

# The Origins of the Irish

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with 122 illustrations

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absorbed into a newly introduced target language. To these we might add Gearóid Mac Eoin's suggestion that both place names (Aife, Bréife, Grafrenn, Life, etc.) and a number of obscure words (*bréife* 'ring', *cuisfre* 'ale', etc.), all with an 'f' in the middle of the word, may also reflect loanwords, borrowed from a substrate that employed a sound not originally found in the Irish language.<sup>92</sup> These studies, however, are still in their infancy, and only when we can produce both systematic semantic and structural evidence for words that appear in Irish, lack an etymology and are not found in Brittonic will we be able to draw any serious conclusions about the pre-Irish languages of Ireland.

### Conclusions

- The Irish language is a member of the Celtic branch of the Indo-European language family.
- The earliest certain evidence for a Celtic language in Ireland dates to c. AD 100 (Ptolemy's map).
- Over the course of its occupation the peoples of Ireland probably experienced language shift a number of times.
- It is highly improbable that a language directly related to Irish was spoken in Ireland during the Mesolithic (8000–4000 BC).
- The shift from hunting-gathering to farming c. 4000 BC probably resulted in a language shift in Ireland. There are good reasons to regard the Neolithic language as not Irish.
- There were a series of possible windows for language shift or at least the introduction of new languages during the later Neolithic (e.g. Grooved Ware) and Early Bronze Age (Beaker), but the dates of these events appear too early to be associated with the spread of the language directly ancestral to Irish.
- The most probable period of the introduction of Irish lies between c. 1000 BC and the 1st century BC. During this time there is evidence that both Goidelic and Brittonic tribes were settled in Ireland.
- One of the most plausible mechanisms for language shift during the target period was the appearance and spread of hillforts and a class of elite warriors c. 1000 BC.
- The rise of Iron Age ritual centres in the first centuries BC may also have been a vehicle for language shift and stimulated the consolidation of the Goidelic language.

## The Origins of the Irish

What are the origins of the Irish? By now the complexity of the question should be appallingly apparent. If we attempt to trace the genealogy of our target Irishman, Niall of the Nine Hostages, his ancestral trail would split within a single generation as his father was born in Ireland (presumably while his mother was British. Potentially, his 'Irish' bloodline could have extended back some 330 generations to the time when Ireland was first settled, and his genetic ancestors could have ranged from descendants of the first colonists who moved north after the Ice Age to Near Eastern farmers who had moved into central Europe, or indeed anyone else in Europe who intermixed with his ancestors before they came to Ireland or who themselves came to Ireland to settle. Almost any aspect of Niall involves a new ancestral trail. While his chemical composition was essentially drawn from Irish geology, the foods that powered his body had different genetic origins. While tucking into a meal of wild boar may have found him consuming an animal whose own local ancestors went back to the Irish Mesolithic, his beef, bread and beer were all introduced from outside Ireland after 4000 BC, while the horse he rode was not introduced until after 2500 BC. By the 5th century AD his dress had been heavily influenced by the fashions of Roman Britain, as had the weapons he held in his hand. Politically, he was a king (*rí*) of a tribe (*tuath*), a member of an institution that clearly came from the earlier Indo-European world (the Irish word for 'king' is cognate with Latin *rex* and Sanskrit *rāj-*, while the Irish word for 'tribe' is cognate with Lithuanian *tautà* 'people'), no doubt modified from whatever its original significance by its use within a distinctly Irish political landscape. He would still cling to a religion that had been partly introduced ultimately from Celtic Europe but that had since engaged with native religions and a landscape covered with ceremonial monuments of past faiths. His language was derived from the earlier Indo-European language family – yet had picked up numerous 'foreign' words as its speakers had crossed Europe and then, presumably, absorbed many more words from the residue of all the various

languages that had preceded Proto-Irish in Ireland. And this is only scratching the surface of all that went into the making of our target Irishman.

Nevertheless, some form of conclusion is needed, and while there is no use pretending that I have been able to give a full – much less a fully credible – set of answers to the questions of Irish origins, I hope at least we can see something of the shape of the answers.

### *The unfolding of the Irish*

The early Irish of the 5th century AD were physically composed of elements initially brought together when two landmasses collided with one another about 450 million years ago to form the foundations of Ireland. The subsequent millions of years of geological change that ultimately evolved into the island of Ireland not only provided more of the primal 'stuff' of the earliest Irish, but also created a landscape that has helped shape the natural and cultural environment of all its occupants. The dearth of native flora and (especially) fauna made Ireland a fairly unattractive prospect at the time of its earliest human colonization. Its postglacial landscape made it far easier to promote a pastoral rather than a strictly agrarian economy with the increase in population that might have supported. On the other hand, the emergence of sources of copper and gold heavily influenced the cultural trajectory of the entire island from c. 2500 BC onward and encouraged the emergence of stratified societies.

