

The Anubis Caves: Evidence of Mithraism and Celtic Religion In the Oklahoma Panhandle

By Carl Lehrburger

The Anubis Cave site, located in the Oklahoma panhandle, is one of the most significant examples of Old World contact in the New World before Columbus. The epigraphy and mythology inscribed in this group of caves are interwoven into an elaborate heliolithic apparatus precisely calibrated for equinoxes. Phrases in Celtic etched in Ogam and Libyan scripts have been interpreted to refer to celebrations at equinox and mention Bel and Grian, Celtic names for the sun god. Remarkably, the Anubis Caves are among the best surviving records of the cult of Mithras, an Old World religion that spanned the Persian and Roman empires.

History and Site Documentation

Gloria Farley was shown the site in 1978 by a local rancher. She then identified the dog-like figure in one of the caves as the Egyptian jackal-god Anubis, hence the name Anubis Cave (Farley, 1985).

Barry Fell provided translations to some of the inscriptions (Fell, 1985). Based on this translation, the presence of sun symbols, and the general orientation of the caves, it was predicted that the caves contained an equinox alignment involving light and shadow interplay. Another study reported that such alignments did in fact exist at the Anubis site. (Gillespie et al., 1985). This work led to a more thorough treatment of the archaeoastronomy, cosmology and mythology of the site in *Ancient American Inscriptions* (McGlone et al., 1993) the primary source of information used in preparing this article.

Scott Monahan of Denver, Colorado produced a television documentary in 1984 and 1985 entitled "History of the Rocks", which documents major features of the Anubis Caves. Twenty years later he has updated the story with a new documentary, entitled "Old News", which includes video documentation and commentary on the Anubis Caves (www.ontar.net).



The Anubis Caves 2 and 3, equinox onlookers, (Photo ©, C. Lehrburger)



Figure 1. Egyptian Anubis (AAI, Figure 77b, page 177)

Phillip M. Leonard has been studying the Anubis Caves for over twenty-five years. Along with William McGlone he has co-authored dozens of papers on the subjects of ancient American inscriptions and petroglyphs. His most recent research on the Anubis Caves is a monogram entitled "A New World Monument to Mithras" (Leonard, 2006), which provides more thorough coverage of the material presented in this article. Leonard and Monahan are among the few researchers continuing to investigate and document the Anubis Caves.



Figure 2. Anubis from Cave 3. (Photo by C. Lehrburger)

Mitra, Mithra, Mithras

The sun god Mitra and his partner Varuna were worshipped in India before 2,000 BC. As his worship spread into Persia and Asia Minor, his name was altered to Mithra. Later, the Romans adopted him as the god Mithras, and his worship was especially popular among Roman soldiers. Roman Mithraism underwent more changes as it spread to the Celtic peoples in Britain and Celtic Iberia. It was during these later Roman times that a great emphasis was placed on

Mithras slaying the bull, known as the "tauroctony" (bull-slaying scene), which today is commonly associated with Mithraism. An explanation of why the tauroctony is not observed at Anubis Cave is that the inscriptions were made before the cult adopted the tauroctony in Europe. A bull or bison with ribs etched Celtic style is found in Cave 3 and is believed to represent the constellation Taurus.



Figure 3A. Mithras slaying the bull, from Hedderheim, Germany (Leonard 2006, Figure 4, page 4).



Figure 3B. Photo of bull in Cave 3, thought to represent Taurus (Photo by C. Lehrburger).

Although Mithraism is known as a mystery religion of the Romans, its roots are found much earlier in Persia. As the cult spread throughout Asia and Europe, it incorporated earlier traditions and incarnations of the Sun God. Thus Mithras is also referred to as Bel and Grian at the Anubis Caves in Celtic. In earlier or later times he could have been Bel, Apollo, Lugh, and Perseus.

