

SCRIBBLES, SCRATCHES, AND ANCIENT WRITING: PSEUDO-HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE OHIO VALLEY REGION

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ABSTRACT. Beginning in the early 19th century and continuing until the present, numerous grandiose claims have been made that various Old World cultures (including – but not limited to – Welsh, Irish, Libyans, and Hebrews) explored or occupied the Ohio Valley region. An examination of but a sampling of these contentions indicates that such claims have been based upon either outright forgeries of individual artifacts (e.g., Tennessee’s Bat Creek stone, West Virginia’s Grave Creek stone, and Newark, Ohio’s “Holy stones”) or highly questionable and unverified “interpretations” of legitimate prehistoric petroglyphs (e.g., rock carvings in Kentucky and West Virginia). Routinely, such baseless claims are never submitted for critical review by either knowledgeable archaeologists or scholars in ancient languages and are characterized by chronically poor scholarship, isolated facts and comparative data liberally and irresponsibly taken out of cultural and chronological context, and haphazardly documented sources. Consistently, those who perpetrate or espouse such claims are seemingly oblivious of the fact that literally thousands of legitimate regional archaeological investigations have yielded not one iota of supporting evidence in the form of corroborating artifactual evidence. It is concluded that such pseudo-scientific claims are without substantive merit.

Sloppy and inappropriate methodologies and inadequate or non-existent evidence have never stood in the way of the concoction or the survival of the most preposterous theories about pre-Columbian contacts.

Ronald H. Fritze (1994)

Who among us does not delight in being regaled with tales of ancient and exotic heroes engaged in bold feats of exploration and epic conquest? In common with a host of beloved ghost stories and accounts of the supernatural told deep in the forest around a late night camp fire, such myths have a persistent and universal appeal which readily inspires boundless awe and fuels the fire of imagination. In concert with great sagas and legends told around the world, they inevitably glorify the mysterious and not infrequently long ago. To be effective, such epic tales must be told in all seriousness and carefully wrapped with a sufficient “ring of truth” and aura of plausibility so that the hearer is prompted to believe that the event may actually have taken place (cf. Bascom 1965). These conditions are abundantly exemplified by known works of fiction such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. *Could* an otherwise obscure doctor have created life from the flesh of the dead? Is it remotely conceivable that *Dracula could* have defied the laws of nature and regularly feasted on the blood of the living? Of course, the almost obligatory response following an optional hem and haw is “Well, yes, that just might have been possible.” However, as we are amply aware such a response in no manner makes these tales true. Unfortunately, this same awareness does not seem to apply when it comes to discounting the numerous

persistent regional tales of ancient writing attributed to long lost Hebrew tribes, courageous royal explorers, early Irish missionaries, or simply ordinary sailors down on their luck and ship wrecked on a coast completely unknown to them¹.

A case may well be made that an inherent and deep-seated desire for regional myths (one may be so bold as to say folk tales) compels some to perpetuate and expand upon venerable but nonetheless erroneous tales of a concocted glorious past. The origin of many of these claims may be traced directly to the post-Revolutionary War era of American history and the rise of the myth of the mound builders. To merely encapsulate the essence of the mound builder myth which persisted throughout the later 18th and much of the 19th centuries, it is sufficient to remark that in

¹ But a limited sampling of the numerous modern (post-World War II) works variously espousing or debunking early explorations in America and/or extraterrestrial origins for cultural influences on Native Americans includes (but is by no means limited to) books by Ashe (1962); Berlitz (1972), Boland (1961), Corliss (1978), Feder (2005); Fell (1978; 1980; 1982), Fritze (1993); Mahan (1992), McMahan (1965), Michael (2004), Olson (1987), von Däniken (1973), Wahlgren (1958; 1986), and Williams (1991). This listing could continue *ad infinitum* for no productive purpose.

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simple terms the majority of the antiquarians of that era perceived the numerous tribes of historically observed Native Americans as culturally “barbaric” and intellectually incapable of producing a higher culture resulting in the creation of mounds, geometric earthworks, and works of impressive artistic expression such as pottery, engraved shell, cold hammered copper, and chipped and ground stone. Since these natives were judged incapable of creating such works, they had obviously been produced by higher, more advanced civilizations. Speculation as to which lost civilization “authored” these remains ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime. But a few of the many options offered were the ten lost tribes of Israel, Romans, Greeks, Vikings, Welsh, Irish, Mongols, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Persians, Hindus, and the survivors of Atlantis (cf. Haven 1856; Silverberg 1968). Though at a minimum one must rationally contemplate the degree of engineering expertise required to dump one basket load of earth upon another, the “logic” of the era dictated that virtually anyone but the ancestors of the Indians then occupying the landscape had to have been responsible for the construction of mounds.

A brief synopsis of these many divergent 19th century interpretations appeared in a late 19th century volume entitled *Our Country* (Lossing 1875:9-10) authored by Benson J. Lossing:

Whence came these dusky inhabitants of our land? is an unanswered and seemingly unanswerable question. Out of isolated facts—facts like the following—bold theories have been formed. Remains of fortifications like those of ancient European nations have been discovered. An idol, composed of clay and gypsum, representing a man without arms, resembling one found in Southern Russia, was dug up near Nashville, in Tennessee. A [pg. 10] Roman coin was found in Missouri; a Persian coin in Ohio; a bit of silver in the Genesee country, New York, with the year of our Lord 600 engraved on it; split wood and ashes, thirty feet below the surface of the earth, at Fredonia, New York; a silver cup, finely gilded, within an ancient mound near Marietta, Ohio, and in a tomb near Montevideo, in South America, two ancient swords, a helmet and shield, with Greek inscriptions upon them, showing that they were made in the time of Alexander the Great, more than three hundred years before Christ. The mysterious mounds found in various parts of our country have made strange revelations: such as weapons and utensils of copper; catacombs with mummies; ornaments of silver, brass, and copper; stones with Hebrew inscriptions; traces of iron utensils—wholly reduced to dust; mirrors of isinglass [i.e., mica] and glazed pottery, and other evidences of the existence of a race here far more civilized than the tribes found by Europeans...

A SAMPLING OF REGIONAL INSCRIPTIONS

Dependent upon the context in which it occurs, the most obvious and incontestable (although certainly not the only) proof of possible pre-Columbian contact would be the written word – or so one would think. Mention will be made of but a few of the claims of reputed pre-Columbian Old World writing reported within the greater Ohio Valley region. Some of these are well known to archaeologists within the area whereas others have thus far attracted less attention.

Newark “Holy Stones” (Ohio)

Our attention may first be directed to the 1860 “discovery” of a stone bearing Hebrew characters in Newark, Ohio, by David Wyrick of that town². As recounted (Anonymous 1860) in the August 4, 1860, issue of *Littell's Living Age*:

Mr. David Wyrick, of this city, who has recently been pushing his investigations respecting our ancient works with more thoroughness than heretofore, and has made new surveys, traced new lines and made many new discoveries found on Friday last, in one of the little circles or sink holes connected with the larger works, a very curious and interesting relic. Mr. Squire, in his antiquities of New York, says that these sink holes, which are uniformly connected with our ancient works, usually contain human bones; and Mr. Wyrick went out on the Cherry Valley plateau in order to learn, by a careful examination, whether the same thing was true of these sink holes in Ohio. He found no bones, but he was satisfied that the excavation was filled by material other than that which was taken from it, and he found beside a beautiful granite ball, highly polished and of a reddish color, and also a very curious tapering stone five or six inches long [Figure 1], the four sides nearly alike, and on each, in neat Hebrew characters, brief inscriptions, which seem to be characteristic of the old Hebrews, and give new vitality to the old theory that these works are in some way connected with the lost tribes. The inscriptions have been examined carefully by our best Hebrew scholars, and translated as follows:—

Bdr Ieue—The Word of the Lord.

Kdsh Kdshim—The Holy of Holies.

Thurth Ieue—The Law of the Lord.

Mlk Artz—The King of the Earth.

² Wyrick and his “discoveries” are discussed in greater detail in sources such as Alritz (1980), Feder (2005:160-163), Lepper and Gill (2000), and Williams (1991:167-176). Additional brief contemporary accounts of the “Holy Stone” appear in Bacon (1860) and Smucker (1862:243).

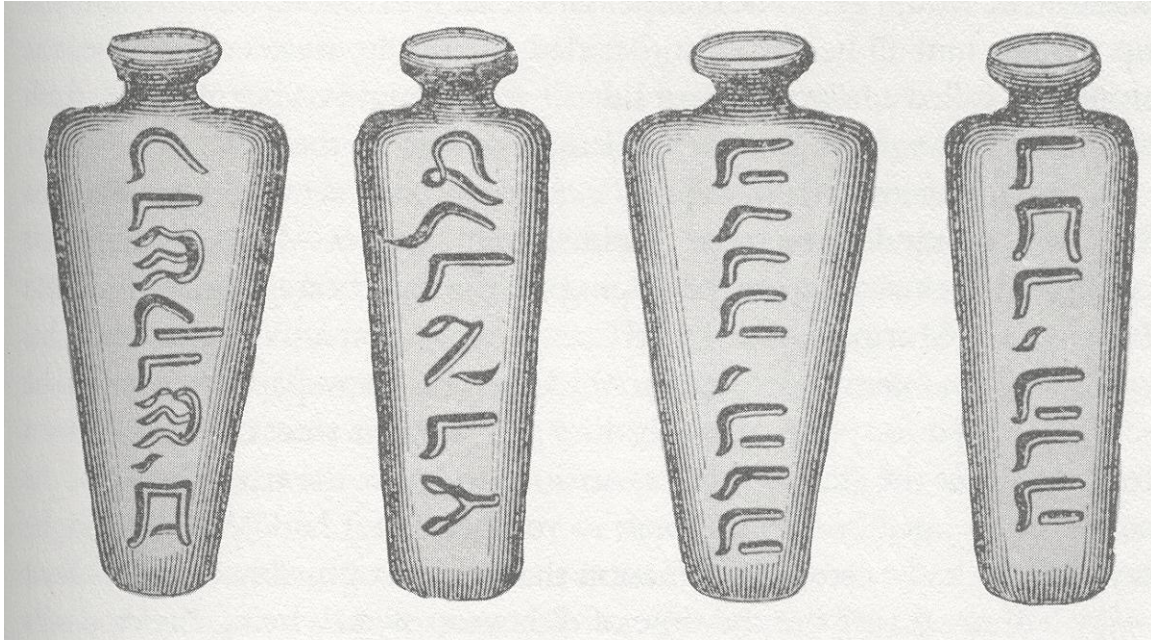


Figure 1. The four sides of the Newark “Key Stone” (reproduced from Randall 1908:212).

Our readers will remember that some weeks ago we described a stone whistle taken from a large burial mound. The stone here referred to seems to be of the same general character. It is neatly polished, and the Hebrew characters are very distinctly engraved, neat and orderly. It is a treasure of no ordinary interest, and may possibly unravel the mystery which has so long hung over these interesting remains. Can it be possible that these works are of Hebrew origin? If so, what has become of the lost race?—*Newark (O.) North American*, July 5.

The critical reader must reasonably wonder as to the incredible coincidence that not one but four such inscriptions were discovered on a single stone and – amazingly (one might also say miraculously) – a cadre of “our best Hebrew scholars” was conveniently on hand to offer virtually instantaneous “expert” translations in time for the latest edition of the local newspaper. Alas, had these same authorities been available in a more modern era the world would not have had to wait 50 years for some portions of the Dead Sea scrolls to be translated.

