



The geoglyph known as the Long Man on the summer solstice of 2023
Photo by Hugh Newman

Recognizing the Long Man of Wilmington

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In June 2023 came the announcement of a discovery in England at the landscape effigy known as the Long Man of Wilmington. Apparently without academic support, researcher Stuart Mason observed on the occasion of the summer solstice a significant particularity of the site. Specifically, Mason noted that the monumental geoglyph was balanced between the rising and setting of the solstice Sun. Although this balance might be interpreted as an accident of the figure's location upon a slope that faces north, a further aspect of its positioning is somewhat more special. The giant effigy actually remains in direct sunlight during Midsummer, whereas the topography of the surrounding landscape does not allow for this phenomenon during the rest of the year. The announcement of this discovery therefore offered that the Long Man may be a "solstice marker" and suggested that the iconic figure, assumed to be holding a staff in each hand, represents a prehistoric surveyor of the landscape.¹

¹ Hugh Newman made this announcement principally through his "Megalithomania" YouTube channel, an incomparable resource featuring aerial photography that covers the latest research into megalithic science.

This last notion is not new, since it was first made by Alfred Watkins a century ago. Watkins was the researcher responsible for the term “ley” that he applied to the landscape alignments described in *The Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites and Mark Stones* of 1925. For Watkins, place-names provided indications of the ancient knowledge he was seeking. Besides “ley,” he emphasized the recurrence of the word “dod,” which among other things designates the snail. In addition to including the Long Man upon a ley line, Watkins fixed upon the effigy as a depiction of a “Dodman” who he imagined would carry surveying staves like the antennae of a snail. Disregarding this admittedly rather fanciful interpretation, contemporary scholarship might consider classifying the Long Man of Wilmington as a variation of an ancient motif now known as the “Master of Animals,” but this terminology is meaningless here. In the absence of snails or any other animal, an accurate interpretation of the geoglyph has been lacking.



Ananda K. Coomaraswamy remains our best authority on the symbolism of traditional art, and in one of his several studies on the worldwide significance of the mythological Sundoor, a sketch is included that is clearly equivalent to the landscape effigy (at left). This sketch depicts symbolism best known through the story of Gilgamesh who reaches the gateway of the Sun, where scorpion-men guard the passage to the Land of Darkness. Coomaraswamy explains that these guardians are often enough replaced by serpents in other depictions of this theme. Here a solar hero grasps the jambs of the gateway itself, and so Coomaraswamy offers: “An equation of the animated door-posts with the snakes that protect them will hardly surprise us.”² The Long Man of Wilmington may not hold the tools of an ancient craft, then, but rather the posts of a gateway.

In order to properly evaluate the relevance of this evidence from Mesopotamia, we should recall an important comment made by John Michell: “The science of the megalith builders was evidently of the magical variety, as practiced by the Chaldeans

² *Guardians of the Sundoor: Late Iconographic Essays and Drawings of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, edited by Robert A. Strom, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2004, page 50.

and studied by Pythagoras..."³ René Guénon, to whom Coomaraswamy and Michell alike deferred in matters of traditional symbolism, explained the importance of the solstices among the followers of Pythagoras.⁴ Preserving a doctrine of great antiquity, the Pythagoreans regarded the solstices as solar "gateways" when souls enter and depart this world. More precisely, the summer solstice was the gateway of the Underworld for humanity in general, whereas the winter solstice was a celestial gateway reserved for the elect. It would appear that the Chaldeans were indeed the source of this doctrine that, while ignored by modern researchers, clearly informed the "science of the megalith builders," as even Stonehenge demonstrates.

What must be insisted here is that the characterization of the Long Man of Wilmington as a carefully placed "solstice marker" is in perfect accordance with the ancient iconography of the solar gateway that is on display.⁵ What is more, this accord extends to the larger landscape, for the surrounding hills are littered with barrows that testify to the belief in the summer solstice as the gateway for departing this world. The recent claim that the geoglyph is historical must therefore be discarded in favor of an estimate relevant to the prehistoric barrows; and even if the figure had been reconstructed in Stuart times, its ancient iconography would have been just as obscure then as it would be for Watkins. Still, local legend of a golden coffin buried beneath the figure⁶ suggests that the meaning of the geoglyph had not been entirely forgotten; at the very least, this legend preserves the association between the Sun – for gold is the metal of the Sun – and the fate of the dead. If it is determined in the future that the winter solstice Sun never reaches the Long Man of Wilmington, this would invite further considerations relating to the theme of the Land of Darkness.

