

## Stonehenge Blindness

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### Summary:

*Two papers published in recent academic media reveal a transformation in the attitude of archaeologists towards the concept of astronomical alignments at Stonehenge and other Neolithic monuments. It may be worthwhile to look back at why it has taken them so long to reach this consensus. Part of the problem lies in the theological divide that persisted for half a century between field archaeologists and archaeoastronomers; but also, the dogma about 'Iron Age Celts' which held that there could be no connection between the Druid astronomy described in classical sources and the earlier 'pre-Celts'. Now that DNA science has removed this artificial barrier we may see that Neolithic people were far more competent astronomers than was previously supposed.*

In a review of the “*Pathways to the Cosmos*” conference held at Dublin Castle in September 2018 Liz Henty makes some perhaps surprising comments. [1] She notes that this is the first such conference where archaeologists and archaeoastronomers have combined to broadly agree that some Neolithic monuments in Britain and Ireland were astronomically aligned. She comments:

*...it has healed the long divide created when archaeoastronomers and archaeologists went their separate ways in the 1970s over arguments about Alexander Thom's megalithic science (see for example Thom 1967), each dismissive of the other.*

So, in theory at least, we can now write about astronomical alignments at Neolithic monuments without fear of the ridicule that has transpired over the last fifty years. As the conference took place in Ireland it focused on the more distinct evidence of alignments at the ‘passage graves’ rather than the stone circles, where more subjective interpretation is necessary; but all the prominent names of modern archaeology seem to have made their contributions.

Also, in 2022, another article/paper by the archaeologist Timothy Darvill in the journal *Antiquity* was widely reported by the popular press. Writing on the history of interpretation of astronomical alignments at Stonehenge he exposes some of the prejudicial attitudes that have held back progress for so long. [2] He sets out in some detail the astronomical alignments of the extant Sarsen circle (the final Phase 3 of the monument). Most of his content is unquestionable and highlights the ability of the ancient surveyors. The concern is that from the secondary reports in some of the popular media one might gain the impression that he was the first ever to suggest such alignments. After summarising the earlier work of Lockyer, Hawkins and Thom, he comments:

*These and many other interpretations, however, are all unsatisfactory, as they often use non-contemporaneous elements of the monument, reference astronomical alignments that do not withstand close scrutiny (Ruggles 1997: 203) or perpetuate the discredited idea of a 'Celtic Calendar' (Hutton 1996: 408–11).*

Darvill concludes, from the Sarsen layout, that Stonehenge embodied a solar calendar and remarks on the later phases of reconstruction at the site:

*...its uses from Stage 2 onwards, providing a secure cosmologically referenced framework for the observance of festivals, ceremonies and rituals that were the reason for the monument's construction. The selection of the existing Stage 1 earthwork enclosure, which had formerly been used as a cemetery, as the site for this innovative development elicits no surprise.*

The work of earlier theorists that led up to the 'great divide' must be appreciated before this debate can be fully understood.

Firstly, to summarise current thinking about the chronology of Stonehenge the earliest phase of construction is dated to around 3000 BC with the building of the circular henge and ditch. The four Station Stones also date from this early phase. Phase 2 is dated from around 2700 BC when the monument was redesigned, to incorporate the Bluestones transported from the Preseli mountains. The monument was completed during phase 3 concluding around 1500 BC when the great sarsen circle that we see today was constructed. Although archaeologists might now acknowledge as many as six stages, this convenient three phase nomenclature remains in common use.

The antiquarian John Aubrey in 1666 first noticed the ring of 56 equally spaced chalk-filled depressions around the outer bank. [3] Archaeological excavation has determined that the Aubrey Holes date from Phase 1 of the monument. Opinion is that they were probably not post holes but perhaps re-used to hold cremated remains. One may speculate that they marked locations where a priest or a temporary structure would stand during a ceremony, or perhaps from where an observation was made. The important point is that there are 56 holes and that number is not random chance.

Around the main sarsen circle, dated to the final phase of the monument, are the rings of 29 "Z" holes and the 30 "Y" holes. The earlier circle of 56 pits, whatever their original purpose, were allowed to fall into disuse and grass grew over them.

