

A Dancing at the roundabouts



According to legend the County Wicklow stone circle at Athgreany, known as the Piper's Stones, is so called because the dancers (the stones of the circle) were turned to stone for dancing to the tune of the piper (an outlying granite boulder decorated with cupmarks) on the Sabbath. The few stone circles which have been excavated have produced very little evidence for their purpose, and though a central burial was found at Drombeg, Co. Cork, it seems highly unlikely that this was intended as the only

function of the circle. Several stone circles, including the Piper's Stones and Drombeg, appear to have had lunar or solar alignments, but what other ceremonies or rituals could have taken place at these monuments?

Traditions of dancing at stone circles are not simply recent folklore. The twelfth-century Norman chronicler Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), in his *History and topography of Ireland*, recorded the contemporary belief in Britain and Ireland that the great stone circle at Stonehenge was brought from Africa to Ireland

and erected near Naas, Co. Kildare, before being brought to southern England. This stone circle was then known as the Giants' Dance. Is it possible that such traditions preserve the memory of a ceremony of dancing, as well as other rituals, which took place at stone circles? If so, what archaeological evidence of dancing could we ever expect to find at such sites? I doubt that future archaeological excavations of a 1950s Irish crossroads would produce any evidence of dancing.

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