Verifying the saying, “When it rains, it pours,” Wyrick also claimed to have discovered a second stone bearing Hebrew inscriptions. Measuring ca. 6.87 x 2.87 x 1.75 inches, this item – referred to as the Decalogue – is a rather elaborate piece depicting an image of what is thought to be Moses surrounded by an abbreviated text of the Ten Commandments. Both the Holy Stone and Decalogue are further discussed in sources such as Alrutz (1980), Bloom and Polansky (1980), Deal (1996), Deal and Trimm (1996),

Lepper (1987; 1991), McColloch (1989; 1990; 1992), Sehenck (1982), and Whittlesey (1872). It is of note that in 1865 – one year after Wyrick’s death – two additional stones with Hebrew inscriptions were found in a mound on the nearby George A. Wilson farm east of Newark. Soon thereafter, a local dentist named John H. Nicol claimed to have made these carvings and purposefully planted them to discredit the two items previously found by Wyrick. These finds are further discussed in a website entitled “The Newark ‘Holy Stones’” accessible at: <http://www.econ.ohio-state.edu/jhm/arch/decalog.html>

It certainly comes as neither shock nor surprise that “established” scholars of the era were less than convinced as to the authenticity of Wyrick’s claims (cf. Williams 1991:167-176). In a summary of papers presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting held in Detroit, Michigan, in August of 1875, John A. Church (1875:561) observed regarding one presentation that:

Prehistoric archaeology is at present attracting especial attention in this country, both on account of the favor with which such studies are now regarded the world over, and because the occurrence of the Centennial Exhibition next year offers an incitement and an extremely favorable opportunity for the collection and comparison of historic facts. Among the papers on this subject was one by Lieutenant Cornelius C. Cusick, chief of the Tuscarora Indians of New York, whose origin and position may be supposed to be obvious advantages in the pursuit of a study in which he is also deeply interested. He



Figure 2. The Bat Creek stone (reproduced from Thomas 1890b:36 with inverted orientation).

discussed the mounds of Newark, Ohio. These works were supposed by Squire and Davis [1848] to be military, and to form part of a general line that extended east and west on the southern border of the great lakes. But Lieutenant Cusick disputed this position. He thinks the structures at Newark are too large, and not properly shaped for defence [sic], and supposes they were used for herding game. He exhibited a number of objects dating from the time of the mound builders, among them a copper awl which had been handed down among the modern Indians for an unknown period, and regarded with great veneration. *In the discussion which followed, several speakers described spurious relics made by counterfeiters for the purpose of deceiving scientific men. They frequently have Hebrew characters engraved on them* (emphasis added).

Bat Creek Stone (Tennessee)

The era of fraudulent Hebrew inscriptions within the region was far from over. Through the years, much discussion has been directed toward the Bat Creek stone (**Figure 2**) “discovered” in 1889 by John W. Emmert, then an employee of the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of Ethnology, near the confluence of Bat Creek and the Little Tennessee River in Loudon County, (eastern) Tennessee.³

³ The sources reporting the discovery of the Bat Creek stone and the subsequent debate (both pro and con) regarding its authenticity are voluminous. But a sampling of the referable literature includes (but is certainly not limited to) books, articles, and commentaries authored by Faulkner (ed. 1992), Gordon (1972; 1990), Mahan (1971), Mainfort and Kwas (1991; 1993a; 1993b; 2004), McCarter (1993), McColloch

Both the history of this item and the subsequent discussions surrounding it have been recounted at some length by Mainfort and Kwas (2004) and need only be summarized here. Following a seemingly endless presentation of point and counterpoint in the debate regarding this piece, Mainfort and Kwas (ibid.:765) determined that the inscription was indeed Hebrew and translated to “Holy to Yahweh” based upon an examination by Dr. Frank Moore Cross, Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and other Oriental Languages at Harvard University. Thus far, such a contention would superficially seem to support the position that the stone was solid evidence for pre-Columbian contact. However, they also observe that character for character the inscription was identical to an illustration appearing in an 1870 book on Freemasonry (Macoy 1870:169), a source which would certainly have been widely available prior to the discovery of this item in 1889. Although one might anticipate that this would resolve the issue and firmly establish the inscription on the stone as fraudulent, the story does not end here. More recently, Michael (2004:40; see also Berkley 2005:425-426) has contended that the characters in the inscription are not only of *British* rather than Hebrew origin but also translate to “The Ruler Madoc He Is Distinctly” (Michael 2004:41) and that the mound in which it was found marks the burial place of no less than the enigmatic Prince Madoc (further discussed below) said to have settled in the New World. And so the myth relentlessly continues.

Noel Cemetery Inscribed Disc (Tennessee)

Aside from east Tennessee’s Bat Creek stone, a second

(1988; 1993a; 1993b; 1993c), and Thomas (1890a; 1890b; 1894:391-394).

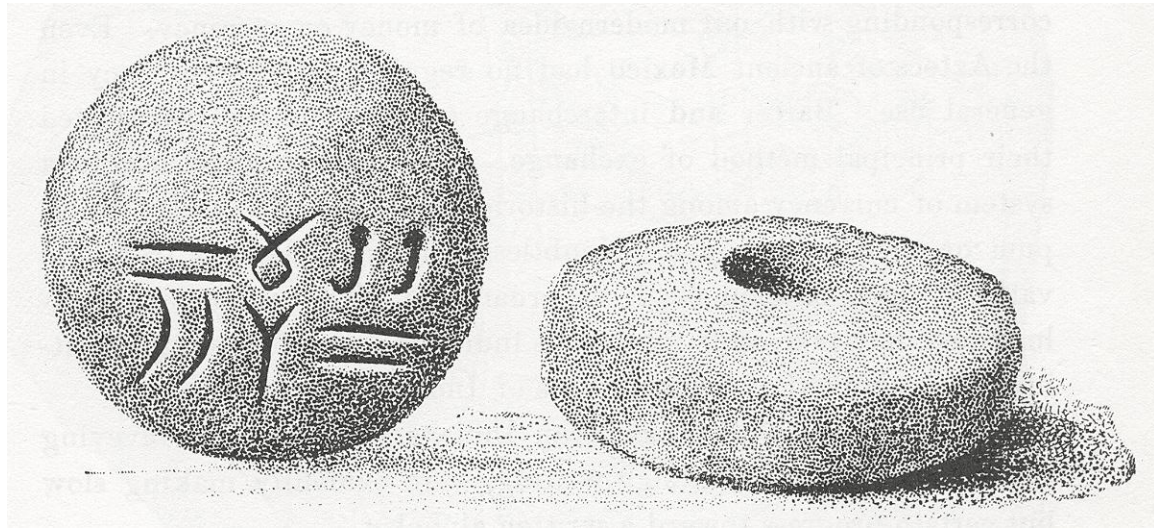


Figure 3. “Inscribed Stone Found near Nashville” (reproduced from Thruston 1897:89).

inscribed Tennessee artifact (**Figure 3**) was recovered in the early 1890s from a large and post-AD 1050/1100 Dowd or Thruston Phase Cumberlandia (Middle Cumberland Culture) Noel cemetery in Nashville, Davidson County (cf. Thruston 1897:89). This cemetery was systematically plundered for antiquities under the direction of General Gates P. Thruston to add to his already extensive personal collection of prehistoric artifacts. Notably, Thruston himself did not personally oversee these excavations but rather employed a local laborer to dig the site for him. According to Whittall (1978), this item reportedly bore an ancient Libyan text interpreted as “The colonists pledge to redeem” and was said to date to pre-AD 100. Nowhere is there any attempt to explain how or where this artifact languished for almost a millennium prior to being placed in a late prehistoric Mississippian era grave and – as may be expected – no supporting materials have been reported.

Chatata “Inscribed Wall” (Tennessee)

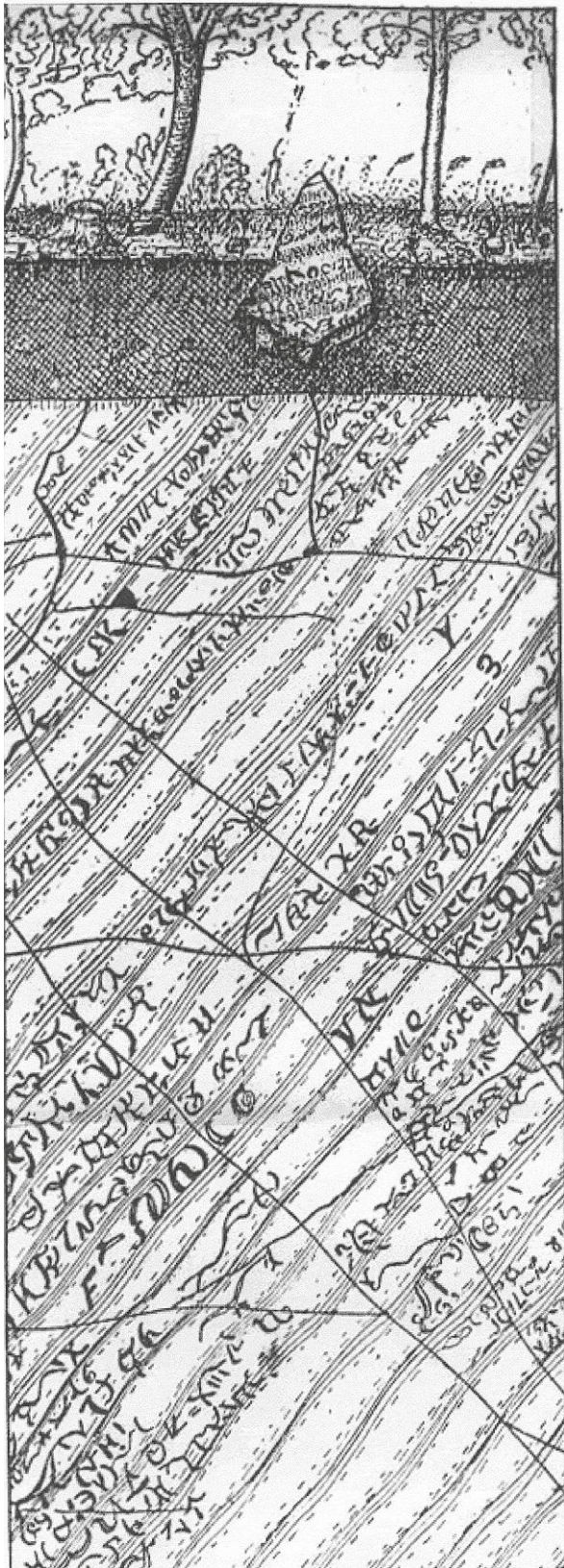
A third and lesser known Tennessee “inscription” has been reported at a site described as a 700 ft. long “inscribed wall” (**Figure 4**) at Chatata near Cleveland in Bradley County in the southeastern portion of the state (cf. Edwards 2004; Hooper 1893; Rawson 1891; 1892; Wirth 1994). Available information indicates that this “wall” was discovered on March 3, 1891, by J. H. Hooper, the property owner. Hooper later spent several weeks further unearthing the wall. The characters are variously said to be Hebrew, “hieroglyphic,” Libyan, Phoenician, Punic Iberian, or otherwise vaguely similar to known but unspecified letters from the Near East. This discovery apparently attracted a good deal of local media attention for several years and would make an interesting study for someone with the time to further investigate accounts published in the regional newspapers of the period. In addition to the various

“inscriptions” on the wall, a number of pictures resembling various animals including giraffes were said to have been observed. Serious concerns have been expressed that these marks are a result of natural action. It has been reported that the wall was subsequently recovered with earth and is no longer visible.

Grave Creek Stone (West Virginia)

Another notable example of an inscribed artifact is represented by the Grave Creek stone (**Figure 5**) claimed to have been recovered about 1840 from the Grave Creek Mound in Moundsville, Marshall County, West Virginia. The mound itself is a large Adena conical mound standing 69 feet in height with a basal diameter of 295 feet, and generally believed to date from about 250-150 BC. As noted by Williams (1991:80-87), in 1838 Abelard B. Tomlinson, the owner of the property, decided to “excavate” the mound by digging a hole from its summit to its base and a shaft from ground level to its center. Upon visiting the site two years later (some early sources indicate four or five years later), Henry R. Schoolcraft, a noted scholar of the era, chanced to see a small engraved stone intermixed with other materials from the mound and housed in a small nearby building erected to display some of the recovered materials. The debate regarding the authenticity of this stone raged from that point onward⁴. Although

⁴ A sampling of the sources discussing the discovery, history, and interpretation of the Grave Creek stone includes (but is by no means limited to): Barnhart (1986); Davis (1930); De Haas (1909); Feder (2005:160), Haven (1856:28, 116, 133-134); Hough (1952); Mallery (1893:761-762), McColloch (2000); Read (1879); Schoolcraft (1845); Whittelsey (1876; 1879); Williams (1991:80-87); and Winsor (ed., 1889:403-404).



