

ON THE ORIGINS OF THE OGHAMIC WRITING SYSTEM

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Abstract

For most scholars, the Ogham is the creation of early medieval missionaries in the conversion effort of the illiterate pagan population of Ireland. Their reasoning being that the letters derive from the Roman alphabet and that no recognised archaeological example dating from the pre-Christian era was ever found. This argument is often used to disqualify the case for an ancient Old World and New World Ogham outside the historical Hibernian area and period. In no way this highly simplistic view holds water when confronted to the scrutiny of interdisciplinary studies. Indeed, the Ogham sign system, not only seems to predate the alphabet and other codes of writing but, might very well be as old as the Stone Age. We are therefore in great need of a paradigm shift!

On the Antiquity of Alphabets

According to current accepted theory, the 24 letters alphabet was devised from a stylisation of an evolved version of the Egyptian hieroglyphs called Demotic (= "popular" in Greek). The alphabet was then introduced from Egypt to Gebal in the Sinai, where it was passed on to the miners of Serabit El-Kheden. Then in 1000 B.C., the proto-alphabet was brought to Byblos, Phoenicia, where it was found engraved on a sarcophagus belonging to king Ahiiram. Phoenician sea merchants then, in the VIIIth century, made it known to the Grecian Cretans at Knossos who, in turn, passed it on to the continental Greeks who then passed it on to the Etruscans of Italy, whence the Roman alphabet. So for the academics, this is the general itinerary for the diffusion of the alphabet from Egypt to Europe via Canaan and Phoenicia. Using this scenario, experts can then date the other known alphabets from the Roman, Tartesian, Celtiberic, Venetic, Runic and Gothic, plus other miscellaneous dead alphabets, on to the Irish Oghams. The problem with this theory is that the Demotic cursive script was in use at a time in Egypt from only about the VIIth century BC to the Vth century AD. Another problem with the theory is that, looking back in time, one should expect to find a fixed prototype for the oldest original alphabet. That is, as time elapses, variant forms are developed and tend to be more numerous. In contradiction, this is not the case for the alphabet. For example, the many variants of alphabets originally used in Greece became standardised only at a much later date, around 403 BC. So if, according to one of the origin myths for the Greek alphabet, it

was Cadmus the Phoenician who first introduced it to the Greeks, what then of the much older Cretan scripts, Linear A and B dating back into the XIVth century B.C.? The reason for this is that the pre-historians and archaeologists are only starting to suspect the meaning of the importance of the Danubian civilisation which appeared in Europe starting from around 6000 B.C.

Alphabet-like and Ogham-like inscriptions in Neolithic Art

In late Neolithic inscriptions, Danubian Lepenski Vir, Vinča culture (dated from 5000 to 3800 BC) are found both alphabet-like and ogham-like symbols, sometimes side by side. The Danubian Neolithic culture, stretching through the valleys from Bulgaria to Germany via Hungary, Slovakia and Austria, ranges from around circa 6000 to 3500 BC. Undoubtedly, one of the world's oldest civilisations predates the Sumerian (3500 to 2300 BC) by 2500 years, the Egyptian (3100 to 30 BC) by 2900 years, the Canaanite (3200 to 2200 BC) by 2800 years and the Minoan (2400 to 1500 BC) civilisation by 3600 years. The Danubian Culture was most likely the mother culture of the Hittite (1700 to 1200 BC) and Mycenaean, Achaean (1600 to 1100 BC) cultures. By the fifth millennium BC, the Danubians had reached a high level of sophistication which included a unified priesthood, political organisations and farming practices. Archaeologists who had uncovered many ancient sites in the Lower Danube (Lepenski Vir) have now discovered its northern extension in Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. The northern sites, where more than 150 temples involving large-scale earthworks were unearthed, date from between 4800 to 4600 BC. These were constructed of earth embankments and wooden palisades and stretched for up to a half mile. The temple sites were built by a highly religious people who lived in communal long-houses that were about 50 meters long grouping sizeable villages. One of these highly organised village and temple complexes at Aythra, near Leipzig, covers an area of 25 hectares. Also uncovered were two hundred communal long-houses. The population was estimated over 300 people living in buildings grouped 15 to 20. Their economy and lifestyle were based on husbandry raising cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. After a 200 years period of growth and consolidation, these pan-tribal mini-states collapsed and dispersed. Their artisans manufactured pots, toys, weapons and tools made of stone, wood and bone and ceramics. They decorated their pottery with geometric designs and carved statues in animal and human shapes. The Danubian nations probably dispersed at a time when they became familiar with copper work since **ayes-* is the main common term to designate metal along with bronze, gold and silver. The bronze tools, parts of harnesses, chariots were fired and fitted from mountain hardwoods. This activity furnished words