The earliest human occupants of Ireland only settled there c. 10,000 years ago in a landscape that was markedly poorer in terms of natural resources than their homeland, which may have been located in the now submerged portions of the Isle of Man basin. The island of Ireland forced these first colonists to modify their behaviour and economy, and by 9,000 years ago a distinctly Irish Mesolithic culture had developed. Many geneticists have reasonably suggested that the bloodlines of these earliest Irelanders can be traced primarily to human populations that occupied Atlantic Europe or, at least, western Europe during the last Ice Age and expanded from refuges in southern Europe. But how much 'blood' of these earliest settlers was in Niall or runs through modern Irish populations is still impossible to determine for certain and may remain so until we discover more human remains from this earliest period and are able to analyse their ancient DNA. The language of these hunter-gatherers was most likely unrelated to the Irish language or any of its prehistoric ancestors.

About 6,000 years ago the entire economy and culture of Ireland were radically changed as farming was introduced during the Neolithic (c. 4000–2500 BC). This

transformation was instigated by at least some farming populations who entered Ireland from Britain, bringing to an end what appears to have been a period of relative isolation that had lasted from c. 7000 to 4000 BC. After this period, contact between Ireland and Britain (and to some extent also between Ireland and Continental Europe) becomes a major theme, underwritten by an archaeological record that tracks almost constant exchanges of material culture and cultural behaviour between the two islands. Analysis of the genetics of modern Irish populations has suggested that a significant minority of the earliest farmers in Ireland possessed a genetic background that may not have entered Europe until the Neolithic and derived more immediately from southwest Asia. The distinction between these farmers and other populations is probably limited entirely to the genetic signature of their mtDNA and Y chromosome. By the time the first farmers entered Ireland it is very probable that any farmers of ultimate southwest Asian descent were culturally thoroughly mixed with 'native European' populations who had adopted agriculture from their neighbours. With the increase in population brought on by the shift to agriculture, it is certainly possible that Niall's generation and modern generations of Irish continue at least in part the genetic signature of some of these first farmers. Again, future developments in ancient DNA should provide a much more concrete picture. The sweeping cultural change initiated by the spread of farming is likely to have resulted in the first case of language shift in Ireland, although again it is fairly unlikely that the language of Ireland's first farmers was related to any of the linguistic predecessors of Irish.

About 2500 BC Ireland entered the Bronze Age, adopting both copper metallurgy and the use of an international style of ceramics that had spread over most of western Europe. Despite acceptance of the new Beaker ceramic style, it does not seem that Ireland accepted the whole associated ideology, such as the specific Beaker burial that was widespread in Britain and neighbouring areas on the Continent. For this reason the case for yet another language shift in Ireland, while still quite possible, is perhaps weaker than it was for the Neolithic, especially when we have to consider that the spread of Beaker-users may have mapped on to the earlier distribution of people associated with Grooved Ware and its new ceremonial horizon. The latter not only indicates a change in pottery but also the introduction of new communal ritual practices that might be better associated with language shift than the Beaker horizon but is so localized in Britain and Ireland that it could hardly be ancestral to the Irish language.

During the Late Bronze Age Ireland, like most of western Europe, was transformed into a society characterized by warrior elites, the conspicuous consumption

of metallic wealth and the erection of hillforts. While direct evidence for foreign contacts is sporadic, the spread of hillforts across Ireland would at least be congruent with the creation of a new social domain associated with the new elites and, possibly, the spread of a new language. Linguistically, this could correlate with the initial expansion of a Celtic language to Ireland. During this period the material culture of Ireland is expressed in tools, weapons and ornaments that have clear connections with Britain and Continental Europe, but items of local inspiration are also indicated.

The Iron Age is still one of the poorest-known periods of Irish prehistory, although now we can at least see some evidence that the use of iron was spreading across Ireland in the centuries from c. 600 BC onward. By about the 3rd century BC elites in Ireland began kitting themselves out in the La Tène style, which was particularly associated with horse gear. This art style, of Continental and British inspiration but delivered almost exclusively in a local Irish form, was largely confined to the northern two-thirds of Ireland. Current archaeological evidence admits at most the entrance of small bands of elites and their craftsmen, but there is nothing to support a major settlement of a foreign population (the 'Celts'). On the other hand, the evidence of tribal names would appear to suggest that broad areas – a third or more of the island – were occupied by tribes presumably speaking the Celtic languages or dialects of Britain or the Continent. It is possible that during the last centuries BC the horizon of large ritual enclosures, the so-called provincial royal sites such as Tara and Navan, indicates a new expression of religious ceremonialism and/or political ideology across Ireland which may have prompted yet another possible language shift or, perhaps, the consolidation of the Goidelic 'dialect' over the dialects of competing Brittonic tribal groups. To this we might also add the erection of massive linear earthworks that would also have drawn populations together. Archaeology provides some evidence for traders and perhaps small groups of settlers from Roman Britain in the first centuries AD. In the centuries leading up to the death of Niall, Ireland became progressively more Romanized and soon afterwards incorporated into its traditions a new religion brought from southwest Asia and much of the material culture from the adjacent Roman province.