Various suggestions of astronomical influence at stone circles have been advanced over the years, such as that of Rev. Gidley in the nineteenth century (*see Note 1 below*). [4] and of course the supposed links to the Druids suggested by Aubrey and Stukeley, so disparaged by later archaeologists. I shall not probe the older references here, except to quote Piggott's dismissive summary (1968 p 136) [5]

The association of the monument and the priesthood has become so established...that it is too often forgotten that its origins lie no earlier than the seventeenth century, and that when Aubrey's suggestion was printed by Gibson in 1695 it was merely one among many alternative views...

Astronomical alignment theories were not widely taken-up until Gerald Hawkins and his 1965 book *Stonehenge Decoded* caught popular interest. [6] In the 1960's, books of science aimed at the popular market were much less common and so could provoke controversy when well-promoted by their publishers; much more so than in the internet era when new ideas can escape more easily.

It was Hawkins' theory that Stonehenge and other circles were observatories to forecast eclipses. This concept was marketed to capture popular interest – to the disapproval of the professional archaeologists. He would refer to Stonehenge as a stone age computer for predicting eclipses and his use of printouts from 1960s mainframe computers would help to confer credibility on his theory.

Another landmark would be the publication in 1967 by Professor Alexander Thom of his thirty years of detailed surveys at stone circles. [7] Hawkins also drew on some of Thom's earlier work. [8] While contemporary archaeologists were quite open to the idea of crude horizon alignments for religious ritual they would balk at the suggestion of ancient science. Thom's surveys also introduced the concept of a 'megalithic yard' and other standard units of measure. These ideas were easier to grasp than his astronomy and thereby easier to criticise. Once the various critics could unpick one part of his theory it could be used to discredit the remainder.

A short but still excellent booklet on Stonehenge archaeoastronomy from the same era is that by C.A. Newham, dating from 1972; although it follows the pre-radiocarbon dating assumptions it contains numerous diagrams illustrating the alignments. [9] His personal correspondence with Hawkins was cited in *Stonehenge Decoded* and his astronomy also influenced later archaeoastronomers. Newham interpreted the rings of Y and Z pits as marking the 59 days of two lunar months (29+30).

On the matter of the 56 Aubrey Holes, Newham asked: why 56 holes? His suggestion was that:

*...56 is almost three times the years taken to complete the retrograde nodal cycle of the moon ( $3 \times 18.61 = 55.83$ )*

This numerical coincidence was employed by Hawkins and Hoyle in support of their own theories that Stonehenge was a practical eclipse observatory (eclipses occur when sun and moon meet at the nodes). Now there is nothing wrong with this astronomy; Newham himself never refers to eclipses beyond his simple comment. Moreover, there is no mention in the surviving classical references to suggest that the stone circle builders concerned themselves with eclipses. Newham and those who cited him were prevented by contemporary dogma from making any link between the astronomy of the Stonehenge builders and that of the later 'Celtic' Druids.

The eminent astrophysicist Sir Fred Hoyle would follow the same route as Hawkins in trying to show that the 56 Aubrey holes were a device to predict the chances of an eclipse. [10] His theory would have the ancients rolling a boulder from one Aubrey marker to the next every 6.5 days to record precisely where they were in the nodal cycle. One wonders what might transpire if the astronomer-priest forgot to move the stone? Perhaps he would be consigned to the wicker man. Hoyle's eminence in other fields (he originated the theory of nucleosynthesis in stars) allowed him to easily gain publication of a book on subjects other than his own. His numerous equations and emphasis on ancient 'pure' science only added to the scepticism of the archaeologists and it is perhaps understandable that they stood back from it all. The complex theories of eclipse prediction would lead everyone in the wrong direction.