**Figure 4. Inscribed wall at Chatata, Tennessee
(attributed to *Chattanooga Times*, November 28, 1920).**

somewhat tedious, Winsor's (1889:403-404, footnote 7) extended summary of the early scientific and antiquarian discussion surrounding this tablet clearly reflects the level of attention it precipitated:

The best known of the disputed relics are the following: The largest mound in the Ohio Valley is that of the Grave Creek, twelve miles below Wheeling, which was earliest described by its owner, A. B. Tomlinson, in 1838. It is seventy feet high and one thousand feet in circumference. (Cf. Squire and Davis, Foster, MacLean, *Olden Time*, i. 232; and account by P. P. Cherry – Wadsworth, 1877.) About 1838 a shaft was sunk by Tomlinson into it, and a rotunda constructed in its centre out of an original cavity, as a showroom for relics; and here, as taken from the mound, appeared two years later what is known as the Grave Creek stone, bearing an inscription of inscrutable characters. The supposed relic soon attracted attention. H. R. Schoolcraft pronounced its twenty-two characters such "as were used by the Pelasgi," in his *Observations respecting the Grave creek mound, in Western Virginia; the antique inscription discovered in its excavation; and the connected evidence of the occupancy of the Mississippi valley during the mound period, and prior to the discovery of America by Columbus*, which appeared in the *Amer. Ethnological* [pg. 404] *Soc. Trans.*, i. 367 (N. Y., 1845). Cf. his *Indian Tribes*, iv. 118, where he thinks it may be an "intrusive antiquity." The French savant Jomard published a *Note sur une pierre grave* (Paris, 1845, 1859), in which he thought it Libyan. Levy-Bing calls it Hebrew in *Congrès des Amer.* (Nancy, i. 215). Other notices are by Moïse Schwab in *Revue Archeologique*, Feb., 1857; José Perez in *Arch. de la Soc. Amr. de France* (1865), ii. 173; and in America in the *Amer. Pioneer*, ii. 197; Haven's *Archaeol. U.S.*, 133, and *Amer. Antiq. Soc. Proc.*, April 29, 1863, pp. 13, 32; *Amer. Antiquarian*, i. 139; Bancroft's *Nat. Races*, v. 75.

Squire promptly questioned its authenticity (*Amer. Ethnol. Soc. Trans.*, ii.; *Aborig. Mts.*, 168). Wilson laughed at it (*Prehistoric Man*, ii. 100). Col. Whittlesey has done more than any one to show its fraudulent character, and to show how the cuts of it which have been made vary (*Western Reserve, Hist. Soc. Tracts*, nos. 9 (1872), 33 (1876), 42 (1878), and 44 (1879).) Cf. on this side Short, p. 419; and *Fourth Rept. Bur. Ethnol.*, 250. Its authenticity is, however, maintained by MacLean (*Moundbuilders*, Cinn., 1879), who summarizes the arguments *pro* and *con*.

One of the numerous "translations" offered for the Grave Creek stone attributes the inscription to Phoenician origin and renders it to read "The mound raised-on-high for

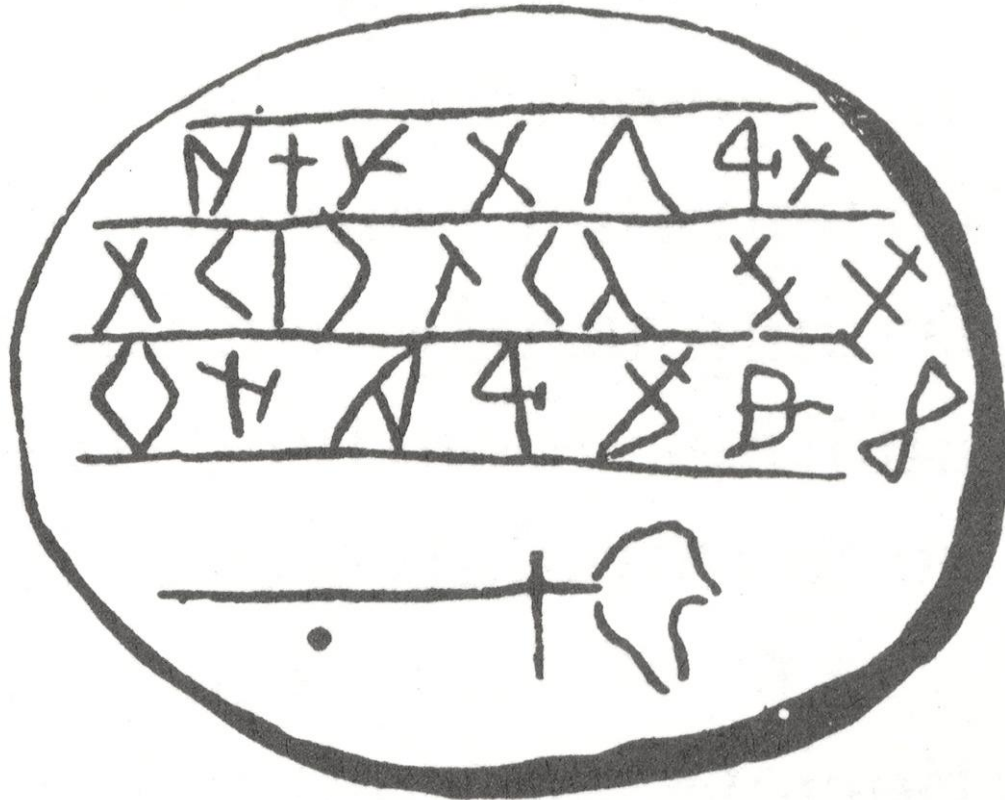


Figure 5. Inscription on the Grave Creek stone (reproduced from Mallery 1893:761/Fig. 1285). The actual stone measured ca. 1.87 x 1.50 inches; the reverse flat side was blank.

Tasach/ This tile/ (His) queen caused-to-be-made” (Fell 1978:21). A more recent “translation” – attributing the characters on the stone to Welsh Coelbren origin – renders the inscription to read, “crossing over the welcome winds with me crossing over, crossing over and swiftly turning in the sea voyage a high lord distinctly thou art, together a welcome hand (to) me in a rainbow (to) me” (Berkley 2005:422).

Coelbren Inscriptions (Kentucky)

More recently, announcement has been made regarding the reputed discovery of 55 inscriptions (most notably including the Brandenburg stone, discussed below) in various portions of Kentucky said to be of ancient Welsh Coelbren origin (cf. Michael 2004:96-106). These are claimed to represent firm “evidence” of the wanderings of the elusive and ill-documented Prince Madoc of Wales⁵

⁵ The tall tales of Prince Madoc and his purported New World explorations are further “investigated” in sources such as Armstrong (1950), Berkley (2005), Deacon (1966), Michael (2004), and Olson (1987). Although each author adds his own “twist” to the story, these accounts typically tend to repeat the same unsupported legends and speculations all the while presenting them as confirmed fact. Far

with his trusted band of followers at a number of sites across the countryside. Of course, it may be taken for granted that many of the prehistoric petroglyphs and pictographs recorded in Kentucky (cf. Coy et al. 1997) and likely nearby Missouri (cf. Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000) will inevitably be construed as yet further “proof” that these intrepid Welsh explorers were “here, there, and everywhere” in the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys. To suggest that these early adventurers – first and foremost presuming they ever existed – died from sheer exhaustion caused by the effort of creating innumerable inscriptions and building “forts”⁶ extending from the Devils Backbone

more scholarly and infinitely less romanticized accounts addressing both the rise and lack of credibility of the Madoc myth appear in Ashe (1962:309-313), Barone (2000), Thomas (1893), D. Williams (1946; 1949; 1963), and G. Williams (1979).

⁶ Useful archaeological studies of early earthworks include sources such as Faulkner (1968), Mainfort and Sullivan, eds. (1998), and Squire and Davis (1848). It is hardly a surprise that excavations at these Middle Woodland era sites have revealed no evidence of either European construction or occupation. Indeed, they are typically interpreted as prehistoric ceremonial centers and are noted for their distinct lack of occupational debris, a finding

bluff overlooking the Ohio River near Charlestown, Clark County, (southern) Indiana (Olson 1987:79-80; Sipe 2004) to the Old Stone Fort in Coffee County, (central) Tennessee (cf. Armstrong 1950; McMahan 1965:65-87; Olson 1987: 43-45) to Fort Mountain near Chatsworth, Georgia (Olson 1987:41-42, 46), and other localities would perhaps be unduly irreverent.

It may be anticipated that tales of the enigmatic Prince Madoc have engendered considerably less than full acceptance by many historians. Exemplifying this position are the comments of William Robertson (1856:456):

..In the twelfth century, according to Powell, a dispute having arisen among the sons of Owen Guyneth, King of North Wales, concerning the succession to his crown, Madoc, one of their number, weary of this contention, betook himself to sea in quest of a more quiet settlement. He steered due west, leaving Ireland to the north, and arrived in an unknown country, which appeared to him so desirable, that he returned to Wales and carried thither several of his adherents and companions. This is said to have happened about the year 1170, and after that, he and his colony were heard of no more. But it is to be observed, that Powell, on whose testimony the authenticity of this story rests, published his history above four centuries from the date of the event which he relates. Among a people as rude and as illiterate as the Welsh at that period, the memory of a transaction so remote must have been very imperfectly preserved, and would require to be confirmed by some author of greater credit, and nearer to the era of Madoc's voyage than Powell. Later antiquaries have indeed appealed to the testimony of Meredith ap Rees, a Welsh bard, who died A. D. 1477. But he too lived at such a distance of time from the event, that he cannot be considered as a witness of much more credit than Powell. Besides, his verses, published by Hakluyt, vol. iii. p. 1, convey no information, but that Madoc, dissatisfied with his domestic situation, employed himself in searching the ocean for new possessions.

But even if we admit the authenticity of Powell's story, it does not follow that the unknown country which Madoc discovered by steering west, in such a course as to leave Ireland to the north, was any part of America. The naval skill of the Welsh in the twelfth century was hardly equal to such a voyage. If he made any discovery at all, it is more probable that it was Madeira, or some other of the western isles. The affinity of the Welsh language with some dialects spoken in America, has been mentioned as a

circumstance which confirms the truth of Madoc's voyage. But that affinity has been observed in so few instances, and in some of these is so obscure, or so fanciful, that no conclusion can be drawn from the casual resemblance of a small number of words. There is a bird, which, as far as is yet known, is found only on the coasts of South America, from Port Desire to the Straits of Magellan. It is distinguished by the name of *Penguin*. This word in the Welsh language signifies *Whitehead*. Almost all the authors who favour the pretensions of the Welsh to the discovery of America, mention this as an irrefragable proof of the affinity of the Welsh language with that spoken in this region or America. But Mr. Pennant, who has given a scientific description of the Penguin, observes that all the birds of this genus have black heads, "so that we must resign every hope (adds he) founded on this hypothesis of retrieving the Cambrian race in the New World." *Philos. Transact.* vol. lviii. p. 91, &c. Besides this, if the Welsh, towards the close of the twelfth century, had settled in any part of America, some remains of the Christian doctrine and rites must have been found among their descendants, when they were discovered about three hundred years posterior to their migration; a period so short that, in the course of it, we cannot well suppose that all European ideas and arts would be totally forgotten. Lord Lyttleton, in his notes to the fifth book of his *History of Henry II.*, p. 371, has examined what Powell relates concerning the discoveries made by Madoc, and invalidates the truth of his story by other arguments of great weight.

Historian George Warburton also remarked at length upon the mythical Prince Madoc. He observed in *The Conquest of Canada* (Warburton 1850:II, 248-249):

The fable of Welsh Indians is of very old date. In the time of Sir Walter Raleigh, a confused report was spread over England that on the coast of Virginia the Welsh salutation had been heard; has, honi, iach. Owen Chapelain relates that in 1669, by pronouncing some Celtic words, he saved himself from the hands of the Indians of Tuscarora, by whom he was on the point of being scalped. The same thing, it is pretended, happened to Benjamin Beatty, in going from Virginia to Carolina. This Beatty asserts that he found a whole Welsh tribe, who preserved the tradition of the voyage of Madoc ap Owen, which took place in 1170. John Filson, in his "History of Kentucky," [sic; Filson 1784:96] has revived these tales of the first travelers. According to him, Captain Abraham Chaplain saw Indians arrive at the post of Kaskasky, and converse in the Welsh language with some soldiers, who were

hardly consistent with claims that they were ever associated with either residential or defensive uses.

natives of Wales. Captain Isaac Stewart asserts that on the Red River of Natchitoches, at the distance of 700 miles above its mouth, in the Mississippi, he discovered Indians with a fair skin and red hair, who conversed in Welsh, and possessed the titles of their origin. "They produced, in proof of what they said of their arrival on the eastern coast, rolls of parchment, carefully wrapped up in otter skins, and on which great characters were written in blue, which neither Stewart, nor his fellow-traveler, Davey, a native of Wales, could decipher." We may observe, first, that all these testimonies are extremely vague for the indication of places. The last letter of Mr. Owen, repeated in the journals of Europe (of the 11th February, 1819), places the posts of the Welsh Indians on the Madwaga, and divides them into two tribes, the Brydones and the Chadogians. "They speak Welsh with greater purity than it is spoken in the principality of Wales (!), since it is exempt from Anglicisms; they profess Christianity, strongly mixed with Druidism." We can not read such assertions without recollecting that all those fabulous stories which flatter [pg. 249] the imagination are renewed periodically under new forms. The learned and judicious geographer of the United States, Mr. Warden, inquires justly, why all the traces of Welsh colonies and the Celtic tongue have disappeared, since less credulous travelers, and who, in some sort, control one another, have visited the country situated between the Ohio and the Rocky Mountains. Mackenzie, Barton, Clarke, Lewis, Pike, Drake, Mitchill, and the editors of the "New Archaeologia Americana," have found nothing, absolutely nothing, which denotes the remains of European colonies of the 12th century.—Humboldt's *Personal Narrative*, vol. vi., p. 326. See Hakluyt, vol. iii., p. 1; Powell's *History of Wales*, p. 196, &c.

