

Nicholas Mann and Phillipa Glasson, THE STAR TEMPLE OF AVALON (Temple Publications, 2007).

What a year it is for Glastonbury. Three great books that transform the way we think about the town's prehistory, with this superb offering from Nicholas Mann and Phillipa Glasson being the third and final one. This book is a marvellous addition to every bookshelf, for it ignores the Glastonbury super legends in favour of unravelling its ancient astronomies based on the presence locally of a suspected community of astronomer-priests around 3000 BC. It was at this time that a phenomenon only recently recognised was celebrated for the first time - this being the sun's slow ascent up the eastern slopes of the Tor at midwinter, the transitional point of the year, when the dark days are once again overpowered by the return of the sun. Yet the bigger revelation is not itself this annual solar phenomenon, still visible today, but the location - the 'back sight' - from which it can be seen. This is an elevated area of land known today as 'the Mound' that crowns St Edmund's Hill, one of the four ancient hills of Glastonbury (the others being Wearyall Hill, Chalice Hill and, of course, the Tor).

Having realised the terrible importance of the mound on St Edmund's Hill, which is today more popularly called Windmill Hill (after a wind device of this description that once dominated the spot), the question becomes what else went on there in the past, for next to nothing is known about the site's archaeology. This is a fact not helped by the presence all around of modern housing estates, and the modern usage of the location as a public playing field. This then becomes the authors' journey. They shakily demonstrate that St Edmunds Hill was once thought by old residents to be hallowed ground, and point out that various old stones once existed in the area, according to early Ordnance Survey maps.

Cue the use of computer sky-programs - their controls set for the year 3000 BC. Revelation after revelation emerges as it seems that in this distant epoch the constellation of Orion, the hunter god, rose out of the Tor as viewed from the Mound on St Edmund's Hill around the November cross-quarter day. Suddenly, we are back to Gwyn up Nudd, which Yuri Leitch, Nicholas Mann and Phillipa Glasson all have realized was personified in the heavens as the constellation Orion, making sense of his home

being Glastonbury Tor, and his annual rule commencing at Samhain, modern Hallowe'en (who says I am against the significance of Orion in prehistory).

There are further star alignments which demonstrate not only the significance of the Mound as a major observation point in the local landscape, but also the importance in other star constellations by our Neolithic forebears. Aside from Orion, the stars of Crux - the Southern Cross - play a role, as do those of Cepheus the king and our old friend Cygnus, the celestial swan, which I have shown played a powerful role in the stellar theology within's Avebury ritual landscape 5,000 years ago (see THE CYGNUS MYSTERY). Avebury is just 50 miles from Glastonbury.

Perhaps the only gripe with THE STAR TEMPLE OF AVALON is something that Yuri has had heated discussions with Nicholas Mann and Phillipa Glasson about, and this is usage of the term Avalon to describe Glastonbury. As Yuri points out in his own book, Glastonbury is not Avalon - this was a medieval invention of the ever-ingenious monks of the abbey, who wanted to make the town the destination place of the wounded King Arthur after his fall in the Battle of Camlann. Yuri's current work shows clearly that Avalon has only ever been in one place, and that is Burgundy in France, where there is even an 'island' of 'Avallon'. From this Avallon came the great mystic and churchman Hugh of Avalon, known also as Hugh of Lincoln. He was an important visitor to Wessex during the very era in which the Glastonbury legends had their inception. Curiously, his totem was the swan, for it was said that such a creature accompanied him as a pet on his journey through life.

I adhere to the school that insists we should stop calling Glastonbury Avalon, even though I suspect that asking Avalon Tyres or any other local business to desist from using the name is likely to fall on stony ground.

What I like about THE STAR TEMPLE OF AVALON is that it smashes through the out-of-date Glastonbury super legends and gets down to the nitty gritty of the town's real past, which is one full of Neolithic temples, star lore and pre-Christian myth cycles, all long ago banished into exile in Wales.

Highly recommended.

By Andrew Collins www.andrewcollins.com