### **Druids and 'Celts'**

As an indicator of how attitudes to stone circles and the Druids were perceived in the 1960s we need look no further than the summary included in the *Stonehenge Official Handbook* by archaeologist R.S. Newall, as published by HMSO. [11] This booklet was on sale to visitors between 1959 and the 1990s. In the opening paragraph we find:

*The average visitor to Stonehenge will in all likelihood have been taught that Stonehenge was built by the Druids. You can clear your mind of this statement...*

*The ancient Druids had no connection with Stonehenge or any other monument of the Bronze Age or, indeed of any earlier period in the British Isles. No doubt they pretended that they had, or even that they built it. They were a class of people who no doubt had a good deal of knowledge, they came to Britain during the early Iron Age invasions in about the third century before Christ.*

So, there you have it, articulated as 'official' government science. Where did the author obtain this disparaging view of Druids and the archaeological dogma that he summarises? The scepticism stems from the 1950s excavations of Stuart Piggott and the earlier generation of archaeologists such as Atkinson, back in the era when the stone circles were dated via pottery cross-dating. Stonehenge was then perceived as contemporary with Mycenaean Greece. The primitive Britons (the pre-Celts) supposedly remained in the stone age while the eastern Mediterranean had advanced to using bronze. Even when radiocarbon dating and tree-ring calibration revised the date of the monuments to a thousand years earlier, the dogma about an Iron Age invasion of 'Celts' persisted. This artificial divide stretches back to nineteenth century scholarship; it would endure until the early twenty-first century when DNA studies began to show that there never was a distinct Celtic race nor an Iron Age invasion. These false doctrines would forbid any comparison of Neolithic astronomical alignments with the Druid astronomy that we find in Greek, Roman and other historical sources.

DNA studies now suggest that the substantial immigration of British population actually took place during the early neolithic and again in the later neolithic. [12] Once you disprove the idea of an invading ‘Celtic’ race then you must at the same time invalidate the concept of pre-Celts. We may now consider an uninterrupted evolution of people and culture from the era when the stone circles were built, right through to the Roman invasions.

One contributor who could never be accused of Stonehenge blindness was the late Euan MacKie. As an archaeologist of note his views were influenced by ideas wider than just field excavations. He was not afraid to cite the archaeoastronomers, or even occasionally the adherents of Velikovsky and Ley Lines. In one of his later papers are a few pointed remarks about his fellow archaeologists. [13] Some are worthy of quote in this context:

*Thom’s work, which is now rarely considered in publications, and his conclusions are generally thought too weighty for the evidence he assembled.*

He was also not afraid to criticise his own over-enthusiasm for the concept of stone age science:

*The author also has to take some of the blame; the title of his book—Science and Society in Prehistoric Britain (MacKie 1977)—obviously perpetuated the myth and was ill chosen. [14]*

*...the underlying reason for the doubts about Thom’s accurate long alignment hypothesis seems to have been forgotten, and Clive Ruggles, Gordon Barclay, and Mike Pitts, for example, continue to criticize this and related concepts...*

*...the author had already, several years earlier, abandoned as misguided the idea of “prehistoric science” and admitted that the possible parallel drawn with the Maya in 1977 had gone too far (MacKie 1977:341, including footnotes 2 and 3).*

Although MacKie may have ventured too far in daring to actually publish the parallel with Mayan astronomy in 1977 the comparison itself is not outrageous.

*As a professional archaeologist who has been actively involved in this field since 1969 (and who trained in the late 1950s), I remain convinced that precision alignments exist, that this existence (pace Ruggles) has been confirmed by several objective and convincing fieldwork tests, and that there is other quite independent archaeological evidence for the presence in Neolithic times (broadly the 5th and 4th millennia BCE) of an elite class with advanced astronomical and geometrical and measuring skills.*

And touching upon the subject of Druids:

*...the time gap between our hypothetical prehistoric priesthood and the well-described orders of Druids in the Iron Age has been reduced to not much more than a thousand years. Classical sources from several centuries BCE tell us that the Druids had extensive knowledge of cosmology and astronomy, and it now seems to the author even more likely that this priestly class was directly descended from the European Neolithic orders...*

Note that MacKie, writing this in 2006 still did not dare to make the direct link to ‘Celtic’ Druids as the guardians of the ancient knowledge, due to the entrenched dogma about invading Celts that was so difficult to overcome.