Lord Lyttleton, in his notes to the 5th book of his "History of Henry II.," p. 371, has invalidated the story of Madoc's discoveries by arguments of great weight; and Mr. Pennant, in "Philosophical Transactions," vol. lviii., p. 91, has overthrown many of the arguments upon which the existence of a Welsh settlement among the Indians was founded. General Bowles, the Cherokee, was questioned when in England as to the locality of the supposed descendants of Madoc; he laid his finger on one of the branches of the Missouri. Pike's "Travels" had lessened the probability of finding such a tribe; and Lewis and Clarke's "Travels to the Source of the Missouri" have entirely destroyed it, as acknowledged by Mr. Southey in his "Madoc."— See note to the Preface of *Madoc*.

Because of the sheer number of such purported inscriptions attributed to Madoc and his followers, the claims

surrounding these supposed early "writings" warrant a degree of additional discussion. Assertions to the effect that inscriptions written in Coelbren, a Rune-like form of written Welsh, have been found in Kentucky (cf. Michael 2004) are – at best – both highly questionable and problematic. Despite impassioned statements asserting their authenticity (cf. *ibid.*), there is no firm documentary or epigraphic evidence to support this contention. According to an online encyclopedia of Welsh lore⁷, Coelbren:

Means something like 'wood memorial' or 'wood learning'. The Coelbren is *allegedly* an ancient alphabet akin to the Irish ogham. Indeed, it may well be, but unfortunately no source earlier than Iolo Morganwg can be found and it is likely that the Coelbren was one of his inventions, or at least, that it came out of the same period of Druidic revival [emphasis added].

There are forty characters [Figure 6] presently in the Coelbren alphabet. In appearance, they are similar to runic characters, mostly being formed of lines coming off a vertical stem. Like the ogham alphabet, these have a system of kennings attached to them, which include tree names.

Iolo Morganwg (1747-1826) – also known as Edward Williams (Figure 7) – was certainly an interesting individual in his own right. One brief biography⁸ of his life and works remarked:

Better known by the bardic name of Iolo Morganwg, Edward Williams was born in Llancarfan, near Cowbridge in Glamorgan. A stonemason by trade, he was also one of history's great fantasists. He once wrote fourteen verses in the name of the medieval poet Dafydd ap Gwilym and sent them off for inclusion in a literary collection...

But it was far from the most astonishing of his inventions. Eager to assert the Welshness of his native county - long derided by the poets of North Wales - he claimed that the bards of Glamorgan used a metre that had disappeared from all other areas of Wales.

He also asserted that they would gather together in an elaborate ceremonial event that he called the Gorsedd. He claimed the tradition had continued unbroken in Glamorgan since before the birth of

⁷ Website entitled "Caer Feddwyn – Encyclopaedia" accessible at: <<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/blackbirdhollins/Encyclopaedia.htm>>.

⁸ See website entitled "Iolo Morganwg / 100 Welsh Heroes / 100 Arwyr Cymru" accessible at: <<http://www.100welshheroes.com/en/biography/iolomorganwg>>. For further biographical information on Morganwg, see Jenkins (1997), Prys (1975), and Williams (1956).

Vowels

Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ Λ
a â e ê i u û y o ô w ŵ

Consonants

l v m m v p ph mh f c ch ngh g ng
t th nh d dh n n l ll r rh s h hw

Figure 6. Coelbren alphabet (reproduced from website entitled “The Stones” subtitled “Coelbren Ar Beirdd” by “Serenwen” accessible at: <<http://www.druidry.org/obod/lore/coelbren/coelbren.html>>).



Figure 7. Edward Williams (aka, Iolo Morganwg; 1745-1826) – poet, laudanum (tincture of opium) addict, and forger.

Christ...

Williams established several businesses but each one of them failed and he spent some time in Cardiff Gaol [jail] as a bankrupt. He began taking laudanum (a form of opium) when he was young, and he was

addicted to it for the rest of his life – possibly explaining his fertile imagination.

An industrious academic and charming romantic poet, the legacy he left behind was a cottage filled to the ceiling with manuscripts. The question of their authenticity - or lack of it - has given headaches to academics ever since.

Like most ‘ancient’ British ceremonial institutions then, the Gorsedd was invented relatively recently...

As noted by the National Library of Wales, “Iolo’s papers were read voraciously by his admirers during the 19th century, and his forgeries were not exposed until the 20th century, through the scholarship of Professor Griffith John Williams. But his genius as a poet and visionary also came to be appreciated: one of the most inventive and prolific forgers in the history of literature.”⁹

Despite adamant assertions to the contrary by Michael (2004) and Berkley (2005), there is no firm record supporting the antiquity of the use of the Coelbren alphabet. Intriguingly, one modern student of Welsh tradition has noted:

The authenticity of the Coelbren [alphabet] is a

⁹ See website entitled “The Digital Mirror – Manuscripts – History of the English Bards” accessible at: <http://www.llgc.org.uk/drych/drych_s069.htm>.

subject that has been the cause of much controversy. This is due to the origins of the system having no certain historical point at which they can be said to have been created. Instead their origins are lost in the mists of the antiquarian movement peopled by such characters as the famous, and for some infamous, Iolo Morganwg. One Welsh magical tradition that collectively refer to themselves as the Gwyddon state that they can prove a lineage that is unbroken for the past eighteen generations. The problem with this is that the group is a closed hereditary group and as such will not produce any documentation that would corroborate this and so we cannot definitely say that this claim is true [emphasis added].¹⁰

If (and this important proviso should be duly noted) the otherwise unsubstantiated claim of the elusive Gwyddon were verified and further assuming that the length of a generation is 20 to 25 years in duration, this vague assertion would support Coelbren usage only to the period ca. 1550-1640, still a far cry from the contention (cf. Michael 2004:18) that this form of writing existed centuries before this time.

For purposes of the present discussion, it is of particular importance to observe that both the characters and values (i.e., vowels, consonants, and English equivalents) of the reputedly “ancient” Coelbren script are clearly and meticulously delineated in an unpublished manuscript believed to date to ca. 1770-1826 entitled “History of the English Bards” written by Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams) and preserved in the Welsh National Library¹¹. Further, one must reasonably wonder why not a single early manuscript in the Welsh National Library is written in Coelbren. Among the oldest Welsh language holdings of this facility are the Black Book of Carmarthen (Peniarth MS 1) written about 1250, the Hendregadredd Manuscript (MS 6680B) dating to ca. 1282, the Book of Taliesin (Peniarth MS 2) written ca. 1300-1350, the White Book of Rhydderch (Peniarth MS 4) dating to ca. 1350, and the Black Book of Basingwerk (NLW MS 7006D) dating to 1460-1500. All were written with Latin letters. Ironically, Michael (2004:17-18; see also Fell 1990) indicated that he was aware of scholarly concerns regarding Morganwg’s

forgeries and literary liberties yet persisted in giving full and complete credence to them. In a study of the letters associated with written Welsh, it has been noted¹²:

The earliest known examples of Welsh literature are the poems of Taliesin, which feature Urien of Rheged, a 6th century king in what is now southern Scotland, and Aneirin’s *Y Gododdin*, a description of a battle between Celts and Northumbrians which occurred in about 600 AD. Nobody knows for sure when these works were composed or when they were first written down. Before then, whenever then was, all writing in Wales was in Latin¹³.

An early form of writing called Ogham (discussed below) is known to have existed in the second half of the first millennium in two portions (Scotland and Ireland) of the Celtic culture region of the British Isles. Significantly, neither of these areas were controlled by Rome and, accordingly, Roman influence on the native development of writing was indirect. Only Wales was directly exposed to the influence of the Latin alphabet.

As noted, firm evidence has yet to be produced to support the pre-1800 use of the Coelbren alphabet on surviving early documents, gravestone or monument inscriptions, dedications or other inscriptions on early churches or fortifications, or indeed stray graffiti scattered about the Welsh countryside. Lacking any confirmation that this form of writing existed prior to ca. 1800, it is entirely reasonable to conclude that it was a creation of the fertile mind of Iolo Morganwg. Further, it was not actually introduced to the Welsh public until several years after his death. The time frame for this is clearly established by the following brief biographical entry concerning his son, Taliesin Williams, appearing in *Johnson’s New Universal Cyclopaedia* (Barnard and Arnold, eds. 1878;1,426):

Williams (TALIESIN), called AB IOLO, son of Edward, known as Iolo Morganwg (1745-1826), b. in Glamorganshire, Wales, about 1775; was his father’s associate in his labors upon the Welsh literature and antiquities; edited his posthumous *Iolo*

¹⁰ See website entitled “The Stones” (subtitled “Coelbren Ar Beirdd”) by “Serenwen” accessible at: <<http://www.druidry.org/obod/lore/coelbren/coelbren.html>>.

¹¹ Iolo Morgannwg (Edward Williams), “History of the English Bards,” Manuscript NLW MS13107B, Welsh National Library. A digital copy of this 83 page manuscript may be found at website entitled “Digital Mirror – Manuscripts” accessible at: <http://www.llgc.org.uk/drych/drych_s069.htm>. The letters of the Coelbren alphabet appear on pp. 16-17 therein.

¹² See website entitled “Welsh language, alphabet, and pronunciation” accessible at: <<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/welsh.htm>>.

¹³ This statement is not completely accurate. It has been noted that, “Around 35 of these [Ogham inscriptions; discussed below] have been found in [South] Wales. Significantly, 26 of the Ogham stones found in Wales have Latin inscriptions as well... This contrasts markedly with the far more plentiful stones found in Ireland – which are (with one exception) in ogham [sic] only.” See website entitled “Ogham and the Irish in Britain” accessible at: <<http://www.postroman.info/ogham.htm>>.

Manuscripts (Llandovery, 1848) [Williams, ed. 1848], and was author of a *Prize Essay on the Bardic Alphabet* (1840) [Williams 1840], in Welsh, and other writings. D. at Merthyr Tydvil in 1847.

This late introduction (although Michael 2004 contends that it was merely reintroduced) of the Coelbren alphabet creates two distinct interpretive problems. The first would suggest that there was no need to create an alphabet which already existed. A second salient problem returns to the inevitable “what if” vein of thought that had this form of writing actually existed in the late sixth century AD – the era of Madoc’s epic voyages according to Michael (ibid.:94-95)¹⁴ – no intimation of linguistic change (i.e., glottochronology) is offered in discussions of decipherment efforts. It is inconceivable that Welsh vocabulary, word use, spelling, and grammar would not have substantially altered in a period spanning one thousand years (cf. Lewis, ed. 1960:8-9) yet it appears to be intimated that modern translations are easily and expeditiously accomplished by copying this or that “inscription” and converting the resultant passage into Latin letters and thence into English presumably with the aid of a modern Welsh dictionary. Without a solid comparative frame of reference based upon surviving early documents or inscriptions – none of which have yet been convincingly documented – this cannot be done.

In a feeble and unconvincing attempt to bolster his case that the use of the Coelbren alphabet preceded the writings of Iolo Morganwg, Michael (2004:18) cites Oxford University Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 572 which he does not date although he mistakenly indicates that it was acquired by Sir Thomas Bodley in 1520 and added to the holdings of the Oxford University Library in 1550. As but one correction to Michael’s many erroneous statements, it may be noted that Sir Thomas Bodley was born on March 2, 1545, and died on January 28, 1613. He was elected to Parliament in 1584 and knighted on April 16, 1604. His involvement with what would come to be called the Bodleian Library did not begin until 1598. Upon his death, the greater portion of his personal fortune was given to the library. Though he led a life filled with many accomplishments, there is no evidence that Thomas Bodley was a serious collector of ancient manuscripts at the tender age of five years old.

¹⁴ Michael’s (2004) attempt to build a case that the mythical Madoc lived in the late sixth century AD contemporary with King Arthur universally and lamentably ignores and dismisses the voluminous body of scholarly literature which has previously examined the life and times of this notable historical figure. But a minimal sampling of the sources relating to King Arthur includes studies by Alcock (1973), Ashe (1992), Ashe et al. (1968), and Darrah (1981).

