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Title: Review: "Survey of the megalithic tombs of Ireland, vol. IV: counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary", by R. de Valera and S. Ó Nualláin (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1982)

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Reviews

Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland, Vol IV, Counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary. By R. de Valera and S. Ó Nualláin. Stationery Office, Dublin, 1982. pp. xx + 145, 45 figs, 30 pls, ¼" O.S. map in folder. IR£35.

This is the fourth volume by these authors, published as part of a general survey of the megalithic tombs of Ireland. Regrettably, Prof. R. de Valera did not live to see this volume in print. The format follows that of earlier volumes, with descriptions of individual monuments, plans at 1:100 and photographs; most of the latter contribute little to the usefulness of the book, while considerably increasing its cost.

In all, 62 sites are listed for Co. Cork, and there are 20 in Kerry, 7 in Limerick and 17 in Tipperary. A further 106 sites are listed in appendices as being unacceptable as genuine megalithic tombs (amongst these are the enigmatic monuments at Rostellan and Castlemary, east of Cork Harbour). All except five of the accepted sites are classified as wedge tombs (formerly wedge-shaped gallery graves). The others include two unclassifiables, and two portal tombs, Ahaglaslin and Arderawinny on the south-west coast of Cork; the fifth outsider is the court tomb at Shanballyedmond, Co. Tipperary (mis-captioned in Fig. 30 as a wedge tomb).

Wedge-tombs, therefore, form the main data of the publication, and a list is given of all 396 examples, arranged alphabetically by county. Treatment of the information could have been fuller — e.g., tables of heights above sea level, more discussion on the topography and the regional groups of tombs. The physical features maps leave much to be desired; Fig. 40 deals with Cos. Cork and Kerry only while Fig. 42 is for part of Co. Tipperary at a much larger scale, showing drift and copper deposits, but only showing height variation of above or below 1000′. A simplified geological map (Fig. 41) is more useful in that all the sites are included on a single map; it demonstrates well how in Cork and south Kerry the tombs are found on Old Red Sandstones, avoiding the Lower Avonian shales and sandstones.

A study of the plans (and the regrettably few sections) shows that some regional groups of tombs may be distinguished — in particular, the fifteen wedge tombs which centre on Kilcommon, Co. Tipperary. In all the eleven well-preserved tombs of this group, a tall slab blocks the western end of the main chamber. Furthermore, the eastern end of all except one of these sites is quite open. Excavation of one of these sites, Baurnadomeeny, showed no socket for a slab at the eastern end and 'a movable stone would have been an obvious provision since the chamber could not have been entered from the western end' (O'Kelly, *JCHAS*, 65, 1960, 110). The burials in the western chamber/portico were regarded as primary, and must have been inserted from the western end. It is possible that the other sites in this group, lacking an eastern stone, were likewise entered from the east. None of these points is discussed, although the Survey notes (p. 106) that the tall western slab ('septal' stone) is 'frequently the finest and often the heaviest slab present'. It should, therefore, be regarded as the backstone of the main chamber rather than as a blocking or dividing stone.

The presence of at least a little Beaker pottery in nine of the twenty excavated wedge tombs cannot be ignored though there is no discussion of whether it is primary or secondary. Certainly in Brittany, Beaker pottery is regarded as being in secondary contexts in most gallery graves; the tombs were built by persons using Seine-Oise-Marne type pottery and its associated artefacts, and were built before Beaker pottery came into fashion in that area.

De Valera and Ó Nualláin are convinced that the Irish wedge tombs were built by an influx of tomb 'builders' from Brittany (p. 120). Waddell, in 1978, pointed out several morphological differences between the Irish tombs and the *allées couvertes* of Brittany which are said to be their ancestors. But here the counter-arguments are made, and to this reviewer at any rate they seem to show a clear case of special pleading. The mutual exclusiveness in distribution of cist burials and wedge tombs, as first noted by Waddell, is taken here as suggesting contemporaneity and thus a bronze age date for the wedge tombs. A much more striking example of mutual exclusiveness in distribution patterns may be noted between the wedge tombs and boulder burials of Cos. Cork and Kerry, a feature not mentioned here.