The archaeologists, whom MacKie would politely criticise, were the ‘establishment’ of his day who were deemed somehow qualified to define what should be considered orthodox prehistory and what should not, by virtue of their skill to classify the artefacts that survive in the ground. The primitive Britons were only to be allowed to scatter bones and pottery around; these were the ‘beaker folk’ and the ‘Rinyo-Clacton-ware folk’, etc – not real, thinking, people!

It is troubling therefore to find a modern archaeologist such as Darvill still considering the builders of Stonehenge as perhaps influenced by the solar calendars of Egypt. To quote again:

*Archaeologically, the question is whether the Egyptian Civil Calendar, or a variation thereof, could have been known to communities living in southern Britain in the mid-third millennium BC, and adopted by them. Barely a century ago, the answer would have been resoundingly affirmative (e.g., Childe 1929). As diffusionist models crumbled and connections between the Mediterranean world and Northern Europe were systematically uncoupled to emphasise autonomous local development (Renfrew 1973: 84–108), such thinking became deeply unfashionable. Now, however, the pendulum of interpretation is swinging back in favour of long-distance contacts and extensive social networks.*

This seems to have prompted the amusing headline in a British newspaper: “*Mystery of Stonehenge ‘solved’ as ancient Egyptians used it for solar calendar, expert claims*”. It seems modern archaeologists still cannot bring themselves to utter the words ‘Stonehenge’ and ‘Druid’ in the same context. Among the Neolithic British and Irish were the forbears of Newton, Halley, Hoyle and James Clerk Maxwell; they possessed their own astronomers every bit as capable as those in Babylon or Egypt.

### **Naked-Eye Astronomy**

Those who take little interest in astronomy often fail to appreciate that observation of the night sky is *not* difficult. To give a real example: every year around 20–21 March at the spring equinox, the sun rises behind a terraced house opposite my own and around 6 AM it shines through a window down a long corridor and illuminates a painting on the far wall. Pure coincidence! It will do exactly the same thing next year. All I would need to do to calculate the number of days in the solar year is to mark-off the days, Robinson Crusoe style, until the same alignment comes round again. It’s not rocket science. Perhaps I should call the neighbours in for a breakfast party and make it a ‘Festival of Apollo’!

These simple personal observations of the sky are one reason why I recoil at academic suggestions that ancient astronomer-priests, druids, or call-them-what-you-like, needed to build grandiose stone monuments solely to define the annual calendar and its ritual observances. An architectural comparison with the east-west alignment of the medieval cathedrals, or the oculus of the Roman Pantheon would be a much better analogy.

Ancient people could easily discover and rediscover solar alignments quite by chance as pointers to seasonal events. Long before the advent of farming the hunter gatherer needed to be ready for the migrations of wild animals and seasonal vegetation. They would then, for practical reasons, need to divide the year into smaller units. The recurrence of the lunar phases is an obvious sub-division. Does it really matter that the periods of sun and moon are not commensurate? For practical purposes, no. Why should it have concerned ancient people? It is just another fact of nature. The moon wanders through the modern Julio-Gregorian calendar and we schedule its phases easily enough. Why did archaeologists ever deny that stone age people were capable of such practical forward planning?

In the ancient calendars of India, the months of the year are determined not by the phase of the moon rather by its location. The zodiacal ‘constellations’ through which the moon passes hold more importance than its phase. The sky is no mystery for the diligent naked-eye astronomer. Every modern amateur astronomer knows which constellation will be visible in the south at a particular season. Even at the age of eight I recall waiting for a fine summer night so that I could see *Antares*; and that it was only possible to view *Fomalhaut* just above the southern horizon on a few clear nights in September. [\*Note 2] It is then a simple matter to align two wooden posts as a reminder where to look next year, or to align two stones so that their children and grandchildren don’t have to think it all out again. Why has it been so difficult for archaeologists to admit that ancient druids and shamans could have preserved such basic calendrical knowledge?

Once we remove the artificial barriers then we have all the information that we need from the ancient literary sources to work-out what our ancestors were actually doing. *The information has always been there*, except that the archaeologists would dismiss any historical sources that did not fit their preconceptions.