It should be emphasized that neither in the Neolithic nor throughout any subsequent period was Ireland ever the mere passive recipient of the cultures of the Continent and Britain, but was always an active player also exporting goods across the water to both Britain and the Continent. More importantly, the creation of the Irish was never solely the product of outside influences or peoples, but invariably involved an internal dynamic of adjustment to continuously changing conditions,

both environmental and social. This book may well be criticized for focusing so much attention on assessing the various hypotheses for immigration into Ireland (where do the Irish come from?) and not devoting much space to exploring the 'genius' of the Irish (or Irelanders) in developing their own cultural identity. But this narrower focus has already required a book, and unless we can deal with what was brought to Ireland from the outer world, we will be poorly equipped to understand the larger picture.

### *The Irish discover themselves*

In the introduction I indicated that it would be nearly impossible to direct the goals of this book around a classical ethnic definition of the Irish, i.e. one in which the people of Ireland had discerned that they were a single people. But having chewed off so much already, there is little reason not to tackle this final problem, albeit very briefly: did Niall think he was Irish?

While books abound with titles referencing the 'Irish Nation' or (wince) 'Irish Race', the concept of nationalism is generally regarded as modern, the product of the emergence of nation states or aspirations to become such a state that began about the 17th century. In Ireland, for example, explicit references to an Irish nation (*náisiún*) only emerge at the beginning of the 17th century in the context of the Counter-Reformation, to quote one pamphlet: 'I call the Irish Catholics the nation of Ireland, because Protestants therein are deemed generally but intruders and newcomers.'<sup>1</sup> The religious tag was critical here: even Geoffrey Keating, that great receptacle of 17th-century Irish learning, had a vision of an Irish people that included both native Gaels and those of Norman lineage (such as himself) who were Catholic and embraced the Irish language, but excluded newcomers such as the 'unassimilated English and Protestant'.<sup>2</sup> This type of definition illustrates how a sense of nationality often focuses not on who one believes oneself to be, but who one wants to exclude; the 'Us-versus-Them' approach has often been a driving force in the creation of national identities. We find a good example of this when Daniel Binchy suggested in the 1970s that an Irish sense of national identity may have been forged as early as the 9th century in the face of the Viking incursions into Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

Donnachadh Ó Corráin would put the evidence for an Irish national identity back to at least the 7th century.<sup>4</sup> Ó Corráin emphasized the impact of Christianity on Irish thought as it plugged them into a system of belief that already provided an origin for all humans and peoples. As the Franks and Saxons were recognized 'nations', so

also should the Irish find their own place in this greater system, and hence all the diverse peoples and tribes of Ireland could be assimilated into the Irish origin myth provided in the *Lebor Gabála*. Moreover, the rise of Niall's descendants saw at least greater ideological attempts to aspire to an all-island kingship. This would place the Irish of pre-Norman times in a much larger world than that summarized in 1911 by G. H. Orpen: 'The Irishman's country was the *tíuath* or territory belonging to his tribe'.<sup>5</sup>

What word the Irish used to refer to themselves is problematic. As we have already seen, the Irish borrowed the Welsh pejorative *gwyddel* ('raiders') to provide their own self-designation *goídel*, and this term only seems to have entered Irish about the 7th century. In texts cited by Ó Corráin to indicate the concept of an all-embracing 'nation', we find reference to Niall's son occupying Tara as the *caput Scottorum*, 'capital of the Irish', and Diarmait mac Cerbaill, Niall's great-grandson, is described as the *totius Scotiae regnatorum*, 'king of all Ireland'. Throughout the Middle Ages the common designations for the people of Ireland were *mic Míidh*, 'sons of Míid', which again emerges earliest in the 7th century, and *fir Éireann*, 'men of Ireland'. It should be said that while this latter term can refer to all the people of Ireland, in the Ulster tales it is also at times restricted to designate only the southern opponents of the Ulstermen.

But could the people of Niall's world have also possessed an Irish national consciousness, or what Ó Corráin describes as a 'feeling of identity', that we might understand as 'nationality'? Here we are not talking of a political concept but rather a cultural one, i.e. the people of Ireland might still regard themselves as members of their different tribes but also recognize a cultural kinship that united all the occupants of the island irrespective of their regional political differences.

In his final (posthumous) book, Proinsias Mac Cana argued that a 'consciousness of Irish nationality' could be found based on language and the pagan system of religion that preceded Christianity.<sup>6</sup> We have already seen that at least the initiation of a Celtic language in Ireland precedes Niall and must have been in Ireland by the 1st century AD and presumably earlier. Unlike Peter Schrijver, who argued that the lack of dialects in early Irish hinted at its comparative recentness, Mac Cana envisaged a learned class (druids, poets) so closely interconnected and so dominant across the island that they were able to prevent the type of linguistic divisions found elsewhere and so they integrated the entire island into a single system of values, despite the fact that Ireland was strongly divided politically into frequently warring tribal groups.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps we might consider the city states of ancient Greece in a similar way, frequently at each other's throats and boasting a wide variety of different political institutions

but sharing many elements of a common religion and language (though here with very marked dialectal differences) and coming together at the Olympic games.