Finally, it should be noted that few Irish prehistorians now would be happy with the concepts which appear to underlie the de Valera/Ó Nualláin

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discussions. We read (p. 111) of 'passage tomb folk' and 'Beaker, Food Vessel and Urn peoples'. Sites with western septal slabs and porticos are regarded as showing contacts with Breton *allées couvertes*, and their distribution in the south-western peninsular area is taken as indicating 'landfall' there (in fact, only 4 of the 312 sites in this area have the feature). On p. 120, the difficulty of determining whether prehistoric incursions were warlike or peaceful is discussed, the conclusion being that, in the absence of evidence of earlier settlement, 'the wedge-tomb builders were colonists rather than invaders'.

Elizabeth Twohig

Newgrange Archaeology, Art and Legend by M. J. O'Kelly. London: Thames and Hudson, 1983. Stg.£16·00.

It is unfortunate that Professor O'Kelly never lived to see the publication of a work to which he had devoted a significant proportion of his life. It is only fitting that the publication of his excavation of Ireland's best-known prehistoric monument should be so lavish. With its numerous colour and black and white photographs, this book remains remarkably reasonable in price.

As Professor O'Kelly has noted in the opening lines of his introduction, 'just another excavation report' would not do justice to the great monument and he has certainly succeeded in presenting us with a book where the essential facts of the excavation are recorded, but in a more palatable and readable manner than is usual in the normal report.

It begins with an interesting section which places the site in its geographic and historic context. In particular, there is a useful section which explores antiquarian and later investigations and shows how certain traditional views of the site emerged. It is fascinating to see, through the recent excavations, the possible confirmation of Molyneux's statement that two unburnt bodies had been found.

The description of the excavation in itself in Part II is a straightforward model of clarity with chapters on methods, the cairn slip, great circle, the cairn, tomb exterior and interior. Part III has concentrated on the reconstruction of the site and its interpretation. Obviously, a great deal of discussion has centred on the building of the 'wall' and Professor O'Kelly has provided detailed arguments as to why he believed the cairn should have a near-vertical wall. Arguments will continue as to the validity of the Newgrange wall.

One fascinating section is on the influence of new ideas and, in particular, the significance of a bronze axe found in a context which traditional archaeology would say is 500 years too early. Are the young 'Late Neolithic Irish travellers' bringing back ideas and new technologies an extension of the personality of the excavator who was instrumental in bringing new ideas and techniques to bear on Irish archaeology? Of course, no excavation of Newgrange would be complete without an examination of the art which is provided by Claire O'Kelly. This includes not only a description of the techniques of production, but a *corpus* of the art from Newgrange.

I personally found the appendices unusually fascinating. Professor O'Kelly had, aside from the magnificent tomb, a very limited data base yet everything was subjected to detailed analysis. The examination of the limited human remains has shown that at least five individuals were recovered from the tomb, and ongoing work on the dentition is throwing light on certain aspects of the diet, population etc. Tombs in good agricultural land, such as the Boyne Valley, Co. Meath, often have no vegetation record associated with them but those involved in the analysis of the botanical remains have shown that the site was in an open, moist meadow rather than the typical forest environment we often associate with the Neolithic of Ireland. Of course, this book is only one part of the publication of his work at Newgrange as the extensive Late Neolithic/Beaker period settlement outside the mound has also been published; so have some of the faunal remains.

To those working in Munster, Professor O'Kelly's main achievement must be his contribution to our understanding of the field archaeology of this province through 40 years of endeavour. It is only fitting that this volume on Newgrange should augment the international reputation he deserved.

Peter C. Woodman

English Lordship in Ireland 1318-1361. By Robin Frame. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1982. Pp. xii, 381. Stg.£19·50.

The Anglo-French conquest of much of Ireland in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries brought into being the lordship of Ireland. In its early stages of development the constitution of that lordship had been fluid as a group of land-hungry adventurers, belonging to an international military élite, sought to carve out lordships for themselves in the conquered lands. However, that fact that those

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