## The Historical References

The first piece of testimony to consider is the quotation of **Hecataeus** (c.330 BC) as paraphrased by Diodorus Siculus, which describes the festivals of the *Hyperboreans* on ‘*an island beyond the Celts*’. [Diodorus Siculus, II, 47] This large island, beyond the Celts, could only refer to either Britain or Ireland. There are no others. Diodorus describes a ‘*magnificent sacred precinct of Apollo*’ and a ‘*temple of the spheres*’; he tells us that the priests, the *Boreadae*, understood the nineteen-year cycle of Meton and that the god Apollo (a solar deity) visited the island every nineteen years.

However, it is anomalous that while the Meton cycle is a repeating lunisolar cycle (235 lunar months equate closely to 19 solar years) it is described rather as: ‘*the period in which the return of the stars to the same place in the heavens is accomplished*’. This does not define the Meton cycle. Rather than a calendar cycle it would seem to be describing the orbit of a superior planet around the zodiac.

Even Gerald Hawkins quoted Diodorus Siculus for his book *Stonehenge Decoded* back in the 1960s, in support of his eclipse theories (page 165). However, nothing in the passage actually suggests eclipses. For Hawkins and others, the spherical temple was a clear reference to Stonehenge or one of the other stone circles.

The Hyperboreans have long been derided by classical scholars as purely mythical, citing earlier authorities who sought to relegate them to the frozen north, or beyond the Urals where they could safely be ignored. It simply was not convenient for archaeologists to find Hyperboreans among the stone-age Britons; and of course, the *Boreadae* could not be equated with the Druids because the stone circles long predated the supposed Celtic invasions. These artificial barriers are now lifted.

**Herodotus** (c.450 BC) preserves that the Hyperboreans maintained contact since the most ancient times with the priests of Apollo in Athens and Delos, sending two girls and their attendants with offerings via the Adriatic Sea – thus giving us a further clue whence they came. (*Herodotus IV, 33*) These visitors arrived *from the northwest*, whereas visitors from ‘Scythia’ or central Asia would have arrived via the Black Sea.

As a parallel aside, genealogists note the presence of the E3b gene in the North Wales region of Abergele and the Great Orme copper mines, which find their closest equivalent in populations around Greece and the Aegean coast of Turkey, but strongest in Albania and the Adriatic islands. [15] This may offer confirmation that Bronze Age colonists voyaged from Greece to North Wales in the Late Neolithic, probably seeking tin and copper. In the later Iron Age and Roman times, the Island of Anglesey was the cult centre of the Druids. [*Tacitus Annals, XIV, 30*] The importance of this connection has always been denied because most of the Roman accounts describe only the Druids of Gaul. Archaeologists therefore maintained that Druidism came into Britain along with the supposed invasion of Iron Age Celts, ignoring the very clear statement by **Julius Caesar** that the druidic system originated in Britain and was only later introduced into Gaul. [*Gallic War VI, 13*] Now that DNA evidence has removed the Celtic-invasion fallacy, we may see more clearly that the British Druids were a local evolution from a much older shamanist priesthood.

Another valuable clue offered by Caesar, citing lost literary sources, was that the gods of the Celts (specifically of the Gauls) were essentially the same deities as those worshipped by the Greeks and Romans. [*Gallic War VI, 17*] Again, this valuable remark has always been dismissed by archaeologists because it did not fit their orthodox view of barbarian Celts and pre-Celts.

The Roman author **Pomponius Mela** [*De Chorographica, III, 2, 18-19*] informs us that the Druids possessed extraordinary astronomical wisdom, notwithstanding the undoubted cruelty of some of their ceremonies. He says that they claimed, “*to know the size and shape of the world and the motion of the stars and the heavens*”. They were forbidden to commit this knowledge to writing.