So what is the earliest evidence for an ideology that seems to extend beyond tribal affiliations and embrace the entire island? The Irish word for 'province' is *cuigeadh* (Old Irish *coiced*) which derives from the word for 'five' (*coic*) and hence actually means a 'fifth', i.e. Ireland was envisaged as comprising five-fifths. The concept of the totality of Ireland being divided into five provinces has been described as 'the oldest certain fact in the political history of Ireland'.<sup>8</sup> This 'fact' saw Ireland divided into the five provinces: Connacht, Ulster, Leinster and Munster, with Meath as a separate province at the centre. These were far more than regional political divisions such as counties – they were part of a cultural cosmology, a way of partitioning the world in which each province was embued not only with a directional significance but also a conceptual characteristic (Table 10.1).<sup>9</sup>

**Table 10.1 The five provinces**

Province	Direction	Characteristic	Capital	Site
Connacht	West	<i>Fis</i> 'Learning'	Cruachain	Rathcroghan
Ulster	North	<i>Cath</i> 'Battle'	Emain Macha	Navan Fort
Leinster	East	<i>Bláth</i> 'Prosperity'	Dún Ailinne	Knockaulin
Munster	South	<i>Séis</i> 'Music'	Casael	Cashel
Meath	Middle	Kingship	Temair	Tara

The five-province division was certainly a governing principle for discourse on the make-up of Ireland throughout the Middle Ages. Its existence as a system, ideological or political, presupposes a vision of Ireland as a subdivided unity. It does not provide evidence for an Irish 'nation', but it does underwrite the concept of what Mac Cana regarded as a 'national consciousness', an awareness that the occupants of Ireland constituted an individual people and were not merely an assortment of tribes who accidentally shared the same island. How early then is this provincial concept?

Its ascription to the earliest period of historical sources has generally meant that the concept has been presumed to be 'prehistoric' or, worse, dating back to 'time immemorial' (not much use to an archaeologist). Almost all discourse regarding its antiquity has been in the hands of historians, so there have not been many attempts to ground any proof of the provincial concept in the archaeological record. In the most thorough analysis of the issues within an archaeological context, Nick Aitchison

has argued that the concept of Ireland being divided into five provinces is a product of Niall and his descendants, who attempted to anchor their own claims to political superiority in a supposedly ancient system that they themselves had fabricated.<sup>10</sup>

There seem to be two main elements to Aitchison's dismissal of any prehistoric existence for the provincial concept. The first concerns the archaeological sites that are the emblematic capitals of each of the provinces. The historical evidence depicts these as provincial political capitals, the residences of kings, and the scene of assemblies and battles during the medieval period. The archaeological evidence, on the other hand, suggests that the so-called 'royal capitals' were no later than the Iron Age (therefore they could not have provided the scene for activities set in the Middle Ages) and that they were ceremonial rather than defensive or residential. The second element is that the concept of the five provinces with a centre at Tara served so well the political ambitions of the *Uí Néill* to dominate Ireland, placing them in control of the centre of the entire system. The five-province system could not lie in the Iron Age 'because its ideological function and political context lie in the early medieval period and this cosmological scheme could scarcely have developed without relating to an ideology that reflected genuine political aspirations'.<sup>11</sup> In short, the cosmological scheme of the five provinces was part of an '*Uí Néill* ideology'. If we follow this interpretation, it was the descendants of Niall who created for Ireland its earliest 'national consciousness'.

Before questioning this interesting interpretation, we need to dispense with some of the other issues on which most authors probably agree. First, the concept of a five-part world view focused on a centre surrounded by four directional and symbolic regions is widely found, both in the Indo-European world (especially ancient India) and outside it (e.g. China). There is nothing exclusively 'Irish' about it: it is an almost natural way of shaping a politico-cosmology. Second, we are dealing with an ideology and not a political system and so, whenever it came into existence, it need not have reflected a concrete political reality with a central high king surrounded by four provincial kings. Third, Munster as one of the provinces is problematic in almost every imaginable way. The sources are ambivalent as to where its emblematic capital was located (though Cashel is the main contender) or whether Munster constituted more than one province. Testing the date of the provincial system is probably best confined to the four more northerly provinces and their capitals. And fourth, the medieval Irish frequently engaged in reconstructing a fictional past for their monuments. The site of Navan Fort, for example, bears little evidence for the imagined buildings that were portrayed in the Ulster tales.