that embraced the smelting of metals. On the other hand, lithic work is also very present at the common level as testified by the many derivatives of root **ak-* = “stone” and also “acuteness”. Terminology for wheeled and nautical transport is abundant in the proto-language. There are words for “wheel” (**rotho-*), “axle” (**hakhs-*), “yoke” (**iak'om*) and associated gear for harnessing and ploughing. They domesticated the horse, **ekwos-*, as shown by the term **ekwo-wiros* = “horse-man”, “cavalier”. Other animals included **gwous*, cattle, **tauros* = “bull”, *su-* = “pig”, **porko-* = “hog”, **peku-* = “sheep”, **kapros* = “goat”, **pholo* = “fowl”, **ghans-* = “goose” and **anHt-* = “duck”. Cereals included : *yava-* = “wheat”, *zeiai* = “barley” and *kerā* = “oat”. The landscape described by the proto-language is that of wooded valleys, mountainous ranges with lakes and quick flowing rivers from snowy sources. The IE had no original common word for “ocean” but had many words for “sea», **mar-*, “moorland”, **agher-* and “lake”, **lakw-*. The great waterways were better known: **dh[e]n(w)-* or **ap-*, the “river” since they had boats: **nāw-*, “nave” and **dul-*, “ship”, “vessel”. At the time, the Ocean was probably ice locked. This explains the many terms pertaining to ice cover : **lad(h)-/e-* = “ice”, **eig'-* = “ice flow”, “glacier”, **g(l)ak(l)-, -g(l)-* = “ice”, “ice cover”, “frozen surface”, “ice shelf”, **preus-* = «frost.

The Greek word *thalassa* was borrowed from Pelagian, a non Indo-European language, showing that the notion was not known to them before they reached the Mediterranean Sea. The Black Sea level before 5000 BC was much lower than it is at the present and was a large fresh water lake. The most catastrophic event of the VIth millenium was the flooding of this great lake turning it into the salty Black Sea. So around 5550 BC, within two years, 20,000 square miles of prime Ukrainian lowlands were flooded under 510 feet deep undrinkable sea water. This event displaced lake populations up the river valley highlands and into the Danubian basin. It coincides with new cultural artefacts and North Danube cultural expansion. The root **lak-* for “lake”, Germanic, *lox*, echoed by Sanskrit *lak-* for lacquer, a salmon-pink colour, also denotes “fish” in many of the IE languages of Europe, as well as in the Celto-Italic dialect of Central-Asia known as Tocharian. Indeed, the root **mori* in the Celto-Italic and Germanic branches stood for : “great body of water”, “great lake”. Hence derived are the Celtic *mori*, Latin *mare*, German, *meer* and Slavonic, *moje*. In fact, the Celtic name for the Black sea was *Moria* and this shows that they were at an early period acquainted with the Black Sea north-shore. Salmon was at a time common in the post Ice-Age rivers of Europe and one species, *Salmo trutta*, is still found in the streams of the Caucasus. The landscape was also dominated by the beach tree along with the oak and vine (**woi-no / *wei-no*; Hittite **wiiana*; Celtic **uiniia*) in the valleys spreading further north of the Black Sea as the climate became warmer at the turn of the fourth and third millennium

BC. Migrations of the northern Danubian peoples after 4600 BC into the Baltic and northern Eurasian areas gave rise to a hybridisation with the Finno-Ugric and Altaic shamanic cultures. Words borrowed from Finno-Ugric languages attest an IE presence in the northern hinterland of the Baltic and Eurasia.