From the Roman encyclopaedist **Pliny**, we gain the further insight that the Druids used a lunar calendar and also used the moon to map time in longer 30-year ‘ages’ or *saeculi*. [*Natural History XVI, 250*] **Plutarch** provides the extra data that Britons in the Western Isles would wait thirty years for Saturn to return to Taurus, in order to schedule sea voyages to the ancient oracle of Cronus. [*The Face in the Moon, 941*] These two historical references together confirm that the Britons were carefully observing the 30-year geocentric orbit of Saturn – and they were doing-so as far back in prehistory as you wish to place the era of Cronus and the other Titans. In 30 solar years Saturn makes 29 geocentric orbits in our sky, thus “returning to the same place in the heavens”. Plutarch’s evidence gives us the further clue that the starting point for each 30-year cycle was the constellation Taurus, probably the Pleiades.

$$29 \text{ Saturn synodic periods} = 29 \times 378.09292 = 10964.694 \text{ days} = 30.02 \text{ solar years}$$

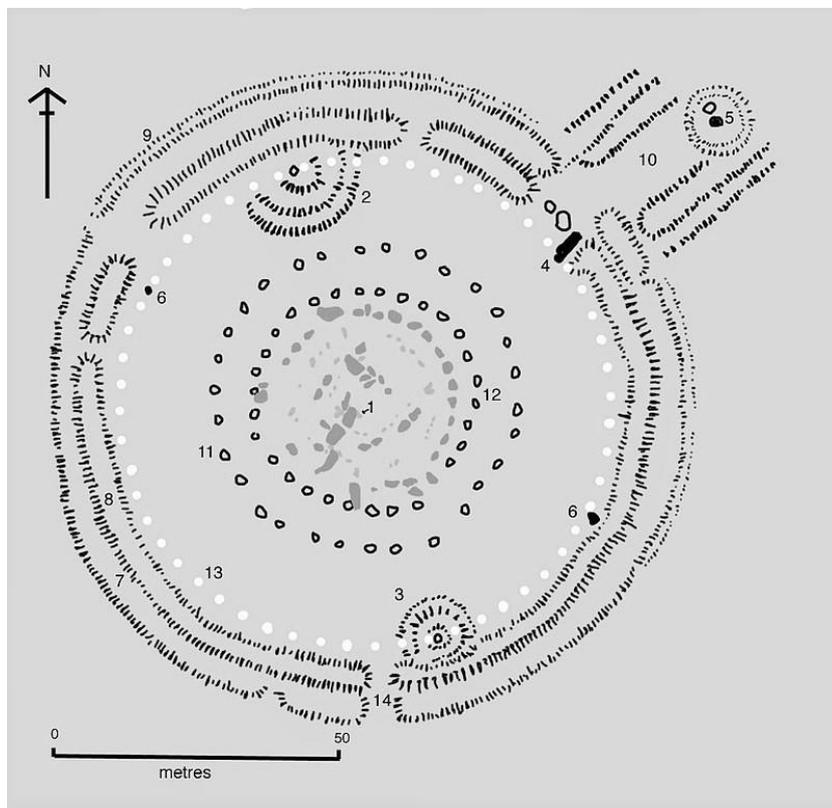
The link between Saturn and the Moon is also evident at Stonehenge. We may see that 56 synodic periods of Saturn equate to 717 lunar months.

$$\begin{aligned} 717 \text{ lunar months} &= 717 \times 29.530598 = 21173.43 \text{ days} = 57.97 \text{ solar years} \\ 56 \text{ synodic periods} &= 56 \times 378.09292 = 21173.2 \text{ days} = (\text{approx. } 58 \text{ years}) \end{aligned}$$

After 59 years and 57 synodic orbits a solar correspondence occurs. Saturn returns to its starting point precisely two days later in the solar year.

$$\begin{aligned} 59 \text{ solar years} &= 59 \times 365.2422 = 21549.29 \text{ days} \\ 57 \text{ synodic periods} &= 57 \times 378.09292 = 21551.29 \text{ days} \end{aligned}$$

These astronomical correspondences when meshed with the lunisolar cycle could therefore be used to refine the calendar to an accuracy that would not be achieved again until the Gregorian reform. We may not know the original application of the 56 Aubrey Holes, but this numerical correspondence cannot be mere coincidence. We may deduce that Stonehenge was originally built as a temple to the god Cronus, visible in the sky as the planet Saturn.



