

The Stonehenge Builders came from Turkey – so what's new?

Summary:

Upon the release in Nature April 2019 of the DNA research by Brace et al: "Population Replacement in Early Neolithic Britain" we were treated to sensational headlines in the popular media and online. One headline boldly states: "Stonehenge builders came from as far as modern-day Turkey, DNA suggests" [ITV]. Another declared: "Stonehenge was built by descendants of Neolithic migrants, DNA study shows" [NBC]. Although the authors of the report were quick to distance themselves from any such spectacular claims, these headlines soon become fixed in the readers' minds. Our first reaction should really be: "so what's new?"

The DNA research reveals that Stonehenge and the other Late-Neolithic stone circles were not built by the first Neolithic farmers to inhabit Britain, but by their descendants, whose DNA *'matched the genetic "signatures" of early farmers in Europe; a group of people shown in previous studies to have migrated from the Aegean coast via Spain and the Mediterranean coast.'* It now appears that these immigrants did not mix with the older generation of farmers who had arrived earlier in the Neolithic, around 4000 bc.

Up until the 1970s, archaeologists proposed this same origin for the Stonehenge builders based on the artefacts; but in those days cross-dating had placed such influences as recently as 2000 BC. We were confidently told by the archaeologists of that era that the influences of Mycenaean Greece were the inspiration for such grand architecture, which could not possibly have originated among the primitive Brits. These diffusion theories all fell apart when tree-ring calibrated C14 dates pushed this culture back to 3000 BC and earlier. Similarly we have always known that the Indo-European languages, which include Greek and Celtic, as well as the ancient Hittite language of Anatolia, had all originated in the Caucasus and Black Sea region, from which there was an Indo-European language 'dispersal'. All of this may be found in our older textbooks. So does this new DNA research just confirm what we already knew?

Less well known, and certainly neglected by the scientists, is that this picture also concurs with the narrative that we find in our indigenous myths and legends. The Irish *Book of Invasions* narrates that Ireland was populated by successive waves of 'Greeks': Partholon, Firbolgs and Nemedians who arrived both via Spain and via the Danube route across the North Sea. It seems probable that any such migrants must also have passed through Brittany, Cornwall and South Wales as they progressed.

From Britain we have conflicting stories of origin, mainly surviving in Welsh literature. The most well-known is the myth of Brutus and his 'Trojans' that we find in Nennius. There has always been an unexplained anomaly between the versions of origin given by Classical historians and those in the Welsh 'triads'. All the invasion legends infer that Britain and Ireland were unoccupied and ripe for colonisation.

We find in the commentaries of Caesar and Strabo (both probably citing Poseidonius) a story that the interior of Britain was populated by tribes who claimed to be indigenous to the island. By contrast, the Welsh triads describe the Cymry as originating from the regions around the Bosphorus, whence they came, "after the Flood". The Roman historian Tacitus [in Agricola XI] even remarks on the clear similarities between the people of South Wales and those of Spain, "...all lead one to believe that Spaniards crossed in ancient times and occupied that part of the country", he says.

The Classical historians also recognized that the Celtic gods were the same as those of the Mediterranean pantheon, in all but name; and the Greek poets told us of the close relationship

between the Delian Greeks and the Hyperboreans who lived beyond the Celts. The Greek myths tell us of Heracles who, among other achievements, placed his ‘pillars’ at the Strait of Gibraltar on his way west. In Roman times, the respected Greek author Plutarch is quite clear in his belief that Greeks had colonised the outlying islands of Britain as they migrated there “in the train of Heracles”. Can we any longer afford to just dismiss these ancient stories as fiction when they follow the DNA trail so closely?

There is, in the so-called *third-series* of the Welsh Triads, a tradition that Hu Gadarn first brought the Cymry to Britain from the regions around the Bosphorus; but first we are told that they settled in Llydaw, which implies Brittany and the Biscay coast of Gaul. Two other races, the Lloegrwys and the Britons, of the same stock and language, were later allowed to settle. These triads, in the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* have long been condemned as the forgeries of its nineteenth-century author – simply because the twelfth-century manuscript from which he claimed to have taken them – is no longer extant. However, the correspondence with the story that DNA evidence now reveals is quite striking!

The Triad of the three pillars of the Race of the Island of Britain begins as follows:

The first, Hu Gadarn, who first brought the race of the Cymry into the Island of Britain; and they came from the land of Háv called Defrobani [where Constantinople stands] and they passed over Mór Tawch (the German Ocean) to the Island of Britain, and to Llydaw (Brittany) where they remained. The second Prydain...

In the Triad of the three benevolent tribes we are given the same origin for the Cymry; and of the others we find:

...The second were the race of the Lloegrwys (i.e. the dwellers on the river Loire) who came from the land of Gwas-gwn, and were sprung from the primitive stock of the Cymry.

The third were the Britons. They came from the land of Llydaw, and were also sprung from the ancestral line of the Cymry... and the three were of one language and one speech.

These translations are taken from the *Celtic Researches* of Edward Davies written in 1804. He was a Welsh classical scholar, who could freely make comparisons between the Welsh and Classical languages; so the saying is true: there’s nothing new under the sun!

In so far as they may be considered authentic, the Welsh Triads derive mainly from medieval sources in South Wales. Other recent DNA studies have shown that the populations of North Wales and South Wales are quite distant from each other. The modern boundaries of Wales, with its three ancient divisions, are just that mountainous part of Britain that the Anglo-Saxons failed to conquer. The indigenous British inhabitants may therefore be revealed to us as the tribes of North Wales and of the regions further north in England and Scotland.