MS. Bodl. 572 is described by the Bodleian Library as the “‘Codex Oxoniensis Posterior’, a miscellany of booklets, mostly in Latin but including glosses etc. in Cornish, Welsh and Old English, 9th and 10th centuries with 11th-century additions, later belonging at least in part to St. Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury.”¹⁵ The less than compelling argument advanced by Michael (2004:18) regarding the presence of Coelbren inscriptions within this manuscript is a simple statement that “The Coelbren alphabet can be found there today...” with no pretense of elaboration. Contrary to this assertion, a review of the digitized text of this manuscript revealed no clear evidence of writing in Coelbren. Berkley (2005:120-124) further examines in greater detail the reputed Coelbren inscription found on folio 41 recto (sheet 41, front side) of MS. Bodl. 572 and observes that the lettering is enshrouded in “codes and curves that are added as a guide to reading” (ibid.:122).

After “doctoring” the cryptic MS. Bodl. 572 text with a liberal application of imagination, *some* of the resultant “letters” actually do resemble certain Coelbren characters. However, no mention is made regarding the numerous characters (including those containing curved lines, completely inconsistent with the straightline attributes of rune-like Coelbren letters) which bear no resemblance to any letter in the Coelbren alphabet. Of interest, Berkley (ibid.:122) further claims that the Coelbren alphabet consisted of only 16 letters at the time in which this passage was written (presumably ca. AD 1000±) rather than the 40 characters depicted by Morganwg (cf. Figure 5). It may reasonably be observed that the illustrious Harry Houdini obviously had no monopoly on performing sleight of hand tricks of illusion.

What may be said of the legendary (or, more accurately, mythical) exploits of Prince Madoc in the then uncharted wilds of the North America interior? Regarding this supposedly historical figure, one Welsh historian¹⁶ has observed:

Many of our American visitors will be familiar with the story of Madoc, a prince of Wales who, in the twelfth century¹⁷, is supposed to have discovered

¹⁵ See website entitled “Early Manuscripts at Oxford University” accessible at: <<http://image.ox.ac.uk/list?collection=bodleian>>. Examine “MS. Bodl. 572” therein.

¹⁶ John Weston, see website entitled “Data Wales – a short note on Madoc” (subtitled “The legend of Prince Madoc”) accessible at: <<http://www.data-wales.co.uk/madoc.htm>>.

¹⁷ Not surprisingly, dates attributed to Madoc’s epic voyages tend to vary. Olson (1987:i) and Williams (1991:257) have given a date of AD 1170. As noted, in marked contrast Michael (2004:94) places his voyages in the late sixth century AD reputedly contemporary with the reign of King Arthur.

America. The story first appears in *A True Reporte*, written by Sir George Peckham in 1583. This document supported the first Queen Elizabeth's claim to the New World. It was repeated in Humphrey Llwyd's *Historie of Cambria* the next year. In 1810, John Sevier, one of the founders of Tennessee wrote about a belief among the Cherokee Indians that there had been a Welsh-speaking Indian tribe. Their chieftain was supposed to have told Sevier that he had heard his father and grandfather speak of a people called the Welsh, and that they had crossed the seas and landed at Mobile in Alabama.

Welsh scholars have been long been sceptical [sic], especially since the Madoc story was promoted in the 18th century by the bard Iolo Morganwg, someone not renowned for his devotion to accuracy in the sphere of history...

These comments having been made, what observations may be offered regarding the innumerable supposedly Coelbren inscriptions in Kentucky reported by Michael (2004:96-106; see also Berkley 2005:382-433)? Despite proclaiming their historic importance, with the exception of the Brandenburg stone (**Figure 8**) found near the community of Battletown in Meade County, Kentucky, Michael (2004:96-106) provides illustrations and "translations" of but seven examples of the 55 inscriptions he claims to have located. Consistently, these examples yielded rather innocuous "Kilroy was here" type passages derived from inordinately few characters, hardly consistent with an alphabet based writing system attempting to relay an intelligible message. The subject matter of these supposed notices variably includes "They cry out the secret name for God from the Grave Mound" (four characters), "In difficulty (have) faith" (four characters), "A holdfast (from) acute flooding" (seven characters), and "A state of being in Christ, and a strong light, being in the tomb for a long time, now outward thou art" (12 characters). One of the longest inscriptions, derived from the Brandenburg stone (cf. Schneider 1999), is said to be "Divide the land that we are spread over among our offspring in all Justus [sic; i.e., Justice]" (ca. 27 characters).

Indeed, in common with the passage appearing in the referenced MS. Bodl. 572 it may be observed that *some* of the characters depicted by Michael (2004:96-106) do bear a passing degree of resemblance to letters in the seemingly ever shifting and elusive Coelbren alphabet. Conveniently, once again no mention is made of the numerous "letters" which appear to be completely anomalous to the very alphabet they are claimed to represent (compare Figures 6 and 8). But a cursory review of a modern Welsh dictionary (Lewis, ed. 1960) fails to support the contention that passages of these lengths could be reduced to so few characters. To Michael (2004:99), this constitutes an easily

surmountable conundrum by stating with absolutely no further linguistic or epigraphic support that "they use a hieroglyph as part of the inscription." Unfortunately, in common with the saying "To the man with a hammer, every problem looks like a nail" it may be observed that to the individual with a fixation on any given type of ancient writing virtually every stray scratch or carving on a rock will resemble precisely that.

The resolution of the mystery surrounding the appearance of otherwise inexplicable curved letters in "inscriptions" written in an alphabet said to contain only characters formed from straight lines and the inconsistency of statements regarding the numbers of letters (ranging from a high of 40 to a low of only 10) in that same alphabet comes into crystal clear focus as one reads some particularly telling and informative remarks concerning this epigraphic "bag of tricks" appearing in Berkley (2005:400):

At all times, Jim Michael, Alan Wilson, and Baram Blackett [the last two individuals being Michael's "research collaborators" in the United Kingdom], have been careful never to reveal the Coelbren Ciphers to anyone in America. So which Sign corresponds to what modern letter is kept as secret as possible. This has to be done to avoid allegations of forgery, although the majority of Coelbren inscriptions have been well known for very long periods and were never before identified as British Coelbren. It also serves to prevent any "helpful" forged inscriptions being made.

In actuality, what the reader is being told – and is expected to unquestioningly believe – is that: (1) no other scholars know the "secret code" required to "translate" such inscriptions; (2) there is no way that anything they say can be either confirmed or disproved; and therefore (3) "you'll just have to trust us" concerning the accuracy (or lack thereof) of any given translation. In plain and simple terms, any inscription can convey any meaning they wish. Such cult "scholarship" in concert with claims of esoteric knowledge and a self-imposed aura of infallibility is an unabashed display of outlandish arrogance and unverifiable claims which have all the trappings of delusion, outright fraud, or simple ineptness. Indeed, this approach must surely qualify as the type of snake-oil show which would have made P. T. Barnum smile and say to himself, "Now why didn't I think of that!" "Why," one is left to reasonably ponder, "are these the only people capable of reading this reputed ancient script in a nation not lacking in qualified scholars capable of translating any number of dead languages from Ogham to cuneiform to hieroglyphics to Linear B?" One must further wonder how it is that historians and archaeologists alike in the British Isles can ferret out obscure stones bearing Ogham or Latin inscriptions yet are presumably intellectually incapable of

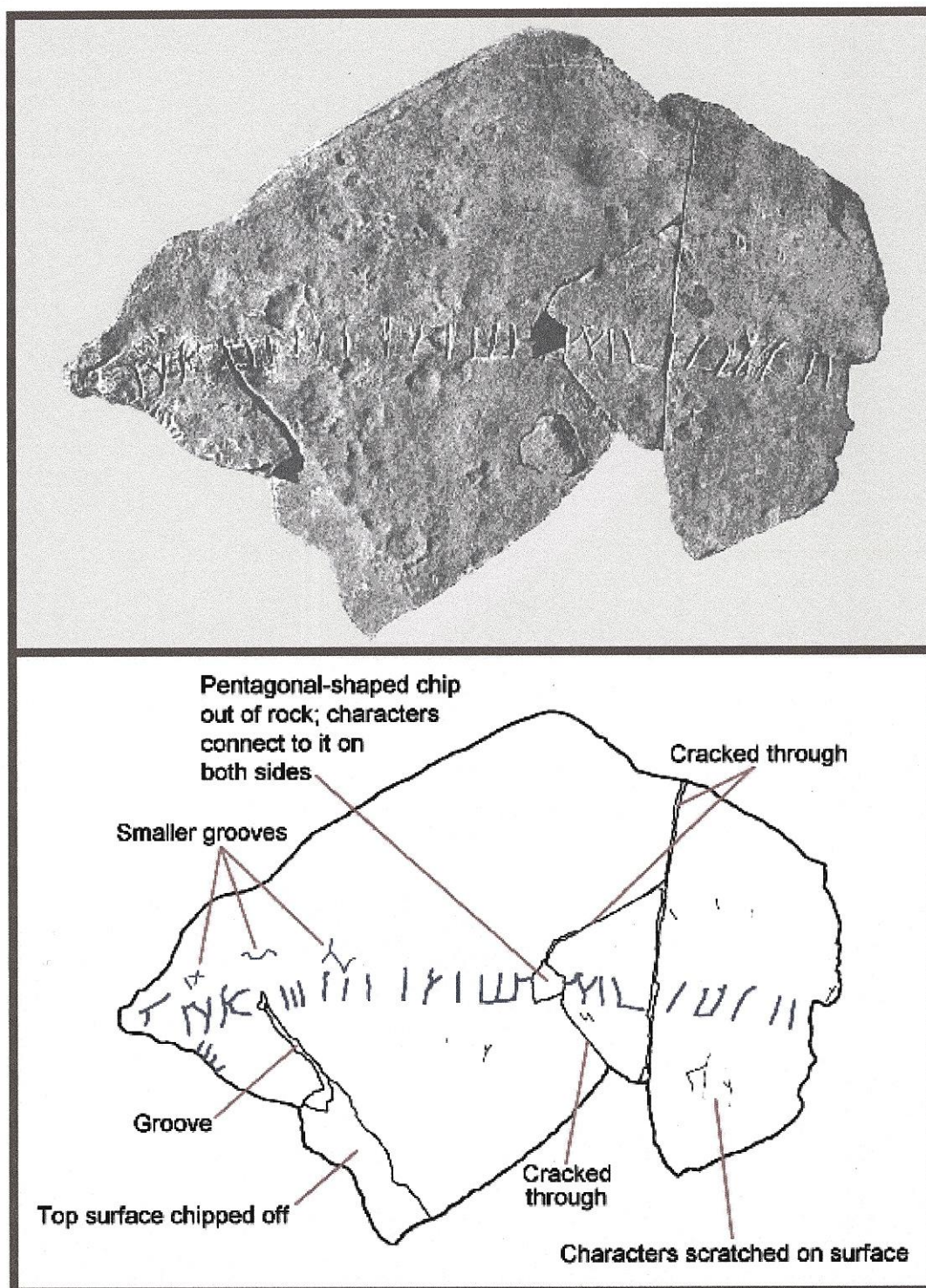


Figure 8. Brandenburg stone; composition – limestone; dimensions: ca. 29 in. wide, 15.5 in. high, ca. 1-3 in. thick; compare markings to Coelbren alphabet in Figure 5 (reproduced from: <http://www.freewebs.com/brandenburg_stone/analysis1.html> with the permission of Ms. Sundae Murphy).

Hebrew Names of Letters.	Meaning in English.	English Equivalent.	Conjectural Hieroglyphic Original.	Ancient Phœnician.	Old Hebrew.	Square Hebrew.	Old and Later Greek.		Old and Later Latin.	
Aleph	Ox	A								
Beth	House	B								
Gimel	Camel	G								
Daleth	Door	D								
He	Window	H, E								
Vau	Hook	V								
Zayin	Weapon	Z								
Cheth	Fence	Ch								
Teth	Snake	Th								
Yod	Hand	Y, I, J								
Kaph	Bent Hand	C, Ch								
Lamed	Ox-goad	L								
Mem	Water	M								
Nun	Fish	N								
Samech	Prop	S								
Ayin	Eye	O								
Pe	Mouth	P, Ph								
Tsadhe	Hook	Ts								
Koph	Back of Head	K, Q								
Resh	Head	R								
Shin	Tooth	Sh								
Tau	Sign (Cross)	T, Th								

Figure 9. A sampling of ancient alphabets (reproduced from Quackenbos 1873:87).

recognizing a form of writing said to be indigenous to their own country. It comes as little surprise that serious scholars reject the work of Michael and his associates.