### Stonehenge in its Landscape

Drawing by Adamsan - Cleal, Walker, & Montague, (London, English Heritage 1995) Pitts, M, Hengeworld (London, Arrow 2001)

Click on the diagram for a link and the full key.

11 = 30 Y-holes

12 = 29 Z-holes

13 = 56 Aubrey holes

Although it is the standing stones that attract the eye, it is the rings of chalk-filled holes that reveal the link between Saturn and the Moon.

Returning to the significance of the 29 Z-holes and the 30 Y-holes. We may see that these could mark the 29 orbits of Saturn in 30 years rather than (or in addition to) signifying the days of lunar months. *No horizon alignment of sarsens is required.* The Saturn correspondences may be deduced from the calendar alone without the need to build stone circles. The solar alignments may be seen as mere architectural design features incorporated into the structure by clever architects applying knowledge that was already ancient. The argument that the Aubrey Holes and the Y/Z holes date from non-contemporaneous elements of the monument is also no obstacle as it only requires the continuous application of a very ancient lunisolar calendar. The significance of the concordance between Saturn and the moon every 56 orbits could only have been appreciated by a society that employed an accurate lunar calendar and who religiously observed Saturn over more than a human lifetime.

Following modern DNA science, we no longer have any impediment to recognising that druidic astronomy, as it was recorded by the Roman writers, was inherited from the practical astronomy of the stone circle builders. It doesn't matter whether you want to call these Neolithic astronomer-priests 'proto-druids' or by some other name.

### **The Calendar of Coligny**

We also have evidence of the accurate luni-solar calendar against which the Druids could schedule the appearances of Saturn. In 1897 fragments of a Gaulish calendar plaque were unearthed at Coligny in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region of France. Specialists have reconstructed the Coligny Calendar as a five-year cycle of lunar months. In addition to a year of twelve alternating 29- and 30-day months we see two intercalary months inserted at the start and in the middle of the third year; and evidence of a variable month (equivalent to our modern February) which must be present if the days are to be held to the solar year. However, a 5-year cycle alone simply does not work as a lunisolar calendar; it does not repeat and an error soon accumulates.

As I have shown in various books and articles when combined with a hypothetical 6-year cycle then the 5-year Coligny cycle becomes a repeating 11-year lunisolar cycle with 4 intercalary months. [16 & 17] This was the neolithic calendar that the Druids inherited and against which they could schedule the orbit of Saturn over its longer 30-year 'ages'. [18] It doesn't really matter how you wish to arrange the days of the months: whether to hold them to the solar year, or to the moon, or to Saturn's rhythm. For example, every fourth year we *could* insert a 32<sup>nd</sup> of March instead of a 29<sup>th</sup> of February and our modern Gregorian calendar would still function. However, we may see from analysis of the Coligny fragments combined with the information supplied by Pliny that in its later form it was intended as a lunisolar calendar. [19]

This 11-year calendar cycle is ancient. It is not 'Celtic'. **Plato** also mentions alternating 5- and 6-year ceremonial periods associated with an ancient civilisation of the Atlantic coast. [*Critias 119*] Consider this for a moment: *this cannot just be a numerical coincidence.* If you follow the logic then the 5+6 calendar must be at least as old as the mid-Neolithic; if you want to take Plato more literally then it would be even older. However, even to mention Plato will have the establishment archaeologists running for somewhere to hide.

You don't have to accept everything that Plato offers in order to believe that knowledge of an ancient European calendar could have been preserved in the Egyptian Temple of Neit dating back to the fourth millennium BC. The reference to an alternating cycle of 5 and 6 years seems to have languished in the ancient Egyptian source, without either Plato, Solon, or the Egyptian priests of Neit recognizing it as a working calendar. Again, it fails on the dismissive mindset of university scholarship towards legends and ancient history. We see clear indication here of an archaic astronomy, overlooked by archaeologists for so long because it did not fit with the picture of the past that they had been taught. This is why we must always build from the most ancient sources rather than following the trail of modern excavations and published papers.

