth Shee Twohig

The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland. Ed. by Michael Ryan. Country House, Dublin, 1991. Pp. 224 + illus. £19.95.

A growing interest in the archaeology of Ireland has not been served by publications for lay people by Irish archaeologists. O'Kelly's and Harbison's books on Irish prehistory are designed more for students and there is very little available also for the historic period. Thus this book has a ready audience, both to service the many courses which are being taught in adult education and as a source for teachers working in the new history curriculum of the Junior Certificate course.

Much of the book is very satisfactory. The idea of having a series of experts in various fields write about their specialization is a good one, and the editor, Michael Ryan, has linked and

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