Sadly, by no means does this increasingly contorted comedy of interpretive fantasy and garbled “scholarship” end here. Amazingly, Michael (2004:22; see also Berkley 2005:507-523) further states with his all too typical lack of documentation that:

In 1992, we [referring to Alan Wilson, one of his British research collaborators] found that this [i.e., Coelbren] alphabet was on the copper portion of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This confirmed the beliefs that Iolo [Morganwg] certainly did not invent Coelbren and that the Welsh were, as they have always said, part of the “Ten Lost Tribes of Israel”.

Although scholars have variously argued that the copper scroll dates from ca. 70 BC to AD 100, there is no disagreement among them (cf. Allegro 1964; Lefkovits 2000; McCarter 1992; Milik 1956) that this scroll (correctly referred to as scroll 3Q15) was written in early Mishnaic Hebrew. For present purposes, it is immaterial if the writing was in either Old (Paleo) or more modern “square” Hebrew letters (Figure 9) – it most certainly was *not* written in

Coelbren.

As previously mentioned, persistent claims regarding Welsh speaking Indians in various parts of early America remain an integral and inseparable element of foundationless assertions surrounding the Madoc myth (e.g., Michael 2004:3-4, 7; Olson 1987:92-102). For example, while reference is frequently made to Catlin’s (1841) contention that the Mandan Indians spoke fluent Welsh, it may be noted that whatever his abilities as an esteemed and talented painter of vanishing Americana Catlin neither professed to be a trained linguist nor was he. Indeed, intensive linguistic studies conducted since the late 19th century have firmly establish Mandan as a Siouan language (cf. Hollow 1970; Kennard 1936; Mixco 1997; Parks and Rankin 2001; Wood and Irwin 2001).

While it is certainly possible that some words in either or both of the Mandan dialects (Nuptare and Nuetare) spoken at the time Catlin visited this group in the early 1830s may have resembled Welsh, this hardly constitutes sufficient linguistic grounds for referring to them as “Welsh speaking Indians”. A particularly informative website in this regard is “That Mandan is not Welsh” accessible at <http://www.languagegeek.com/siouan/mandan_is_not_welsh.html>. This site discusses at some length the

experiences of a trained linguist *fluent* in Welsh attempting to converse with a native Mandan equally fluent in his own language. In plain and simple terms, *these languages are neither related nor mutually intelligible*. The vast majority of these claims are made by those who know absolutely nothing about either language yet chronically continue to parrot the nonsensical “theories” and unsubstantiated reports of others. It is abundantly obvious that those who continue to espouse such gibberish have never personally examined the linguistic evidence¹⁸. Further, such baseless linguistic claims completely fail to take into account the inevitable changes which would have occurred in word usage and grammar in both the parent population and an isolated colony separated by thousands of miles and hundreds of years. But one example of two modern languages possessing identical words with completely divergent meanings is the term “nova.” In English, this word means “new star” whereas in Spanish it means “no go” (as in “will not move”). Applying the fanciful but nonetheless fallacious “logic” so widely used by “researchers” such as Michael (2004) or Olson (1987), it is to be presumed that one might easily reach the erroneous conclusion that England was entirely settled by the early occupants of Spain.

In summary, contrary to Michael’s (2004:21) bold assertion that “...the Coelbren alphabet was lost and found again,” in North America it is contended that it is an impossibility to lose that which never existed. First and foremost based upon documentation in Morganwg’s own handwriting, it appears that the Coelbren alphabet dates no earlier than ca. 1800 and was invented as part of a Welsh nationalist movement to enhance cultural pride and heritage. Although these are certainly noble and commendable goals, in no manner do such efforts serve to provide any degree of support for Michael’s contention that such inscriptions found in Kentucky date to the early centuries of the Christian era.

Ogham Inscriptions (West Virginia)

Lest it appear that other early inhabitants of the Celtic cultural region of the British Isles were any less adventuresome than the Welsh, it is appropriate to discuss two purported Irish “Ogham” petroglyphs recorded in Wyoming and Boone counties, West Virginia¹⁹. To begin, what is

Ogham (also spelled Ogam)? This type of early writing has been dated from between the 4th and 7th centuries AD. Approximately 500 such inscriptions, all of which are preserved on stone, have been reported in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England. The script is linked together by a solid line called a stem line, thought to represent the trunk of a tree, and strokes or marks (typically, though not universally, consisting of straight lines) constituting individual letters appear above, below, or transecting this plane.²⁰

Not surprisingly, the West Virginia Ogham inscriptions were attributed to St. Brendan (cf. Gallagher 1983), a sixth century Irish monk said to have undertaken extensive overseas travels to spread Christianity. In common with Madoc, it is widely claimed that he too was “here, there, and everywhere” in the northeastern United States and major portions of eastern Canada. A brief biography of St. Brendan appears in Flood and Hartig (1907). A more recent book devoted to his travels was authored by Geoffrey Ashe (1962). As intriguing as such tales may be, solid proof is inevitably lacking in substantiating these colorful assertions.

One of the longest reputed Ogham text within the Ohio Valley region has been reported at the Luther Elkins Petroglyph (46 Wm 3) site in Wyoming County, West Virginia (**Figures 10 and 11**). As noted by the Council for West Virginia Archaeology (2003):

The Luther Elkins Petroglyph (46 Wm 3) was first formally recorded in 1965 by Edward McMichaels, based on information from two members of the West Virginia Archeological Society, Oscar Mairs and Hillis Youse. This should be the proper name of the site, following the convention that a site is designated by the name given in its first formal report. Robert Pyle reported the site in 1982 as the “Lillyhaven Petroglyph Site” and wrote about it in *Wonderful West Virginia* as the ‘Wyoming County Petroglyph.’ Some also call it the “Lynco Petroglyph.”

First recorded by Olafson (1950), this site was subsequently announced as an Ogham inscription in the March 1983 issue of *Wonderful West Virginia*, a publication of the West

¹⁸ Of related interest is the story of Welshman John Evans’ 1790-1799 odyssey in America attempting to find the elusive Welsh speaking “white Indians.” He failed to find them because there were none to find (cf. Olson 1987:110-115; D. Williams 1949; 1963).

¹⁹ These are not the only reputed Ogham “inscriptions” which have been reported in West Virginia. Descriptions of additional examples (and related discussion) variously

appear in Clark (1988), Gallagher (1986), Hyde (1988; 1999), and Pyle (1998).

²⁰ For those who may be interested, the characters used in Ogham are clearly illustrated in a website entitled “Ogham Alphabet” accessible at: <<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/ogham.htm>>. A basic primer on Ogham translation may be found in “Translating Ancient Ogham Script” accessible at: <http://www.celticgrounds.com/chapters/ogham_translat.htm>.



Figure 10. Inscriptions at Luther Elkins Petroglyph (46 Wm 3) site, Wyoming County, West Virginia (reproduced from Fell 1983, Figure L, with permission of *Wonderful West Virginia*).

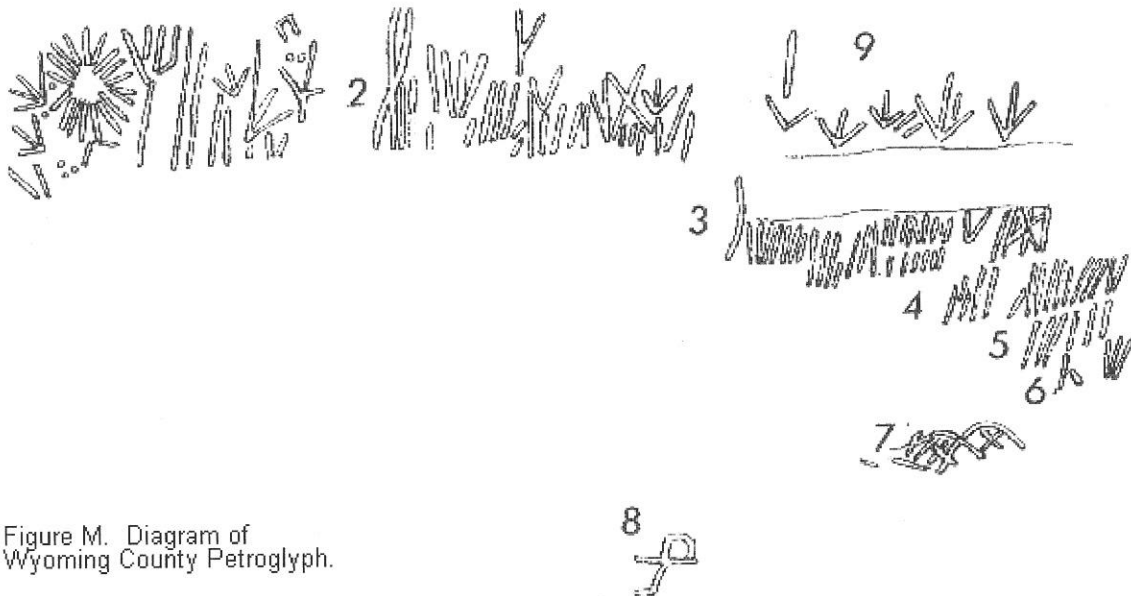


Figure M. Diagram of Wyoming County Petroglyph.

Figure 11. Detail of inscriptions at Luther Elkins Petroglyph (46 Wm 3) site, Wyoming County, West Virginia (reproduced from Fell 1983, Figure M, with permission of *Wonderful West Virginia*; redrawn to enhance clarity by Roger B. Wise).

Virginia Division of Natural Resources (cf. Fell 1983a; Gallagher 1983; Pyle 1983; see also Fell 1983b; Pyle 1986; 1998). After being photo-graphed and duplicated in latex²¹ in November 1982, this seemingly meaningless collection of straight line incisions and other design elements was soon thereafter “identified” by Berry Fell (1983a:17;

1983b) as an early Gaelic inscription and rendered as:

At the time of sunrise a ray grazes the notch on the left side on Christmas Day.

A Feast-day of the Church, the first day of the (Christmas) year.

The season of the Blessed Advent of the Savior, Lord Christ (Salvatoris Domini Christi).

Behold, he is born of Mary, a woman.

Fell dated these inscriptions from the 6th-8th centuries

²¹ Such a procedure is *not* recommended for recording petroglyph sites. The application of chemicals to the surface of the stone such as advocated by Michael (2004:97) is also ill-advised. See **Appendix** herein.

AD and claimed that they were written without vowels in “Old Irish.” Without explanation, he further stated (1983a:12) that portions of the Luther Elkins petroglyph were written in an “ancient Libyan script” which was “used to render two languages in the annotations [i.e., other portions of the total inscription] (1) the ancient Libyan tongue itself, and (2) an Algonquian dialect of the northeastern group, perhaps allied to Shawnee.” Beyond remarking that one portion of the supposed Libyan text was translated to “The right hand of God,” these inscriptions were not further treated in either articles prepared at that time (Fell 1983a; 1983b) or in any subsequent publications. As if this lengthy inscription were not enough, it was also claimed that a sunburst-like design on the left-hand side of the petroglyph was illuminated by the winter solstice sunrise (Gallagher 1983). Subsequent observations undertaken on the morning of the winter solstice in December 2002 failed to confirm this statement (Wise 2003a).

A second site designated as the Horse Creek petroglyph (**Figures 12 and 13**) in Boone County, West Virginia, was also recorded by Gallagher (1983). This inscription was translated by Fell (1983a; 1983b) as reading:

A happy season is Christmas, a time of joy and goodwill to all people.
A virgin was with child; God ordained her to conceive and be fruitful. Ah, Behold a miracle.
She gave birth in a cave. The name of the cave was the Cave of Bethlehem. His foster-father gave him the name Jesus, the Christ, Alpha and Omega, Festive season of prayer.

Taken at face value, these are certainly impressive passages and would superficially appear to give incontrovertible evidence of early European presence in the New World. To say the least, archaeologists working within West Virginia were – and have remained – highly skeptical of these epigraphic efforts (cf. Brashler 1989; Hunter 1983; 1989; Olafson 1983; Wise 2003a).

However, just as making a claim does not prove a given contention, merely disagreeing with a conclusion in no manner serves to disprove it. It would thus come as little surprise that the debate surrounding Fell’s efforts would continue and markedly different interpretations would surface. Rather remarkably, Edo Nyland (1996; see also Wise 2003b) would later assert that the Horse Creek petroglyph was written in Basque using the Ogham alphabet. His translation was:

[top line] The migration passed by like a powerful mirage, quietly undulating and moving unsuspectingly a short distance, peacefully. To bring about a disturbance we advanced rattling branches

and shouting. I remember that a whole wave happened to pass by and we fell back in fear (to avoid) the bad-tempered stampede of the frightened herd of bison (moving into) the entrance of the narrow wooden-fenced passage and into the abyss in flight. Come and help! The clan-mother was pleased with our co-operative effort.