The religion bearing his name includes a cosmology integrating constellations, planets, calendrics and rituals. Mithraism has a mystical and

esoteric tradition that addresses the soul's journey to and from heaven. At the Anubis Caves, an erect phallus is inscribed beside the head of the Sun God (Figures 4). The phallus was used in Egyptian hieroglyphs to designate "male" or "procreation". The Sun God is the procreator who fertilizes Mother Earth.



Figure 4A Drawing of Key Elements of Mithras Panel, Cave 2 (AAI, Figure 74, page 168).

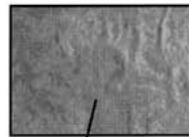


Figure 4B Detail photo of Sun God

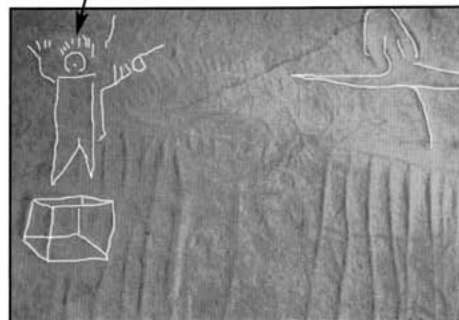


Figure 4C Enhanced Photo of Anubis Panel, Cave 2 (C. Lehrburger).

Mithras is often shown wearing a cape covered with stars. In Anubis Cave 2 he wears a cape and is positioned between a rising sun and a setting sun. Seven rays emanate from his head. Mithrae is the ancient Irish word for the rays of the sun (Brennan, 1994). The seven rays may also relate to the seven grades of Mithraic initiation. Each grade had its own set of teachings, represented by a celestial body and symbol and each of these symbols is found on the Anubis panel. Porphyry, the ancient writer, assigned Mithras' proper seat as the line of the equinoxes. "He is set on the line of the equinox with North on his right, South on his left. That is, Mithras is placed on the celestial equator facing west" (Gordon quoting Porphyry, p. 66,

1975). The image identified as Mithras in Anubis Cave faces west with the north on his right and the south on his left.

The Site and Petroglyphs

The Anubis Caves are a series of six eroded caves in a low sandstone bluff facing west. There are five main caves clustered together and a sixth farther north containing Plains Indian zoomorphic petroglyphs. Caves 1-3 are interconnected by eroded windows between them. In each of the five main caves are found different markings that share commonality and cohesion. The extensive engravings and archaeoastronomy at the Anubis Caves permit only a cursory look at the many aspects of what is depicted in these remarkable caves.

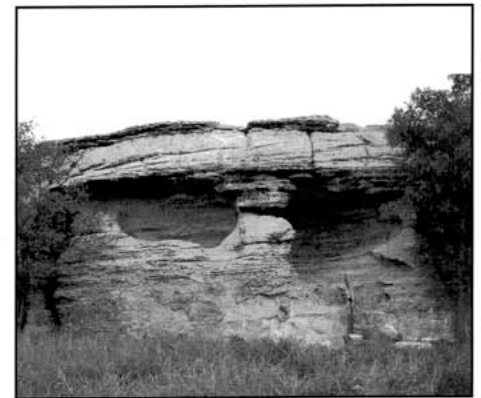


Figure 5. Photo of Anubis Caves 2 and 3. (Photo by C. Lehrburger)

The style of engravings at the Anubis Caves is different than the pecked abstract or pecked representational style petroglyphs more commonly found in the region. (McGlone 1994). Judged by their appearance compared to 19th and 20th century graffiti on the panel, the Anubis Caves inscriptions are quite old. Cation Ratio dating, also known as indirect carbon-14 dating, was completed by Professor Ron Dorn from Arizona State University. Using his technique for dating rock varnish or patina, he concluded that the inscriptions are 2,000 years before the present with a +/- of 300 years. (Dorn, 1985).

The engravings in Cave 1 can be seen from the ground but, unlike Cave 2 and 3, there has been no light and shadow play discovered. In Cave 1 there are seven figures that have been interpreted as representing seven constellations.