On the other hand, I think that a case can still be made that the provincial system as an ideology extended all the way back into the Iron Age. If the identification of the provincial capitals, what Aitchison has described as the 'monumental linchpins' – the *quintessence* – of the five-fold division of Ireland,<sup>12</sup> was merely an *Uí Néill* ploy to superimpose a familiar cosmological system on their landscape, a critical element would obviously be the selection of these 'linchpins'. The *Uí Néill* could potentially have selected any ancient monuments that were impressive enough to meet their needs. They could have chosen their 'legendary' provincial centres from more than 70 hillforts and earlier ceremonial enclosures such as the Giant's Ring near Belfast. Yet the *Uí Néill* spin-doctors just happened to select at least three monuments (and probably the fourth – Rathcroghan) that all date to the Iron Age, the sparsest period in Irish prehistory for leaving remains of settlement. Moreover, the similarities between what should have been random sites, especially Navan and Knockaulin, are so striking that they must surely be related; the most recent remote sensing of Rathcroghan (published long after Aitchison's book appeared) renders the Connacht capital far more comparable to the others as well.<sup>13</sup> Even without the lens of later historical sources, an archaeologist surveying the archaeology of the Irish Iron Age would be tempted to interpret these sites as major centres in the same way that archaeologists have analysed Neolithic megaliths or Bronze Age hillforts as some form of political or ceremonial centre. As the *Uí Néill* managed to identify these monuments in the early Middle Ages, perhaps we should be impressed less with their achievements as political propagandists and more with their extraordinary abilities as archaeologists! In short, the four more northerly centres do not appear to be the product of later random selection; the *Uí Néill* were tapping into an earlier system.

Aitchison rightly recognizes one of the really critical issues with erecting such a system: irrespective of whether it was established in the Iron Age or the Middle Ages, just how does one generate five sites on the landscape that represent this five-part politico-cosmology? In Aitchison's theory, the driving force was the need of the *Uí Néill* to anchor their political aspirations in a mythic past (if they control the centre at Tara, the rest of Ireland should naturally be subservient to them).<sup>14</sup> So how can we imagine that the people of Ireland could have set up a five-province system in pre-history when we will assume that they actually believed in the politico-cosmology?

Mac Cana reminds us that, in order to scale the universe down to their ideology, the Irish would have had to set apart special sacred places and also recreate the cosmological relationships in their own territory. And when people migrate, they may be expected to 're-cosmicize the national territory... by creating new ritual

centres'.<sup>15</sup> What we might imagine, then, is that during the Iron Age the five-province cosmological principle spread across Ireland (or at least the northern two-thirds, if Munster is excluded) as an ideology. Indeed, it may have been part of the 'big idea' that attracted the Irishlanders to embrace a new language. All the sites that have been excavation show signs of occupation, including presumably some form of ritual use, prior to the Iron Age horizon of their henges, large circular structures and mounds. Only one of them, Tara, already had a mound, while both Navan and Rathcroghan created mounds over earlier timber structures. This could suggest that there was an attempt to emulate on the periphery what already existed at Tara: i.e. in terms of the architectural components of the horizon, Tara probably had primacy. So during the last centuries BC populations in Leinster, Ulster and Connacht accepted this new vision of a five-part Ireland and erected similar ceremonial centres in areas that seemed most appropriate. In the case of Ulster and Connacht, the sites selected were already established ceremonial centres that were modified to serve as expressions of the new ideology. A common cultural idea – accepted across an island whose leaders spoke a Celtic language and which shared cultural institutions found among their Celtic-speaking neighbours in both Britain and on the Continent – would probably meet Mac Cana's quest for establishing a prehistoric Irish 'national consciousness'. If you accept this, then there is at least a case to be made that some form of Irish national consciousness had already taken shape by the first centuries BC.<sup>16</sup> And for that reason, I suspect that when Niall ended his days and went to the House of Donn, he entered it as an Irishman.