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Figure 3- Examples of new evidence pertaining to Parța and Tordos (Turdaș)

(The Global Prehistory Consortium at Euro Innovanet)

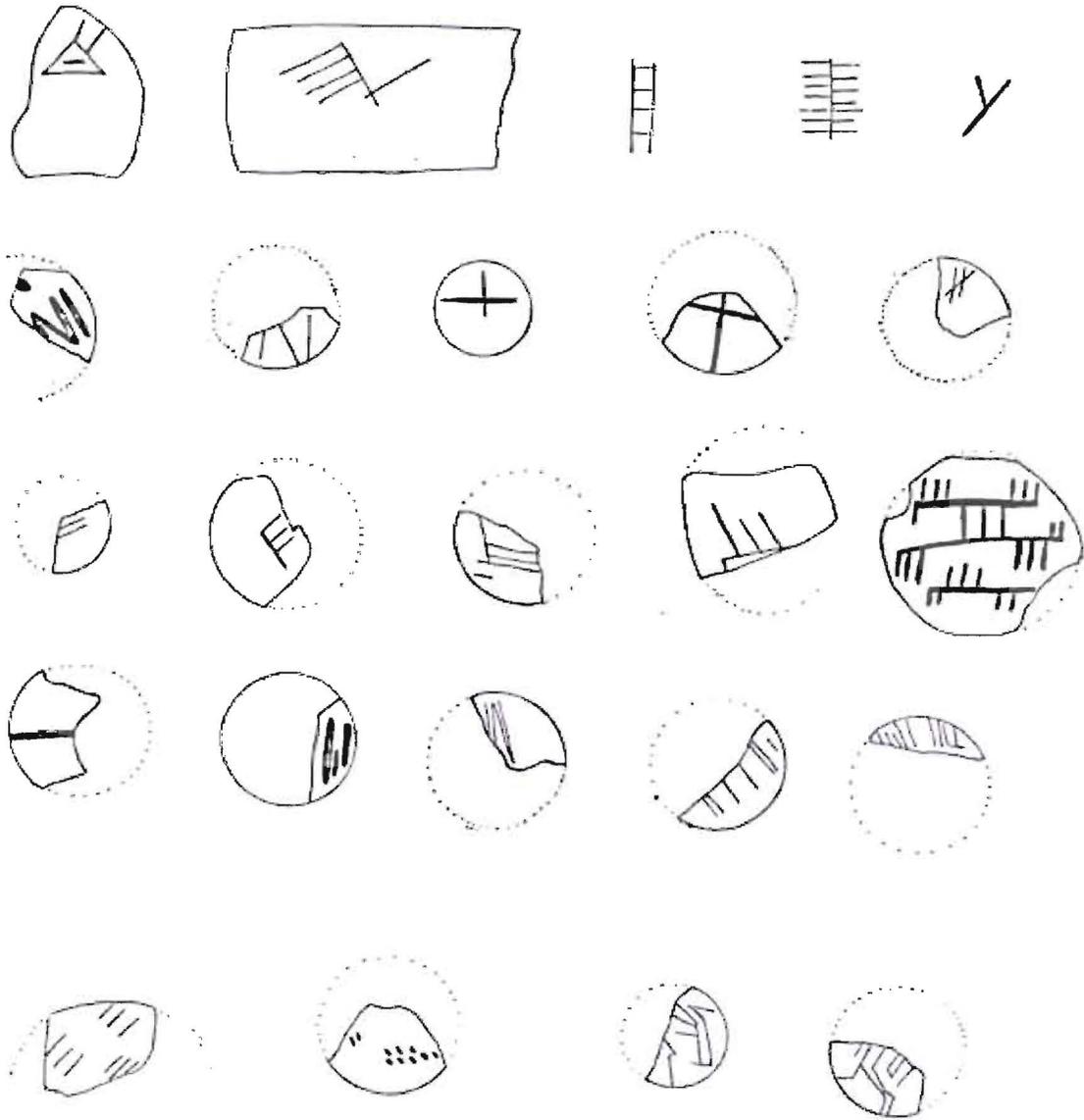


Figure 6 - Signs on Parța pottery (The Global Prehistory Consortium at Euro Innovanet)