Figure 6. Cave 1 Constellations. (Photo by C. Lehrburger)

Caves 2 and 3 are inscribed so that onlookers standing outside can view the interplay of light and shadow. Both caves contain sophisticated and precise alignments that occur on the equinox. The "Silent Opera" (a series of images linked by light and shadow play revealing a story line) in Cave 2 appears to be the most sophisticated alignment among many others found at the Anubis Caves. Cave 3 has several alignments including "the Nose Pointer" shadow striking the "Six Months Ogam" inscription in Cave 3 described below. Cave 4 contains three lines of Ogam-like inscriptions.

The soft sandstone site is fragile and has suffered severe damage. Cowboy and recent graffiti has damaged several glyphs. The autograph and birthdate "TOM OGIMA 1896" at the top of the Anubis Panel is graffiti from the 1930s.

Most discouraging, an early researcher callously affected the site by taking molds of many of the petroglyphs without using a release coating to protect the outer layer of patina. As a result, the latex molds stuck to patina and was removed with the mold damaging many of the glyphs. Without a protective patina layer, many Anubis Cave petroglyphs have been worn by erosion. Some easily seen 20 years ago cannot be discerned today. For example, an image of a horse on the left side of Anubis Cave 2 cannot be seen with naked eye. The same is true of etchings on the right side of Cave 2, where much of the details etched on the "pillar" noted below have eroded and been vandalized.

The Epigraphy and Inscriptions

Ogam is a writing system using parallel lines in groups to represent letters. It was used in the first millennium A.D. in the British Isles. While Ogam can be used to write any lan-



Figure 7. The Six Months Ogam (Leonard, 2006, page 9).

The G-R-Ng in Ogam at the extreme left of the inscription reads GRIAN. The crossed stemline is near the center of the inscription. Near the top of the photo and slightly to the right is the 13 day verneir. (Leonard 2006). (Photo by Bill McGlone).

guage, most Ogam messages use a Celtic language. There are many examples of Ogam in Ireland and England, but it is also found in Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.

The existence of Ogam in America has been a controversial topic among researchers and archaeologists. While most professional archaeologists have dismissed Ogam in the New World, a dozen sites throughout Southeastern Colorado present compelling evidence that Ogam found its way to the New World long before Columbus.

There are Ogam-like inscriptions in five of the Anubis Caves. The first to receive attention was the "Six Months Ogam" (Figure 7) in Cave 3. It was originally translated by Fell (Fell 1985) as THE SUN IS SIX MONTHS IN THE NORTH; IN THE SOUTH FOR THE OTHER MONTHS. Fell's early translation led to the original suggestion by Jon Polansky that the site was associated with the equinox. After much discussion among other researchers, the translation was modified to THE SUN SIX MONTHS NORTH, SINKS SOUTH FOR SPACE OF MONTHS EQUAL NUMBER.

Another Ogam-like inscription from Cave 4 was interpreted by Fell (Figure 8, 1985) to say in Gaelic, THE SUN BELONGS TO BEL. THIS CAVERN ON THE DAY OF THE EQUINOX IS CONSECRATED FOR CHANTING OR PRAYERS TO BEL. While the entire inscription has the appearance of Ogam, this interpretation has not been

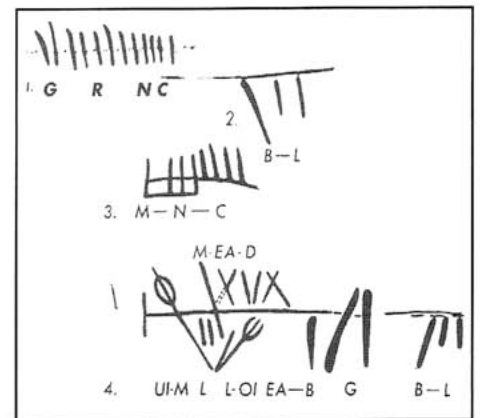


Figure 8. Bel Ogam from Anubis Cave 4 (AAI, Figure 64, page 153).

