

EXCAVATIONS AT CUSH

(Special to the "Limerick Leader")



The attention of Mr. Sean P. O'Riordain, of the National Museum, was first drawn to this site by the papers of the late Mr. T. J. Westropp, and having inspected it, he concluded that the group was without parallel in the country, and would repay excavation. As we will see, his conclusion was justified.

Mr. Westropp always referred to this site as Temair Ereann, and while Mr. O'Riordain was not directly concerned with this aspect, it may interest local readers to examine the question.

ASSEMBLY PLACE AND SANCTUARY

Temair Ereann was the assembly place and sanctuary of the Ernai, the people who dominated Munster until displaced by the Eoganacht about the 3rd century A.D. The 10th century poet, Mac Craith, states in his topographical poem (*Metrical Dind Shenchas Vol. X.*) that every outstanding person of the Ernai, except Curol, was reputed to have a grave on Cenn Febrat. The "great hill of Sliabh Riach" has at the Kilfinane end Bealach Febrat, called after the same Ernean hero. His slayer, Cain, gives its other name to the mountain, "Sliabh Riach alias Sliabh Cain" (*Onomasticon*): Further evidence of the location of this mountain may be found in the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, who viewed it from Ardpatrik. Also in *Silva Gadelica*, *Agallamh na Seanorach*, we find an account of St. Patrick's journey as follows:—*Is ann sin tainic Patraic roime ocus is i slige thainic. ocus do leim in fheinnea. Ocus d'aenach Cuile mna Nechtain re nabar aenach setach senchlochair. Ocus do chenn shebrat sleibe cain bud dhes. Ocus do thulaigh na feinne re nabar ard Patraic isin tan so.*

From these descriptions it would appear that the Cush group is the Ernai sanctuary.

WHAT EXCAVATED SITE CONTAINS.

The site excavated contains 3 tumuli and 6 conjoined ring forts, these last connected with a rectangular enclosure, consisting of a ditch and bank. Four of these forts have been completely excavated, one incompletely. In each of them, except the last, was found a souterrain, such structures being common, not only in Ireland, but also in Cornwall and Scotland. Numerous cremated burials, Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, of various types, have been found. The position of one of

these burials, in an urn of the Late Bronze Age, shows that it took place after a souterrain, now collapsed, had gone out of use. This is a most important discovery in prehistoric chronology. This urn was placed upright, unprotected, by any cist. Another burial nearby was in a very beautiful urn, inverted, and in a stone cist. The 3 further burials had each some individual difference. In addition to these, which were in one fort, were found others; one in a long cist grave, and a small cist grave, outside the forts, which contained cremated bones and 2 small food vessels with unusual ornamentation.

HOUSE SITES.

Excavation also revealed house sites, the ground plan of which might be plainly seen from the position of the post holes. These houses, again, were of various types and dates; one showing where the lower parts of the walls were of stone, another with walls of wattle and daub. In one was a large rectangular floor of packed clay and gravel. Two of the tumuli contained simple burials, where the cremated remains were found on the former ground surface, having had the tumuli built over them. In one was found a small bone plaque, with *La Tene* decoration, comparatively late in period, being just before the Christian Era.

The third tumulus contained a burial in an encrusted urn, which had unfortunately been broken, and most of the pieces removed, when the tumulus was opened in 1924.

NUMEROUS QUERN STONES.

The finding of numerous quern stones showed that the inhabitants were agriculturalists, which was further proved by aerial photographs taken by the Army Air Force. These photographs show traces of two distinct field systems, the first found in Ireland. Those of the higher contours, above 1,000 feet, show parallel stone lines, while the lower levels near the ring forts are earthen banks. Their position in relation to the forts and resemblance in constructive details show that they are contemporaneous.

From the foregoing we find that whether the site is Temair Ereann or not, it is a most important one in archaeological research, showing, as it does, continuous occupation during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.