## Notes

- image at <http://www.scotese.com/future2.htm>.
- 11 Woodman *et al.* 1997.
- 12 Dates kindly supplied by Valerie Hall, Queen's University Belfast.
- 13 Viney 2003 provides a good summary of some of these issues.
- 14 Mitchell and Ryan 1997, 107.
- 15 Wingfield 1995.
- 16 Lambeck and Purcell 2001.
- 17 Devoy 1995.
- 18 Edwards and Brooks 2008.
- 19 Cooper *et al.* 2002.
- 20 Edwards and Bradley 2009.
- 21 Ward and Brownlee 2003, 81–85.
- Chapter 2 (pp. 37–70)
- 1 The earliest radiocarbon date for human settlement in Ireland is from Mount Sandel, Co. Londonderry, where the start date for the settlement falls in the range 7790–7635 BC (Bayliss and Woodman 2009).
- 2 Wales was first settled c. 250,000 years ago by early Neanderthals; modern humans are recorded from c. 26,000 years ago at Paviland Cave (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 5).
- 3 I exclude here the genuine artifacts such as hand-axes from Dún Aonghusa and Argalin whose contexts are so problematic that they cannot be regarded as valid evidence for occupation of Ireland.
- 4 Mitchell and Ryan 1997, 79–80. A more recent discovery comes from near Scrago, Co. Down, where it was probably redeposited during the Midlandian glaciation.
- 5 Early Modern humans were already in Britain by c. 44,000–42,000 years ago (Higham *et al.* 2011).
- 6 Woodman 2003.
- 7 Costa *et al.* 2005, 22; Woodman (pers. comm.) now suggests 7800(?)–6800(?) BC for the Early Mesolithic, but the arguments for these dates have not yet been published.
- 8 Woodman 1985; the only full synthesis of the Irish Mesolithic is Woodman 1978a.
- 9 Woodman at <http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Limerick&id=2067>.
- 10 Collins and Coyne 2003.
- 11 German *Irländer*, Swedish *Irländare*.
- 12 Translation from Viney 2003; for a short account of this remarkable thinker, see Duddy 2002, 1–17.
- 13 Woodman and McCarthy 2003, 36–37.
- 14 See Woodman *et al.* 1997; McCormick 1999; Davenport *et al.* 2008; Searle 2008; Sleeman 2008.
- 15 Estimates of modern animal populations from Sleeman and Yalden 2009.
- 16 Figures taken from Sleeman 2008, 78.
- 17 Ellis *et al.* 2003, 117–18; there is also mention of another site (Marsh Benham) with an 'animal bone assemblage of unknown size dominated by wild boar' (119).
- 18 Bay-Petersen 1978.
- 19 Yalden 1989, 72.
- 20 McCormick 1999. See also McCormick 2004.
- 21 Van Wijngaarden-Bakker 1989; Kelly 2008.
- 22 <http://calorcount.about.com/calories-eel-mixed-species-i15026>.
- 23 Woodman *et al.* 1999.
- 24 O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 39.
- 25 McClean 1993.
- 26 Warren 2005, 13.
- 27 Tolan-Smith 2008, 144.
- 28 O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 53–57.
- 29 Macalister 1921, 58–59.
- 30 Herity and Eogan 1977, 17.
- 31 Woodman 1978a, 208.
- 32 Harbison 1988, 24.
- 33 Tolan-Smith 2008, 151: 'To get to Ireland in the mid-eighth millennium BC involved a sea crossing, and it is reasonable to assume that the passage was made from Southwest Scotland, from which the coast of Ireland is visible on most days.'
- 34 Ballantyne 2004.
- 35 Ashmore 2004, 90.
- 36 Mellars 2004, 169.
- 37 Mellars 2004, 169–70.
- 38 Edwards 2004.
- 39 Warren 2005, 37.
- 40 E.g. Bayliss and Woodman 2009, 117.
- 41 Mellars 2004, 173.
- 42 Wickham-Jones 2004.
- 43 Woodman 2004, 291; Bayliss and Woodman 2009, 117.
- 44 Saville 2004b, 189.
- 45 See Saville 2004b for the Scottish Mesolithic industry.
- 46 Saville (2009, 55), who emphasizes that he has 'been at pains to contradict earlier attempts to link the Irish and Scottish Mesolithic... by stressing the paucity of hard evidence for any cultural similarities on either side of the North Channel before the Neolithic period.'
- 47 Scotland and northern Britain do possess ground stone tools, but only Ireland produces an abundance of ground stone axes (Clarke 2009, 19).
- 48 Woodman 2004, 294–95.
- 49 At Mount Sandel there were 523 scalene triangles, 315 rods and 100
- Preface (pp. 6–7)
- 1 Mallory 1985.
- 2 Mallory 1991.
- 3 Mallory 2006.
- Introduction (pp. 8–10)
- 1 A worthy exception is Shane Hegarty (2009), who asks many of the right questions.
- 2 The standard accounts are Waddell (2010), Cooney and Grogan (1999), O'Kelly (1989), Harbison (1988) and Herity and Eogan (1977). More popular accounts include Flanagan (1998), Ryan (1994) and McGaffrey and Eaton (2002).
- 3 See, for example, De Paor 1986, Loughrey 1988, Hegarty 2009.
- 4 Gallagher 2007.
- 5 See Mac Cana 2011.
- 6 O'Rahilly 1946, 216; Byrne 1973, 71.
- Chapter 1 (pp. 11–36)
- 1 For a general account of the formation and evolution of the Earth, see Marshak 2001. The basic accounts of Irish geology have been taken from Woodcock and Strachan 2000, Holland 2001, Mitchell and Ryan 1997, Mitchell 2004, and more popular accounts in Feehan 1997, McKeever 1999 and Williams and Harper 2003.
- 2 Winn 2006, 68.
- 3 Comerford 2003, 1.
- 4 O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 15.
- Measuring coastlines is a notorious problem involving fractals, as can be seen by the very different estimate in Wikipedia of 1,448 km. There France and Spain are given much longer coasts than Ireland, while O'Sullivan and Breen claim that Ireland's coast is longer than that of either.
- 5 Ward and Brownlee 2003, 30; a larger amount is estimated in Marshak 2001.
- 6 Winn 2006, 55–56 (Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow).
- 7 Ward and Brownlee 2003, 31.
- 8 This is the shortest estimate I have found (Smith 2010, 147, correcting an erroneous estimate of 25 mm); but there are sources indicating as much as 2 cm per year.
- 9 There are footprints 7 cm long of an early reptile (but not yet a dinosaur) from near Scrago, Co. Down, and the discovery of dinosaur remains at Portmuck. We will obviously discount the (unintentionally) amusing discovery of a dinosaur and its mother off the west coast of Ireland in the British monster film *Gorgo* (originally banned in Finland!).
- 10 See C. R. Scotese's 'Pangea Ultima'