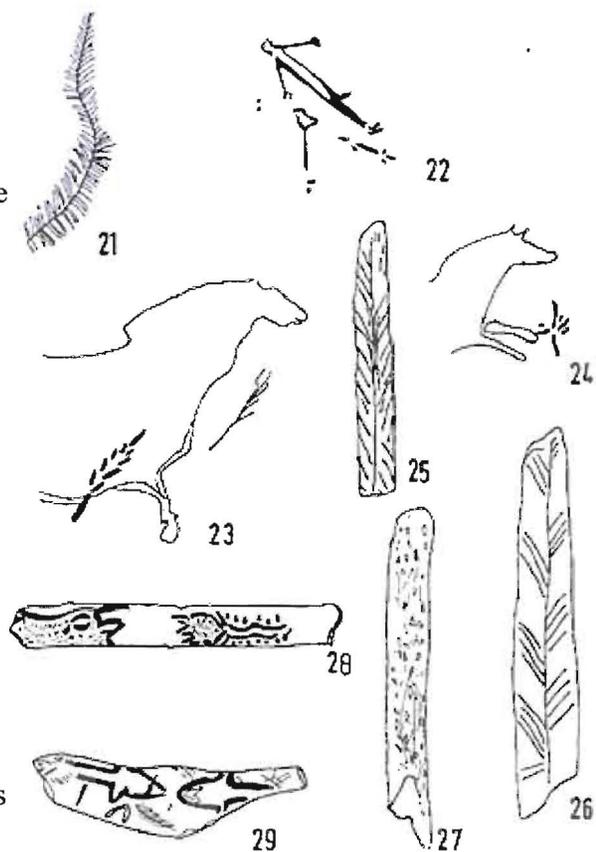
Similar marks are also found at a number of sites in Central and Western Europe, ranging from Danubian valley to the British Isles. Rock Art of the Azilian (Mas d'Azil, France) type has been found in all parts of France, Italy, Spain, Rumania and as far north as Scotland.

Illustration :

Azilian Art : Roc de Courbet, Bruniquel, Tarn-et-Garonne

(Quaternary Science Review)

Two other sites bearing striking similarities to the Danubian inscriptions are the Seine River valley (France) and Windmill Hill site (England) petroglyphs. The Windmill Hill site dates older than 2200 BCE when carbon-14 adjustments are made. Surprisingly, many of the alphabet-like symbols are close matches to the Mycenaean hieroglyphs and syllabic signs found at Knossos or on Linear B tablets from Pylos and which have been translated from archaic Greek in 1953 by Michael Ventris with the help of linguist John Chadwick. The Pylos inscriptions of southwestern Peloponnese date from the XIIIth century BC. Prior to this, the archaic Greeks were in the area of the lower Danube north to the Black Sea in the Pontic area. A bilingual cuneiform tablet found in the Hattusas archives records the mythological tale of a hunter in the then already dead Hurrian language along with a translation into Hittite. This remarkable discovery gave us the Hurrian word *ashi* from which Homer's *askos*, for "hide" or "fur," apparently stemmed. Before their migration to the Aegean, the Greeks borrowed the Hittite word *kursa*, which by a familiar phonological shift became *bursa*, another synonym for "fleece." These words seem to confirm the Greeks' belief that their ancestors had come from western



Asia, as recounted in the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, who sought the Golden Fleece in Colchis, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. The evidence that the Greeks came thence to their historical homeland puts the Greek "colonies" on the northern shore of the Black Sea in a new light. The colonies may now be considered as very early settlements that were established when the Greeks began migrating to their final home in the Aegean. We know from the Egyptian records that the Sea Peoples confederacy, of which the Mycenaean were part, led major attacks on the Nile Delta and on the Canaan coast where they finally settled. On the Merneptah Stele is the pharaoh's prosaic account of this campaign against the Sea Peoples and Libu is described in prose on a wall beside the sixth pylon at Karnak. Egyptian manuscripts also mention the "infamous" Sea Peoples as the major sea power in East Mediterranean. The most valuable source of linguistic information from Ancient Egypt is the list of names for Sea Peoples.