[middle line] Club blows in abundant measure (were needed) because many which had fallen into the ravine resisted with obviously broken legs. Brothers, come and help the slaughterer to finish them off.

[bottom line] Having prevented escape by running away, we made the usual preparations by the edge of the stream and happily rejoiced in dividing the welcome riches into three parts by plentiful butchering. At first unaccustomed (to the task) we undeniably had to pay attention. We were as busy as possible and so happily exhausted that (we didn’t notice) the noise of the thunder coming in our direction.

[left of top line] In spite of (being) some distance away, the clan mother, just in time, reached the cattle shelter during a period of silence, to sensibly wait out the approaching thunder. Your dear Friend.

It requires neither great training in nor knowledge of the decipherment of ancient scripts to rapidly come to the conclusion that these “translations” have absolutely nothing in common. What, then, can be said of the West Virginia petroglyphs? The most authoritative voice of reason regarding them appears in a paper by Oppenheimer and Wirtz (1989) who observed:

Recognizing that some pieces of the picture needed further development, the 1983 *Wonderful West Virginia* articles [i.e., Fell 1983a; Gallagher 1983; Pyle 1983] promised that additional information would follow. Three years later, a brief follow-up story [Hyde 1986] in the June, 1986, issue reported that the “Petroglyph Case Remains Open.” This second article included none of the further information that the first report had referred to. It recognized that the earlier account had created “considerable controversy,” and said that “Assembled Evidence Strengthens Petroglyph Interpretation Case [Gallagher 1986],” but left the reader to decide for himself if the evidence is plausible, regardless of the dissension of professionals and avocational archaeologists [cf. Brashler 1989; Hunter 1983; 1989; Olafson 1983] in the state.

The meaningful use of such freedom obviously depends on having, with respect to this controversial issue, all of the available evidence. This means giving to the public some information that has not so



Figure 12. Horse Creek petroglyph, Boone County, West Virginia (reproduced from Fell 1983, Figure N, with permission of *Wonderful West Virginia*).

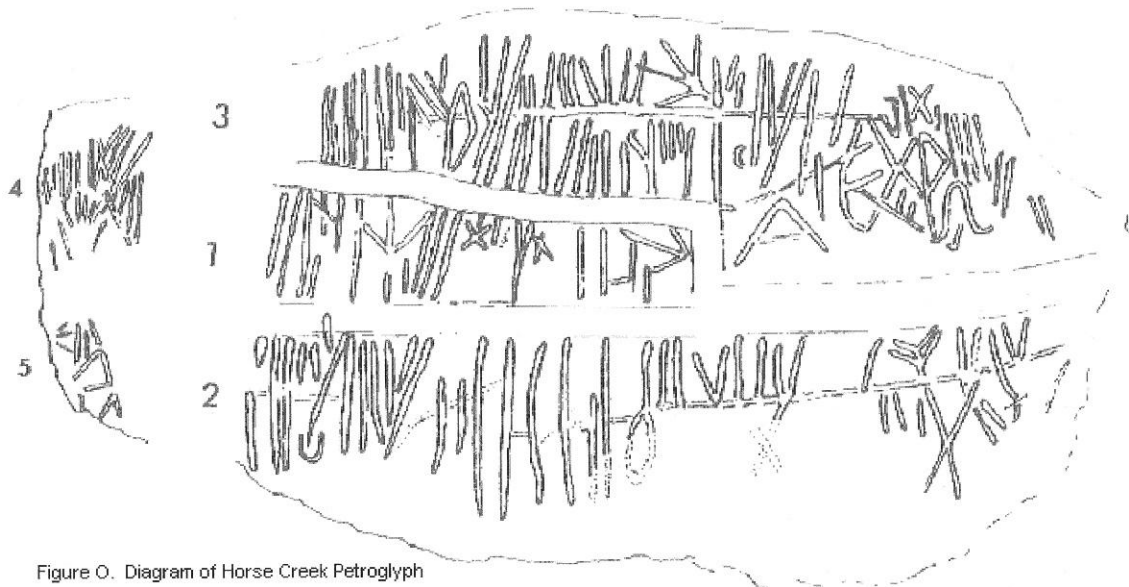


Figure O. Diagram of Horse Creek Petroglyph

Figure 13. Detail of inscriptions at Horse Creek petroglyph, Boone County, West Virginia (reproduced from Fell 1983, Figure O, with permission of *Wonderful West Virginia*; redrawn to enhance clarity by Roger B. Wise).

far been published in *Wonderful West Virginia*.

Perhaps the most critical piece of this information is that by using the “decipherment” methods Fell sets out in his March 1983 article it is possible to find in these rock wall markings not only the nativity story but any other preconceived text one might choose.

Beyond merely expressing their dissatisfaction with Fell’s translation, Oppenheimer and Wirtz (1989) went to considerable effort to contact and communicate with recognized scholars in Ogham studies in the United States, England, Scotland, and Ireland, an approach which seemingly eluded both Fell and those who have unthinkingly accepted his version of the purported meaning

of the Luther Elkins and Horse Creek petroglyphs. It is a telling statement that they (ibid.) remark that upon “Reviewing the *Wonderful West Virginia* report of evidence regarding the Wyoming and Boone County petroglyphs, these authorities conclude, spelling out their reasons, that this [i.e., Fell’s translation] is a transparent hoax.” Recalling that Ogham letters are principally formed by perpendicular lines cut above, below, or transecting the stem line and – importantly – separated by a space to allow for distinguishing the individual letters thus formed, even a causal inspection of the West Virginia petroglyphs reveals neither a clearly delineated stem line nor consistent spacing between the so-called letters. In Fell’s “translation,” the placement of the requisite stem line is completely arbitrary and therefore meaningless. His delineation of the groupings of perpendicular lines (and, as may be immediately noticed, few of the upright lines were in fact perpendicular) used to form the letters is equally arbitrary. Fell’s statement that this reputedly early form of Ogham was written without vowels in concert with the arbitrary placement of the stem line would – at best – only yield a meaningless translation. As appropriately noted by Oppenheimer and Wirtz (ibid.):

What is critical here is that by this device Fell gives himself virtually complete flexibility in “interpreting” any series of consonants he has constructed. If he were dealing only in English he could, for example, make the consonants NGDWTRST mean – if this were the text he had started with – IN GOD WE TRUST. Yet, they could equally as well be interpreted as NO GOOD WATER SITE.

The problems with Fell’s so-called “translation” do not end here. For example, it has also been noted (ibid.) that his “reading” of the petroglyphs glibly incorporates elements of Gaelic spelling and grammar which did not develop until centuries after the era (6th-8th century AD) in which he says they were written.

The conclusions reached by Oppenheimer and Wirtz (1989) should hopefully provide a serious “wake up call” to those who persist in placing credence in such haphazard and inept so-called “scholarship”:

Dr. Fell’s work is an affront to the readers of *Wonderful West Virginia* and the public at large. The fairest verdict on his hoax is offered by Professor William Gillies, of the Department of Celtic Languages at Edinburgh University in Scotland. Reviewing the *Wonderful West Virginia* account, he writes that Fell’s “decipherment” belies all that is known regarding “Ogam script, epigraphy, Celtic language and Christianity ...I find the professed content of these ‘inscriptions’ far-fetched and the linguistic ‘reconstruction’ an absolute bar to credibility” (Gillies, personal communication).

Professor Gillies concludes, however, “I suspect there may be more valuable things to be said about these carvings than the preposterous constructions you have had to put up with so far” (Gillies, personal communication). It would be unfortunate if the continuing search for whatever may be these petroglyph’s explanation were deterred or obstructed by what turns out to be a demeaning fraud.

Despite such an assessment, there is little doubt that others will pick up the proverbial banner and both uncritically accept and continue to perpetrate the concocted myth of St. Brendan and wandering Irishmen in the mountains of West Virginia for many years to come.

CLOSING REMARKS

Although it is has long and consistently been maintained by some authors that the various “finds” discussed herein constitute important research breakthroughs and represent historically significant discoveries, the majority of these assertions are most noteworthy for having yielded copious quantities of fluff and remarkably little substance. Unsupported claims are rampant while serious and legitimate decipherment scholarship such as associated with Egyptian hieroglyphics, Babylonian cuneiform, and Linear B (cf. Doblhofer 1971; Pope 1975) or more recently Mayan glyphs (cf. Coe 1999; Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Mathews 1998) is notably lacking. Sadly absent is any meaningful and coherent level of comparison to the vast body of literature relating to the history, mythology, folklore, material culture, and/or archaeology of the purported parent societies which are said to have been responsible for this or that inscription. It likewise seems to completely elude the purveyors of such claims that literally thousands of legitimate regional archaeological investigations have been undertaken which have yielded not one iota of supporting evidence that this or that ancient Old World culture or epic hero had any level of demonstrable contact with or – importantly – influence on the native societies of the region. Within the context of anthropologically oriented investigations, in and of themselves claims that some European vessel may have at sometime and someplace intentionally or unintentionally landed on the shores of the North American land mass constitute neither more nor less than a relatively meaningless historical curiosity of no lasting significance. From the same anthropological perspective, the central and overriding issue at hand remains the impact such contact between cultures may have had on the region’s native peoples.

Despite grand pronouncements by authors such as Fell (1982) and Michael (2004:41) that bronze and brass (both alloys) have been found in direct pre-Columbian context, no substantive archaeological or metallurgical evidence has yet been presented to support this contention. Not to be

outdone, the June 1, 2005, issue of the *Manchester Times*, a weekly newspaper published in Manchester, Tennessee, ran an article (Barr 2005) concerning claims that one of King Solomon's temples had been constructed near Ruby Falls atop Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga. It may reasonably and point-blankly be contended that making such assertions is inordinately easy while supporting them is another matter entirely. Where, one may ask, is the incontestable proof? There is none. Such claims are invariably further brought into doubt by being based upon either single artifacts recovered under questionable circumstances or vague inscriptions appearing on readily accessible open sites which could have been created or altered by anyone at any point in time. Corroborative artifactual evidence is never mentioned. As an example, let us presume, as claimed by Michael (2004:31-45), that the legendary Prince Madoc and a band of followers actually existed and lived in the interior of North America. Obviously, a basic premise of such claims is that they brought with them a written language. However, as social beings they would also have brought their own concepts of material culture and social organization. It is beyond any semblance of anthropological reasoning to believe that they would not also have had fixed ideas as to how houses should be constructed, how villages or communities should be spatially arranged, or what types of pottery should be made and how to decorate it (cf. the concept of "mental template" discussed in Deetz 1996). Such detailed material culture comparisons are the required essence of serious and meaningful archaeological study yet are nowhere to be seen in support of otherwise baseless and questionable claims of either conquest or simple exploration of the Ohio Valley region by Old World populations. Although it is unlikely that writing materials (i.e., paper or more likely parchment) dating to the distant past would have survived within the region except under extraordinary circumstances, it is inconceivable that some individual in a literate society would not as a minimum have used a stick or twig to write on pottery. Once again, such evidence has yet to be reported by any knowledgeable archaeologist.

One must further reasonably question why such discoveries of purportedly European derived inscriptions are relentlessly "hyped" in the print media like the latest Hollywood extravaganza, popular music release, or latest fashion rage yet are never presented at either "mainstream" archaeological or historical conferences or published in respected professional journals where they would be subjected to the harsh and glaring realities of no-nonsense scrutiny and peer review. To those who dare to wonder why such "popular" announcements are not accepted with open arms by professional archaeologists, the answer is both straightforward and simple – when one persistently espouses unproven and nonsensical gibberish they will not be taken seriously. "Talk," as is commonly observed, "is cheap". Now where is the proof? Upon critical examination, the inevitable "chain of evidence" offered in support of

such "discoveries" is one person citing a myth appearing in an earlier study which in turn referenced a legend appearing in a previous volume which was based upon yet an older book which repeated a fable, and so it goes. Although each successive author will inevitably add their own creative embellishments, the basic premise being offered is no truer than the original fable. For example, while there is no doubt that symbolic "writing" in the form of both petroglyphs²² and pictographs (cf. Mallery 1886; 1893; Taylor 1996:283-287; Yates 1896) was both widely used by Native Americans through an extended period of time, the same cannot be said regarding reputed inscriptions in Hebrew, Libyan, Phoenician, Welsh, Gaelic, or any other Old World language said to exist within the region. It should likewise be noted that claims made by Michael (2004:39) that the pre-contact Cherokee – or, indeed, any other prehistoric inhabitants within the United States (cf. Mallery 1886; 1893, Walker 1996) – possessed a formal alphabetic, syllabic, or hieroglyphic based form of writing remain to be substantiated. At their dubious best, such fantastic claims may condescendingly be viewed as a mild and harmless diversion. At their worst, however, such poorly researched studies are unconscionably deceptive and a disservice to the both the public and the advancement of serious archaeological pursuits alike.