Alfred Watkins admitted that the word "dod" had been conflated in the past with the word "dead," and so the name "Dodman" for the figure holding the gateway to the Land of the Dead is not entirely without significance. As for the original name of the Long Man, who has also been known as the "Green Man" of Wilmington, this has been lost to time, although Apollo who guided the Pythagoreans was also known to the Celts; and we know that in any case the role of a guide beyond death has been filled by various sacred figures in the succession of traditional worlds. It is, however, worth recalling that the teacher of Pythagoras among the Chaldeans was said to have been Hermes, in fact the "Second Hermes," and that Hermes was also a psychopomp or "soul guide." What is more, the "First Hermes" was none other than the antediluvian Idris, who is also

³ John Michell, *The Earth Spirit: Its Ways, Shrines and Mysteries*, Singapore: Thames and Hudson, 1975, page 92. In *Sacred Geography and the Paths of the Sun*, I addressed the role of Pythagoras in relation to the greatest of the so-called ley lines, the Axis of Saint Michael and of Apollo.

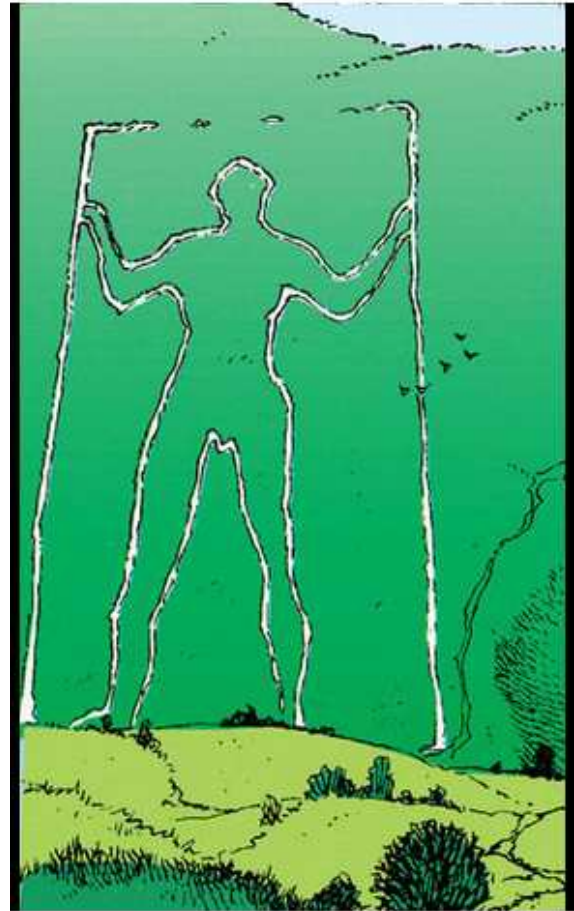
⁴ See the relevant articles collected in the section "Symbolism of the Forms of the Cosmos" in *Symbols of Sacred Science* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004).

⁵ This interpretation is supported by the existence of another landscape effigy, the Cerne Abbas giant in Dorset, whose club suggests the emblem of the solar hero Hercules. Soon after entering this world, the legendary Hercules held a deadly serpent in each hand just as the Long Man of Wilmington holds the jambs of the Sundoor.

⁶ Rob Wildwood, *Magical Britain: 650 Enchanted and Mystical Sites*, Bath: Wild Things Publishing, 2022, page 140.

remembered in British lore as a giant. Idris remains in Islamic esoterism a supreme spiritual authority beyond the reach of death at the domain of the Sun.⁷

The Long Man of Wilmington appears featureless, and so care must be taken in approaching his long-lost identity; we should therefore not overlook a recent strange appearance from the world of the imagination. In 1990, the creative team of Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess produced issue 19 of *The Sandman* that involves a performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* set specifically at the Long Man of Wilmington. Now, both Shakespeare and Gaiman would have been well aware of the Underworld significance of Midsummer, at least in connection with the Land of Faerie if not in terms of the Pythagorean journey of the dead; but the importance of Midsummer to this landscape was yet to be discovered. What is especially remarkable is that the Long Man of Wilmington serves in this story as the opener of the gate to the Underworld, and that he is shown by the artist holding the jambs of this gateway (at right). How is it possible that artistic inspiration anticipated so precisely a proper interpretation of the geoglyph that would have to wait until 2023? The only explanation depends upon the view defined by John Michell, that we are dealing here with a science "evidently of the magical variety."



Art by Charles Vess

⁷ On these forms of the Thrice-great Hermes and Idris in British lore, see "Idris in Wales" in *Guardians of the Heart: Essays in Sacred Geography* (Temple of Justice Books, 2022, page 70); on Idris and Elijah, as well as Saint John the Baptist whose feast is at the summer solstice, see *Alchemy in Middle-earth: The Significance of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings* (Temple of Justice Books, 2003).