Celtic: (Ata) Grian aig Bel, Mionach uimh ele Loi-Meadh eabh aig Bel.

English: THE SUN BELONGS TO BEL. THIS CAVERN ON THE DAYS OF THE EQUINOX IS CONSECRATED FOR THE CHANTING OF PRAYERS TO BEL.

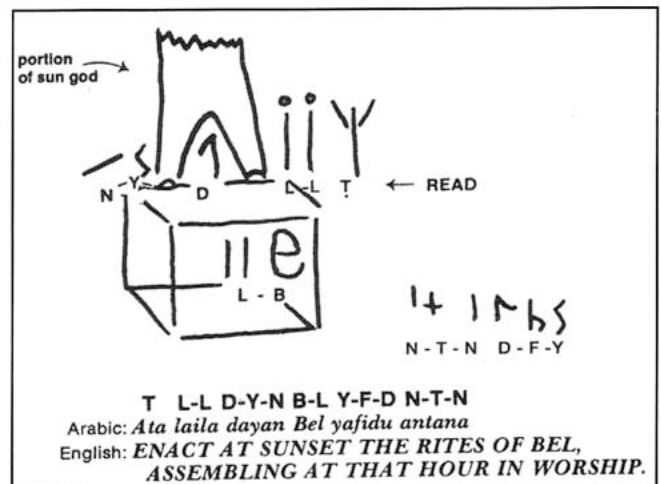


Figure 9. Libyan writing on the Anubis panel. (AAI, page 148, figure 59).

corroborated.

Libyan writing has also been discovered at the Anubis Caves. Below and to the right of the Sun God's feet are Libyan letters which Fell (1985a)

proposed to read as ENACT AT SUNSET THE RITES OF BEL, ASSEMBLING AT THAT HOUR IN WORSHIP. Other potential inscriptions in Ogam can be observed at Anubis Cave, but they have yet to be confirmed as Ogam or interpreted with great reliability.

Cave 3 Archaeoastronomy and Equinox Alignments

The major calendrical alignments at Anubis Caves occur toward and at sunset on the equinoxes. The sequence of alignments begins in Cave 3, where the two significant equinox alignments discussed below occur. The equinox sunset sequence ends in Cave 2 with the dramatic "Silent Opera" alignment (to be presented in Part II).

Cave 3 "Nose pointer" alignments

The "Six Month Inscription" in Cave 3 has been translated "The Sun six months north, sinks south for space of months equal number". The alignment indicating the arrival of equinox day is created by the sun shining on a projection of rock generating a shadow in the shape of a man's face profile (Figure 10). On the equinox this shadow which appears like a nose in profile ("Nose Pointer") moves upward and to the right until it reaches the stemline of the inscription (Figure 11). Caption Figure 11 The Nose Pointer is



Figure 10. Cave wall silhouette producing the face shadow that falls on the Indicator in Anubis Cave 3. (AAI, Figure 60, page 150)



Figure 11. Equinox Nose Pointer in Anubis Cave 3. (Photo by C. Lehrburger)

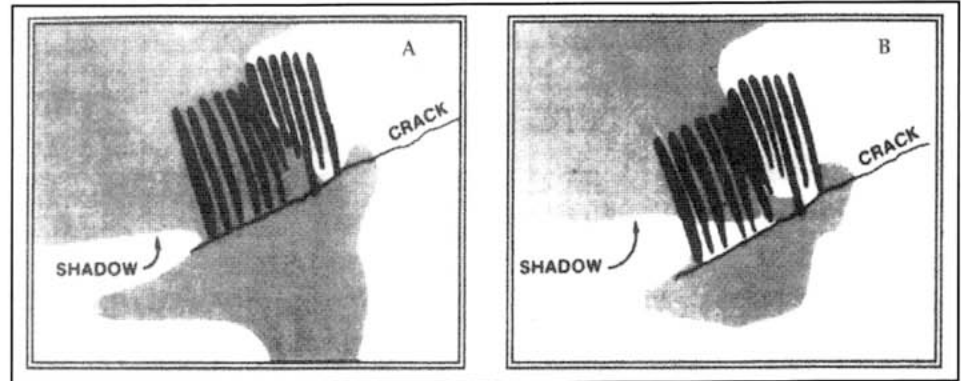


Figure 13. Twelve marks on pillar in Anubis Cave 3 (AAI, Figure 63, page 152). Twelve marks on pillar in Anubis Cave 3 showing no marks lighted in A and six marks lighted in B.