Perhaps through it all, the operative maxim associated with such claims is to be found in the well-known tale of the emperor's new clothes. Just as the well intentioned assertions of the emperor's loyal subjects failed to clothe their sovereign, the relentless presentation of shopworn and recycled fables disguised as New Age or "block buster" interpretations do not constitute fact. Sadly, such efforts merely serve to divert time, attention, and always limited resources from more meaningful avenues of productive archaeological enquiry and exemplify the age old question, "But how can I be wrong when I'm so sincere?" The critical reader with knowledge of and training in academic archaeology will understandably come to the conclusion that grand claims, isolated facts and comparative data liberally and irresponsibly taken out of cultural and chronological context, haphazardly documented sources, and chronically poor scholarship²³ fail to support any

²² The scholarly literature on Native American petroglyphs is voluminous and includes (though is certainly not limited to) sources such as: Braley (1993); Cambron and Waters (1959); Carstens and Knudson (1959); Coy et al. (1997); Diaz-Granados and Duncan (2000); Diaz-Granados and Duncan, eds. (2004); Faulkner, ed. (1996); Grant (1981); Keyser and Klassen (2001), Newcomb (1967), O'Neill (1988), Swauger (1984), Wellmann (1979), and Whitley (2001)

²³ As but passing examples of the poor scholarship typically associated with such claims, it is intriguing to note that Michael (2004:21) remarks on the discovery of "...a brass

box deep in the Appalachian Mountains with a rolled up scroll” written in what is said to be “ancient Hebrew letters.” The source for this claim is attributed (ibid.:22) to an article in the March 20, 2001, issue of the *Weekly World News*. This is the same tabloid which has carried, among numerous other questionable news items, articles such as “Two-Ton Alien Hairball Found in Australia” (*Weekly World News*, October 19, 1999), “Princess Anne’s Dog Plotted Diana’s Death” (*Weekly World News*, March 31, 2004), and “Vampire Babies Born Addicted to Blood” (*Weekly World News*, April 7, 2004). It is hopefully sufficient to observe that by any reasonable definition this publication hardly qualifies as either an authoritative or scholarly source.

By no means do the problems with scholarship end here. For example, Michael’s (2004:29; see also Berkley 2005: 17) statements regarding certain aspects of human skeletal studies are likewise erroneous and misleading in his contention that Fawn Hoof, one of the “mummies” recovered from Mammoth Cave, was of European origin because her crania lacked an Inca bone (*Os incae*) formation (cf. Brothwell 1972:41). Such an assertion is not supported by physical anthropological data. For example, Washington (1889) found that Inca bones were present in the crania of 5.68% of a sampling of Native American crania from Arizona in contrast to an occurrence rate of but 1.53% among Negroes. He further noted that this formation is found with even less frequency among other racial groups (e.g., Europeans). This finding was further substantiated by Hanihara and Ishida (2001:137) who observed that “The New World populations have generally high frequencies of the Inca bone, whereas... In Central and West Asia as well as in Europe, frequency of the Inca bone is relatively low.” Moreover, Hauser and DeStefano (1989) have observed that *Os incae* formations occur more frequently in males than females. However, this genetic trait can vary widely between study populations. Of particular interest to this paper, it is of note that in a study (Sellevold 1999:12) of 29 Pict and Viking skeletons from the Orkney Islands, 15 individuals (51.72%) exhibited an Inca bone (3 males, 10 females, 2 indeterminate).

Another error associated with identifying the genetic origin of skeletal remains is an over reliance on the presence or absence of shovel shaped incisors (cf., Berkley 2005:17, 368, 374), a trait first recognized by Hrdlička (1920). As noted by Bass (1971:234), it has long been known that such dentition has a “relatively high frequency of occurrence in Mongoloid racial groups” and Brothwell (1972:119) observes that this trait not infrequently exceeds an occurrence rate in excess of 80% in these populations. However, he continues (ibid.) with the comment that “The incidence of [shovel shaped incisors] is far lower in Europe, where moderate to pronounced degrees of this anomaly may occur in about 15% of individuals.” Accordingly, while the presence of either or both *Os incae* bones and

meaningful hypotheses or contentions regarding the past. Indeed, a case may be built that such grandiose pronouncements and slapdash research allegorically have much in common with Swiss cheese – a few hard facts interspersed with a good many holes.

Such sweeping claims exemplify what is frequently referred to as “hyper-diffusionism” which envisions broad global prehistoric movements of both people and ideas which stand in marked contrast to the concept of more localized independent invention (cf. Ford 1969). Whereas authors such as Berkley (2005), Fell (1978), and Michael (2004) typically adopt this stance as a working hypothesis which “explains” virtually any and all real or imagined cultural, linguistic, or artifactual similarities between any two groups regardless of distance or chronology, professional archaeologists have been reticent to universally and unquestioningly apply this concept to every occurrence of this or that similarity. However, it should be noted that the concept of diffusionism is *not* completely rejected by professional archaeologists as exemplified by recent studies by Blake (2005) and Jones and Klar (2005) who have investigated the similarities between plank canoes in Polynesia and portions of southern California based upon both material culture and linguistic evidence.

Invariably, when confronted with “facts” or opinions which contradict a given pet theory the final resort and refuge of such “scholarship” is to adopt a martyr complex²⁴ and assume the not unexpected position that academic archaeologists have an unspoken but ulterior “agenda” (aside from, it is claimed, protecting their professional egos and reputations) to suppress the “truth” (e.g., compare statements in Michael 2004:vii, 46 with remarks appearing in Brashler 1989 and Fritze 1994; see also Feder 2005 and Williams 1991). Handily and unashamedly overlooked is the reality that the same archaeologists seek hard and substantive verification for rashly made but poorly supported assertions, an approach which has served both their profession and the public well. Flippant and self-serving statements such as espoused in Michael (2004:vii, 46) are not only erroneous but also patently insulting to the archaeological community at large. As a consequence of hard work and probing questions, it is archaeologists – not agenda driven dilettantes and poorly informed armchair antiquaries – who have immeasurably advanced and

shovel shaped incisors are *suggestive* of a given early burial within the region being of Native American origin, both of these non-metrical traits can occur in the crania of an individual with European ancestry while being completely absent in a Native American.

²⁴ Such a perspective brings to mind a remark attributed to George Bernard Shaw: “Martyrdom, sir, is what these people like; it is the only way a man can become famous without ability” (quoted in Williams 1991:8).

expanded our knowledge of the past. Nowhere in the ever growing maze of fringe and “pseudo-scientific” literature does one find detailed excavation reports, chronologies based upon supportable stratigraphic evidence, defensible definitions of cultural attributes, or critical assessments of hard gained archaeological knowledge. Standing in marked contrast to hackneyed and trite tales of Lost Tribes or Welsh and Irish explorers wandering about the Ohio Valley countryside, it may be noted that a legitimate and verified Viking settlement has been positively identified at the L’Anse-aux-Meadows site in Newfoundland, Canada (cf. Feder 2005:114-117; A. Ingstad 1977; H. Ingstad 1969; Ingstad and Ingstad 2000). Importantly, the confirmation of discovery was not based upon either questionable or unfounded speculation but rather upon meticulous and exhaustive fieldwork conducted by qualified archaeologists and supported by solid scholarship. It is not inappropriate to end this discussion with a quote from Stephen D. Peet (1892):

One of the greatest among many annoyances to archaeologists is that so many fraudulent relics are found in mounds. It seems difficult to fasten the frauds on any one, for they are planted probably in the night and are adroitly covered up. Some of them are wrought with reference to the special sensation that may be made, and are very startling in their resemblance to foreign articles. These are very easily detected and are rejected at once; others, however, bear a resemblance to the relics of the Mound-builders, and are very deceiving. The most of these have some ancient alphabet, Hebrew, Phoenician, Hittite, and are recognized as frauds by these means. Among these are the Grave Creek Tablet, the Newark Holy stone, the Pemberton Ax, the Stone from Grand Traverse Bay, and a great many others. Not one of these has been accepted by the skilled archaeologists, but they have been discussed and defended by others until they have grown wearisome.

Unfortunately, vague myths and sheer fantasy often assume a life of their own despite representing neither more nor less than a house of cards held together by wishful thinking and resting upon a foundation of sand. Through it all, however, we may rest assured that for each of the “too good to be true” artifacts (typically termed “Oparts” or “out-of-place-artifacts” in the jargon of their dedicated supporters) or inscriptions discussed herein there is always someone “ready, willing, and more than able” to defend either its authenticity or their particular interpretation thereof with the greatest of conviction and the smoothest tongue this side of the renowned Blarney stone. Indeed, as was remarked to the author many years ago, “Somewhere in this country there’s someone who is convinced that God is a ’57 Chevy and lives in Malibu, California.” Why then do

such contentions continually rear their heads above the plane of reason? The most concise answer to this question is Robert Silverberg’s (1968:135) remark that such ideas gain acceptance, “...through the familiar process of the sanctification of myth by time.” Simply put, tell a wild tale long enough and often enough and the unthinking will come to accept it as fact. Regardless, it is beyond the time to acknowledge that unbridled enthusiasm and well meaning intentions supported only by the blind acceptance and unquestioning repetition of claims devoid of substance are neither a suitable substitute for good scholarship nor proof based upon the solidly established provenience of corroborating artifactual materials. As desirable as these goals may be, the “true believers” who support such ideas will fervently continue to do so seemingly unaware that such assertions propagate the baseless and, indeed, *de facto* racist theories of the early 19th century which relentlessly contended that Native Americans were socially and intellectually incapable of creating the numerous earth-works which once dotted the region’s landscape. Despite it all, coming full circle to the universal commonalities of myths discussed in this paper’s opening paragraph we must appropriately – though regrettably – add the Baloney Factor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A sincere debt of gratitude is appropriately due Ms. Sundae Murphy (Louisville, Kentucky) for the use of her picture of the Brandenburg stone used as Figure 7 and Mr. Harry Price (Charleston, West Virginia), editor of *Wonderful West Virginia* magazine, for his permission to reproduce illustrations of the Luther Elkins Petroglyph (46 Wm 3) site and Horse Creek petroglyph used as Figures 8-11. The original photographs used as Figures 8 and 10 were taken by the late Mr. Arnout “Sonny” Hyde, Jr. Mr. Roger B. Wise (Charleston, West Virginia) of the Council for West Virginia Archaeology tediously redrew the original line drawings of Figures 9 and 11 to provide better contrast of the design elements and these revised figures are used with his kind permission. Roger also offered several helpful suggestions on improving this paper. Avocational archaeologist Doug Weller (Solihull, West Midlands, United Kingdom) kindly offered useful editorial comments and brought to my attention a number of inordinately informative sources concerning “fringe” and “pseudo” archaeology. Mr. Michael J. Simonton (Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Philosophy, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, Kentucky) graciously tendered various insightful observations regarding Celtic studies following his review of an earlier draft of this paper. Lastly (but by no means least), Ms. Marcia E. Hemming (Louisville, Kentucky) generously offered a number of helpful editorial suggestions to improve the readability of this paper. Any errors in fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the author.

APPENDIX: ROCK ART ETIQUETTE

The following common sense rules for the treatment and recordation of petroglyph sites are reproduced with the gracious permission of Mr. Steven R. Shaffer from his website entitled "Written in Stone – Report a Rock Art Site" accessible at: <<http://www.writteninstone.info/report.html>>.

- Many rock art sites are located on private property. ALWAYS contact the landowner for permission before visiting.
- Your conduct while on private land may very well determine if a site continues to be made accessible to the public.
- Leave no trash or graffiti. Pick up litter left by less noble souls.
- Never disturb soil, rock or vegetation at the site.
- Campfire heat and smoke will destroy rock art; keep all fires well away from petroglyph and pictograph sites.
- Formerly, it was common practice to chalk petroglyphs in order to make the glyphs more recognizable for photography. Most experts now agree that "highlighting" rock art with chalk, paint, or other substances is destructive. Use natural (early morning or late afternoon) or artificial lighting to help get the best photos.
- Do not climb or walk on rock surfaces adjacent to petroglyphs and pictographs; do not touch rock art with your hands.
- Do not attempt to remove lichen, moss, paint or graffiti from rock art.
- Always follow additional rules of the landowner or site/museum director.
- Do enjoy our surviving prehistoric petroglyphs and pictographs. As there are fascinating rock art sites yet to be discovered, and known images in need of documentation and preservation, You can play an important role in increasing our understanding of these ancient forms of communication.
- Thank you for your help in preserving these vanishing art forms.

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