- Ireland and in Britain (with substantial percentages in southern Scotland and Yorkshire) may be more in keeping with a La Tène migration from Britain.
- 48 This is the official designation (of 29 September 2011) on [http://www.iso.org/tree/ISOGG\\_HapgrpR.html](http://www.iso.org/tree/ISOGG_HapgrpR.html). The instability of haplogroup designations is a phenomenon in itself. In Myres *et al.* 2011, 97, it is listed as R1b1a1b2a; the Wikipedia entry (of 26 September 2011) has R1b1a2a1a1b4b, but the entry for 23 January 2009 was R1b1b2a1b6b.
- 49 Myres *et al.* 2011; percentage figures from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haplogroup-R1b\\_\(Y-DNA\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haplogroup-R1b_(Y-DNA)) (23 February 2012).
- 50 Myres *et al.* 2011, 100.
- 51 Balaesque *et al.* 2010; Myres *et al.* 2011, 95.
- 52 See Eupedia: 'Origins, age, spread and ethnic association of European haplogroups and subclades' ([http://www.eupedia.com/europe/origins-haplogroups\\_europe.shtml#R1b](http://www.eupedia.com/europe/origins-haplogroups_europe.shtml#R1b)) for one (speculative) account of the very late spread of variants of the R1b haplogroup in western Europe.
- 53 Busby *et al.* 2011.
- 54 Haak *et al.* 2010, 8, who also note that some of these types (U4 and U5) are absent from the major Neolithic culture of central Europe; this was ancestral to the earliest farmers of Britain and Ireland.
- 55 Haak *et al.* 2010, 9. Among the mtDNA haplogroups found in Ireland, U4, U5a and U5a1 have all been found among hunter-gatherer populations in northern and eastern Europe (Bramati *et al.* 2009; Malmstrom *et al.* 2009).
- 56 McÉvoy and Bradley 2010, 117, where they label the haplogroup I1c.
- 57 Rosser *et al.* 2000.
- 58 Tömöry *et al.* 2007.
- 59 Tömöry *et al.* 2007, 354.
- 60 Only 13% of modern Hungarian haplotypes could be found among the ancient sample and only 23% of the ancient types survive among modern Hungarians; Tömöry *et al.* 2007, 362. A somewhat similar exercise comparing medieval and modern Icelanders has revealed that the original settlers are genetically more like their source populations (modern Scots, Irish and Scandinavians) than are modern Icelanders (Helgason *et al.* 2009).
- 61 Csányi *et al.* 2008.
- 62 See Nash 2006.
- 63 See also Jobling *et al.* 2004, 9, where they demonstrate that 'What was the ancestral biological homeland of population X?' is a meaningless question.
- 64 A good European-wide summary of this model can be found in Soares *et al.* 2010.
- German, the Englishman and the Anglo-American now control the politics of the world, and their contributions to every department of literature, science and the arts have been the main stimuli of the marvelous progress of the 19th century' (p. 164).
- 15 Kurl 2010, 47; see also Evans 1992, 6.
- 16 Even by the end of the 18th century Celtic was regarded as a possible member of the same language family as Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. The major early scientific work, however, began with the Danish linguist Rasmus Rask in 1817, followed by the Swiss linguist Adolphe Pictet (1836) and the German Franz Bopp (1837). On the other hand, there were also the Celtomania such as the Scottish scholar James Grant (1814, 27–28) who imagined that the Celtic languages reflected some arcane primeval language that could 'explain' the other languages of Europe. See Pedersen 1962, 53–63.
- 17 The technical terms are apocope and syncope.
- 18 Argyll (2001) has argued that Celtic was Goideic since the Iron Age and was not the product of a migration/invasion from Ireland.
- 19 Linguistic revenge was visited on the Welsh when the outside world accepted the Anglo-Saxon pejorative term for them, *Welsh*, i.e. foreigner.
- 20 In Old English the earlier \**k* developed into *hw*, e.g. *hwa*, *hwel*, *hwil*, the letters of which we now reverse as 'who', 'wheel' and 'while'.
- 21 Freeman 2001b.
- 22 Koch 2009; 2010.
- 23 Freeman 2001b.
- 24 Toner 2000; De Bernardo Stempel 2000.
- 25 Or *Régia* may be a Celtic word, 'the ruling one' (De Bernardo Stempel 2007, 149).
- 26 The classic studies are O'Rahilly 1946, 1–42; Mac an Bhaird 1991–93; Toner 2000; De Bernardo Stempel 2000; 2007.
- 27 O'Rahilly 1946, 1–42.
- 28 For example, Sims-Williams 2007, 329–30.
- 29 De Bernardo Stempel 2007.
- 30 Matasović 2007, 96.
- 31 Meyer 1910, 208.
- 32 The Robogdioi, unfortunately, have been provided with so many conflicting etymologies that one sometimes gets the feeling we have not really moved on much from Cormac's 9th-century glossary. Pokorny 1954 (and Schrijver 2009, 205) took the name to mean 'very poor'; O'Rahilly (1946, 295) interpreted it to mean 'traveller (by horse or chariot)'; De Bernardo Stempel (2007, 14) explained it as those 'who fight in