It is also pertinent to ask *why* the astronomer-priests of the Neolithic found it so vital to set astronomical alignments in stone to establish the vagaries of the calendar. The earliest aligned monuments were clearly *practical* observatories rather than community religious sites. After all, not many of the congregation could fit inside the Newgrange passage for a religious ceremony! I have offered elsewhere the most likely reasons why such precocious astronomy arose in the years around 3000 BC. [20]

Is it the function of modern archaeologists to take forward our knowledge of prehistory or is their role to hold us back? The perception remains that only artefacts dug from the ground may constitute evidence of the past and that archaeologists are entitled to *own* prehistory. It was an infuriating attitude fifty years ago and it is just as annoying today. It is certainly not the intention here to be critical of those field archaeologists who produce the primary excavation evidence for others to use. However, it would be progress if they would show equal respect for the historians, astronomers and mythographers who also seek to discover what our ancestors were doing. It would be so much better if they had not squandered half a century to acknowledge that ancient Europeans were capable of basic naked-eye astronomy.

### **Conclusions**

The complex stone circles and passage graves were not necessary to devise a practical calendar. We may see that the earliest aligned monuments dating from the late fourth millennium BC (the Stonehenge 1 era) had a practical purpose for observing both the seasonal variations and the thirty-year cycle of Saturn/Cronus; but by the later Iron Age these astronomical alignments had become ritualised in religious observances. Later generations forgot their original purpose.

With the arrival of the immigrants from the Steppes in the early third millennium BC, commonly known as the Beaker People, the older British population were absorbed and chased out to the western fringes – but the astronomical wisdom of the Druids was respected and adopted. Many of the ancient ritual sites were rebuilt to serve the religious rites of the newcomers. We see this in the remodelling that accompanied Stonehenge phases 2 and 3. The older religion of the god Cronus seems to have persisted alongside a newer ‘Solar’ religion based on Apollo and the other Titans, with the older beliefs surviving most strongly in the Scottish Isles right up to Roman times.

We may view the evolution of a temple associated with the visible gods in the sky as analogous to the addition of minarets to a former church by the Muslims, or the building of a Christian cathedral in the middle of a converted mosque, as in Seville. Whenever early Christian missionaries wished to convert pagans, they would usurp and rededicate their temples; and thus redirect the congregation to the new beliefs. The remodelling of Stonehenge in the Late Neolithic to its extant form (Stonehenge 2 and 3 eras) is just another example of religious conversion. The incoming ‘beaker people’ from the east wished to convert the temple from the older beliefs based on Saturn/Cronus, to their own religion based on Apollo. The ‘new testament’ was metaphorically added to the old!

Perhaps now we may progress to consider *why* Neolithic people developed such a precocious interest in astronomy in the early third millennium BC, which drove them to build so many aligned stone circles and passage graves; and why this excellence seems to have been lost again by historical times.

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### **\*Note 1**

Reverend Gidley, citing Welsh sources, remarked on p 69 of the links between the Druids and the Phoenicians, saying “*Saturn therefore appears to have been the planet which Phoenicians and Druids most highly revered*”. Gerald Hawkins investigated Gidley’s suggestion but thought only in terms of horizon alignments to Saturn, declaring that he found none.

## \*Note 2

I recall these dates exactly because it was the NASA Mercury and Gemini missions that stimulated my own schoolboy interest in astronomy. My copy of *Stonehenge Decoded* is of a similar vintage. I have been studying these matters, on and off, for quite a long time!

## Relevant Hyperlinks

[https://www.academia.edu/38485311/Review\\_of\\_Dublin\\_conference\\_Pathways\\_to\\_the\\_cosmos](https://www.academia.edu/38485311/Review_of_Dublin_conference_Pathways_to_the_cosmos)  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/keeping-time-at-stonehenge/792A5E8E091C8B7CB9C26B4A35A6B399>  
<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/mystery-of-stonehenge-solved-as-ancient-egyptians-used-it-for-solar-calendar-expert-claims/ar-AAAYHpMd?ocid=msedgdhp&pc=ENTPSP&cvid=f6ce2f87e51e4e3fa36e831f07a8006a>  
<http://www.sci-news.com/archaeology/stonehenge-solar-calendar-10598.html>  
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