on the stemline and the forehead is aligned with the first vertical mark of the vernier count. This shadow alignment indicates the day of the equinox. The forehead of the shadow moves over one mark each day following the spring equinox and the reverse occurs for the fall equinox (Leonard, Figure 6, 2006).

On the spring equinox the nose intersects the stemline at the point of the apparent break and overlap. While the Nose Pointer reaches the stemline, the "forehead" of the shadow profile falls along a series of vertical lines or vernier. On each successive day after the spring equinox the forehead shadow moves over to the right, the distance of one line of the vernier, counting 13 days. During the 13 days the position of the Nose Pointer also moves over to the right starting on the first day of the spring equinox and ending on the thirteenth day (Leonard, page 11, 2006).

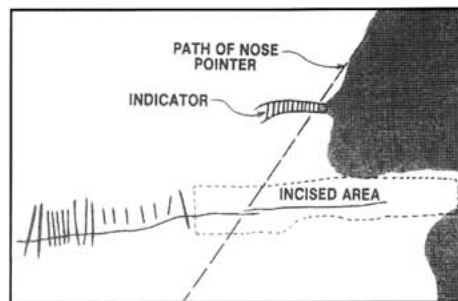


Figure 12. Movement of the Face Shadow in Cave 3 (AAI, Figure 61, page 150)

This process of counting days is reversed for the fall equinox, during the days preceding the fall equinox, the forehead and Nose Pointer move from right to left to mark the days before the fall equinox. The line marking the seventh day prior to the equinox is longer than the others in the series. This

leaves the last six marks before the fall equinox set apart by size (Leonard, Figure 7, 2006).

It is noteworthy that in Iran, the six days up to and including the equinox in September is called Mihregan or Mehrgan, which is the name of an Iranian celebration of Mithras.

Cave 3 Pillar "Balance Alignment"

Between Caves 3 and 2 there is a natural pillar made of sandstone that faces northerly. Inscriptions on the pillar interact with the sun on the equinoxes to create an alignment. On the Pillar there are 12 vertical lines at an angle that end at the bottom in a natural crack. Light strikes the panel in the afternoon before sunset. The six lines to the left and six lines to the right represent the months the sun spends on either side of the equator. (Leonard, 2006, page 12).

The six lines to the left are placed lower than the six lines on the right, tying the Balance Inscription to the Six Months Ogam which refers to the sun spending six months in the north and six months in the south. On equinox the six illuminated lines on the right are joined by six more illuminated lines on the day of the equinox. A triangle of light forms on the initial six marks to the left indicating the arrival of equinox (Leonard, 2006).

While two significant alignments from Cave 3 have been presented here, they are by no means the only alignments in Cave 3 or at the Anubis Caves. In Part II, an enactment of the ancient rites of Mithras at Equinox sunset, known as the "Silent Opera", will be presented to show how the astronomy at the Anubis Caves is integrated into Mithraic religion.

Conclusion

The equinox alignments at the Anubis Caves were not solely established for calendar keeping and calibrations. Instead they were created as part of a complex monument involving the constellations interwoven into ancient mythology and cosmology.

While ruins of several Mithraic temples or Mithraeums survive in Europe, none known to the author display the astronomical details, cosmology and mythology found at the Anubis Caves. Whoever inscribed them in Oklahoma had to know Ogam script, the Celtic language, astronomy and Mithraic religious symbolism in use over 1500 years ago. ■

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