So perhaps it is overdue that archaeologists and other branches of academic enquiry began to show more respect for the precious stories preserved by our ancestors about their own origins, instead of rubbishing them as ‘myths’ and legends. If the DNA evidence offers us anything that is new then it should be to provide a semi-historical framework for the events and characters that we find in the oral history left by our ancestors.

Some useful hyperlinks:

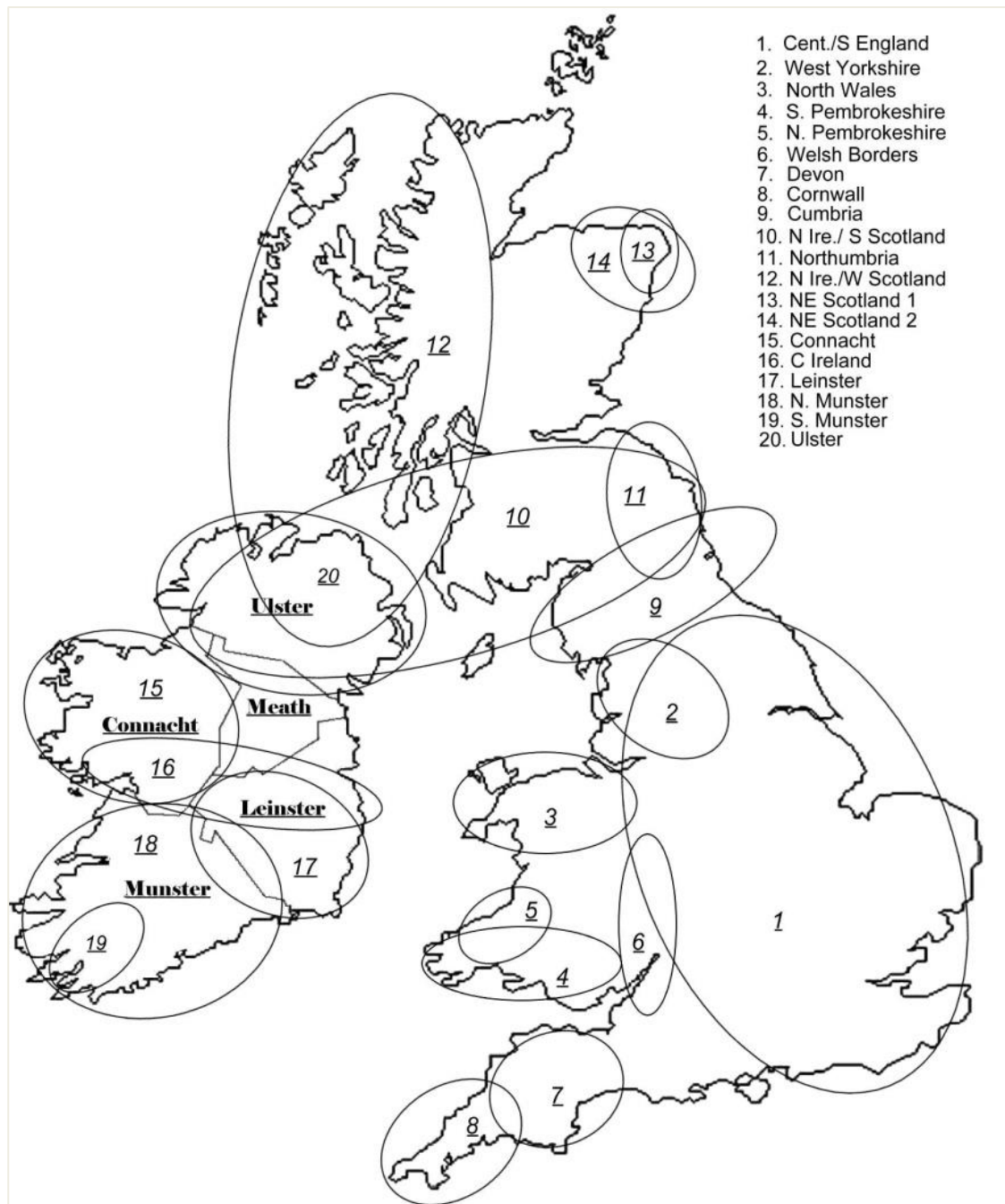
<https://www.nbcnews.com/mach/science/stonehenge-was-built-descendants-neolithic-migrants-dna-study-shows-ncna995221>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47938188>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-019-0871-9>

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Triads_of_Britain

British and Irish DNA Provinces



A summary-map showing the most significant DNA provinces of Britain and Ireland based on *Nature Scientific Reports* volume 7, Article number: 17199 (2017). The full study identifies some 30 regional clusters and considerable overlap. The clusters may be seen to conform to the known older tribal groupings and provinces, apart from southern and central England where population is more homogeneous with continental Europe. This summary diagram is figure 7.2 from: *Towers of Atlantis*

Tags: Megaliths, Ancient Astronomy, Celtic Myth, Stonehenge, Neolithic DNA, Irish legends, Welsh legends, Otherworld, Annwn, Irish Sea, Druids

This article was originally published in 2019 as an interactive webpage on the author's website at: www.third-millennium.co.uk/stonehenge-builders-dna

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