- front' or 'mighty fighters', while Graham Isaac (in a 2008 seminar at Queen's University Belfast) reconstructed it as 'ones characterized by great slaying'.
- 33 As a proper designation of a branch of Indo-European, Tocharian is just as problematic as Celtic (see Mallory and Mair 2000, 333–34).
- 34 A frequently cited example of their similarity is '*Bren, biter en grüne isis is goed Ingelek en goed Frysk*, i.e. 'bread, butter and green cheese is good English and good Frisian'.
- 35 Schmidt 1977.
- 36 McCone 1996, 98–104; Schrijver 1995, 463–65.
- 37 Sims-Williams 2007, 345.
- 38 Adams (1970) discusses a variety of possible permutations, as does O'Rahilly (1946, 419–43) in his review of earlier theories of Goideic origins.
- 39 Greene 1964, 12.
- 40 Novotna and Blažek 2006.
- 41 Gray and Atkinson 2003, 437.
- 42 Forster and Toth 2003.
- 43 If there is silver inlay in Irish Late Bronze Age hair-rings, Waddell 1998, 248.
- 44 For example, David Greene (1983, 132), who regards 600 BC 'the least unacceptable solution'.
- 45 Schrijver 2009, 205.
- 46 Mac Cana 2011, 275–78.
- 47 Koch 1994.
- 48 Koch 1994.
- 49 Pigott 1983, 148.
- 50 O'Rahilly 1946, 434.
- 51 Powell 1950, 193.
- 52 Macalister 1949, 87–88.
- 53 Cf. Raftery 1951, 180: 'A military invasion or a folk migration sufficiently powerful to cause a complete linguistic, cultural, and racial change in the population of a country would require to be great, both in numbers and prestige, a permanent conquest, to control the social life of a community....'
- 54 O hÓgáin 2002, 105, 193–95.
- 55 O Corráin 1992, 3.
- 56 Matasović 2007, 96.
- 57 For a detailed though clearly partisan account of the importance of the Manapi see Mongan 1995.
- 58 And possibly the neighbouring Coritani; see De Bernardo Stempel 2007, 156.
- 59 Hartley and Fitts 1988, 10; Cunliffe 1991, 180.
- 60 Rynne 1976, 242.
- 61 Halpin and Newmann 2006, 17.
- 62 Mallory 1992, 1998.
- 63 Powell 1950, 185.
- 64 Mac Eoin 1986, 171.
- 65 Schrijver 2009, 209.
- 66 Todd 1989, 14–15.
- 67 Mesthrle 2001, 494–95.
- 84 Gensler 1993, 248–49.
- 85 Vennemann 1998; not a plausible explanation from a phonetic standpoint (see Isaac 2007, 51), nor from an archaeological standpoint if we imagine that an Afro-Asiatic language was associated with the spread of megaliths c. 3800 BC when copperworking does not emerge in Ireland until well over a thousand years later.
- 86 To be fair, Gensler anticipates many of these objections in the final chapter of his dissertation.
- 87 Isaac 2007, 47–48.
- 88 Gensler 1993, 452.
- 89 Matasović 2007, 109; 2009, 443.
- 90 Schrijver 1997.
- 91 Schrijver 2000 and 2005; against including *paridn* see Isaac 2003, who suggests that it is a Latin loanword.
- 92 Mac Eoin 2007.
- Chapter 10 (pp. 287–96)
- 1 O Buachalla 1995, 110.
- 2 Mac Cana 2011, 54.
- 3 Binchy 1976.
- 4 O Corráin 1978, 35.
- 5 Orpen 1911, vol. 1, 20.
- 6 Mac Cana 2011, 43.
- 7 See also Ó Corráin 1978 for similar ideas.
- 8 Binchy 1975, 124.
- 9 For discussions of the five provinces from the perspective of cosmologies see Rees and Rees 1961, 118–39; Aitchison 1994, 50–130; Mac Cana 2011, 91–108.
- 10 Aitchison 1994. See also Dillon and Chadwick (1972), who suggest that the creation of a fifth central province at Tara was instigated by the Uí Néill for their own political advantage.
- 11 Aitchison 1994, 122.
- 12 Aitchison 1994, 105.
- 13 Waddell *et al.* 2009.
- 14 Or as Ó Corráin (1978, 19) put it: 'It was this mandarin class that elaborated the idea of the overkingship of all Ireland and projected it backwards into even the remote past'. But we should recall here that historical records only start about the time of the Uí Néill, so the political aspirations of Ireland's prehistoric populations are completely unknown to us.
- 15 Mac Cana 2011, 73.
- 16 It might be noted that the four northerly provincial centres all fall within the territory where La Tène metalwork was found, i.e. the La Tène horizon may not only reflect a prestige metalworking tradition but also was in some way attached to the new religious ideology. This may explain why it is difficult to produce a suitable or reliable capital for Munster.