

## **Carrowmenagh, Ireland, standing stone: 'Old Woman of the Sea: war crushes us'**

Stuart Harris, May 2013, Ballycastle

Out of 40,000 ring forts in Ireland, only one at Carrowmenagh left a written record of war, a secret message embedded in the decoration of a standing stone in a field called 'graveyard'.

The scribe wrote not in Latin or Hebrew or Basque or Gaelic or English any Indo European language, nor used easily recognized letters from Latin, Greek, Hebrew or even Ogham. Thus the gravestone escaped destruction by priests vigilant against heresy.

Instead, the scribe wrote in Finnish, a language even learned monks did not know, in an ancient script called Old European that died out millennia earlier. These letters the scribe arranged to look like an Irish Cross, an expression of piety, which only close inspection would reveal to be a message. This cross is not about Christ or Mary, but a prayer to the mother goddess Akka, revered by the earliest mammoth hunters.

Ireland's most northern cliff is Malin Head on the Inishown Peninsula of County Donegal. Fifteen miles southeast along the coast lies the small townland of Carrowmenagh, or Carromena, triangle-shaped, 3 miles long by 1 mile wide with 701 acres plus 102 acres in the Hill. In Gaelic, Ceathru Meanach means 'middle quarterland'. Cattle and sheep are its only industry, plus one pub and a B&B.

Carrowmenagh has neither church, Parochial House nor Parish Hall. Rock walls enclose the many fields, some of which date to the Bronze Age. The land below the village is arable, while that above the village is not. On the poorer upland, generations of tenants have cut peat and grazed sheep and cattle. In 1659, the entire townland had only 10 farmhouses in which lived about 60 people, averaging 80 acres per farm. In 1901, 132 people lived in 32 houses, lowering the average to 25 acres per farm. Over the next century, population declined to 83, whose 28 tenants share tarbury<sup>1</sup> and grazing rights, averaging 29 acres each, half the national average.

An old road connects Shrove to the south with Malin Head to the north. The original track passed beside a ring fort a kilometer northeast of Carrowmenagh, on top of a slope beyond the boundary creek, with a good view of the sea, mountains and pastures. Although demolished, the ring fort still rises six feet above the surrounding pasture land. One stone wall remains, the rest scavenged to make dry walls. A number of large cut stones lie scattered about. To increase pasture land, the road was re-routed over the ring fort. After years of neglect, this roadway was cleared, walls repaired and a wee pedestrian footbridge built across the boundary stream.

Most ring forts in Ireland date from 550 AD to 900 AD, the lawless centuries after Rome abandoned England, so this ring fort likely dates to the same period. The absence of buildings outside these ring forts indicates that the entire population lived within the walls for protection. Later farmers robbed stones from the ring fort to make dry walls, making it difficult to identify their structure.

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<sup>1</sup> Tarbury is the right of tenants to dig peat for fuel, which practice was outlawed by the European Union in 1999 but persists anyway. In 2006, out of 139 protected bogs, 117 were being cut for peat with mechanical harvesters. In 2011 the EU issued an ultimatum to cease and desist.

Figure 1 General location of Carrowmenagh ring fort and standing stone. The road passes beside Tremone Bar in Carrowmenagh.



Figure 2 Carrowmenagh ring fort straddles the road on top of a rise west of the boundary stream. The standing stone is about half way between the boundary stream and the next farm.



Figure 3 Ordnance Survey Map does not show the ring fort.



Figure 4 A restored ring fort in Co. Kerry had stone ring walls and stone cellar walls. Houses were built of wood.



Near the ring fort is a field named *Leachtar*, meaning 'graveyard field'. Within this field stood a gravestone, called Drumaville Cross Slab. To make the stone easier to view, the owner moved the stone to the road that passes through the ring fort, placing it against the northern rock wall, at 55.264847N, 07.076608W. The inscription is still legible, so perhaps the stone lay face down for some period of time.

Figure 5 Close up of Carrowmenagh standing stone with inscription.



The inscription on the standing stone is Finnish, written in Old European. Other inscriptions in Old European decorate the walls of New Grange, from 5000 years ago. Masons who came from Europe to build cathedrals knew this language, but knowledge ended with the last phase of cathedral building circa 1200 AD. Irish monks did not understand the language, nor could they write in Old European, but someone within the settlement could. The inscription is elegant; ostensibly it resembles a Celtic Cross to pass Church inspection, but secretly it contains a prayer to the Old Woman of the Sea.

The central image is a cross and circle, formed by the letters A and ME. Normally a Celtic Cross reads *Ave Meria*, pronounced while moving the right hand to form a cross, 'Hail Mary, full of grace' But in this case the cross and circle read *Akka Merin* meaning 'Old Woman of the Sea', an ancient deity found on Scandinavian petroglyphs of men in double-prowed boats, and retained in the flags of Nordic countries.

Figure 1: Mariner's Cross on petroglyphs of longboats from Sweden.



Painted on a pot in Rome, I found a four-line prayer to *Akka Merin*:

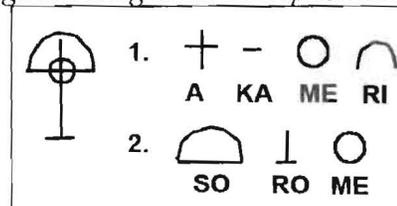
Old Woman of the Sea,  
 Old Woman of the Sea,  
 Old Woman of the Sea,  
 Bring my husband back to me. [or son or lover]

The inscription was meant to be chanted or sung in two different ways. Repeat the first line three times, like the prayer on the Roman pot.

- Letters A-KA spell *Akka* meaning 'Old Woman', the mother goddess. The next two letters, ME-RI spell *merin* meaning 'of the sea'.
- The second line, SO RO ME, spells *soa rouhii meiät* meaning 'war crushes us'.

Thus 'graveyard field' refers to those fallen in battle while defending the ring fort; their ashes may lie interred in the field.

Figure 6 Carrowmenagh standing stone inscription and two different readings.



**Translation**

Old European	Finnish	English
A-KA ME-RI,	Akka merin,	Old Woman of the Sea,
A-KA ME-RI,	Akka merin,	Old Woman of the Sea,
A-KA ME-RI,	Akka merin,	Old Woman of the Sea,
SO RO ME.	Soan rouhii meiät.	War crushes us.

**Notes on Translation**

A-KA < *akka* 'woman, old woman'. A short line in Old European is KA, normally vertical, but occasionally horizontal. If the short line had crossed the vertical stem of A, it would have become a completely different letter.

ME-RI < *merin* 'of the sea'. Inscriptions normally read top to bottom, so RI would have preceded ME, but in this case, it shows that the correct way to write the inscription is to first complete the cross and circle, then add the arch on top.

SO < *soan* 'war, battle', could also be *soa*.

RO < *rouhii* 'it crushes', as in grinding grain. Could also be past tense *rouhi* 'it crushed', but then would be history rather than a prayer for help.

ME < *meiät* 'us'

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