"Their confederacy consisted of Peleset, Tjekker, Sheklesh, Danu, and Weshesh, united lands, and they laid their hands upon the lands to the entire circuit of the earth, their hearts bent and trustful 'Our plan is accomplished!' (Merneptah Stele)

The Sea Peoples were the I.E. peoples who made themselves known to the Egyptians (on the Medinet Habu reliefs) around the XIXth dynasty when its military power was on the decline and were vanquished eventually by Ramses III, XXth dynasty. As the three leaders of these invasions the hieroglyphs mention the Denen (Danunas for the Hittites and - later on - Danaoi in the Iliad), the Prsht / Frst or Pulushta (named the Pilistim by the Hebrew, i.e the Philistines) and the Wawaitw (probably proto-venetic). Among their subordinate allies, the Egyptian epigraphy quotes the Tskl (Sicules, settled later on in Sicily), the Shrdn (probably from the city of Sardi, future capital of Lydia and who later became the Sardis), the Sakar (maybe the future Sicanes), among others. The same ethnic groups will appear in continental Europe as the co-founders of the Proto-Celtic, Proto-Italic, Proto-Illyric and Proto-Germanic nations.

The Denen or Danuna were most likely from the Lower Danube valley and Delta. J. Monard thinks that the Danans and Denen of the Greeks and Egyptians are the one and the same. After having raided Egypt, the Denen were eventually forced back to Cyprus which becomes Dnan. As the Danuna, they contributed to the fall of the Hittite empire. As Danaoi, they mingled with the Achaeans and lead them to the battle of Troy. The apprehensions of Laokoön were expressed thus, one thousand years later: "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes". It seems that they were with others such as the Lusacians of mixed Proto-Illyrian and Proto-Celtic origin who at that time were hardly distinguishable and who shared in a common North Pontic origin. It also seems that they prompted the indo-europeanisation of their Proto-Finnish neighbours of the North Baltic who after became the Germanic tribes. This is why this People of the Sea was labelled "Atlantean" by Plato.

Many of the geographers of antiquity maintained that Cap Skagen in Denmark was called Celtica Lytarnis. The Proto-Celtic ancestors of the Goidels therefore, came from Denmark. According to Irish myths, they were said to reside in the islands of the North and were called the Tuatha Dè Danan (J. Monard 1995).

The Prsht / Frst, Pulushta or Philistines, who prompted the Aegean maritime culture at the beginning of the 12th century BC, had spread, from their homeland in southern Greece and the Aegean islands to the shores of the Mediterranean. At some time in their early history, these people, because of the erosion of the outer banks by the encroaching sea, were faced constantly with the need to abandon some of their settlements. These were, as J. Monard believes, the Frst of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. According to Jürgen Spanuth (in *Das enträtselte Atlantis*), their capital was situated around the island of Helligoland... this nibbled isle being the location of its upper city later known as Hertha by the Germanic peoples. Plato (*Kritias*, 115) named the capital of his "Atlantis" as "Basilea" which in Greek means "The Royal (City) ». The homeland of these Prest (Frst or Prsht on hieroglyphs, later germanised as Frisir) was projected along the shore by a long sea-front bank of dunes destroyed by the encroaching sea. As residual remnants, the three broken chains of the Frisian Islands:

- Western chain, from Texel / Tessel to Rottumeroog and to the north of the Netherlands;
- Eastern chain, from Borkum to Wangerooge, to the north of Ostfriesland in Germany;
- Northern chain, from Amrun and Sylt to Fanø, to the west of Schleswig (Germany) and of Jutland (Denmark). (J. Monard 1995)

The Philistines settled along the eastern Mediterranean coast at the time when the Israelites settled in the highlands of Judaea. Politically independent, they maintained their Aegean traditions, which were clearly related to those of the Mycenaean culture. Architectural features and many finds indicate this relationship.

The Wawaitw were probably the Venetes identified by Caesar as a Gaulish maritime nation, the Uenetoi on Atlantic shores and Irish Sea were a celticised unit of a maritime diaspora. The others, known as Venedi in Latin, were on the Baltic Coast; another group was on the Adriatic, while another on the Black Sea. The Venetes, Uenetoi in Celtic, Ueneti in Latin as mentioned by Caesar, now named Bro Gwened in Breton or Vannetais in French. At the time of the struggle the Britons against Anglo-Saxon invaders, there was a small kingdom called Uenedotia, most likely settled by Uenetae. At that time, the Britons

(or Combrogas as they called themselves) were cornered in East Albion by the Saxons so they left for Armorica and settled the land of their remote cognates. Through linguistic evolution, the former Uenedotia was turned into Gwynned in north-west Wales and on Ynys Môn (Anglesey) where the name is still in use. The Venetes of Gaul and of Albion were Celtic-speaking in the last centuries of the Latenian era. Other Uenetoi were in north-western Italy, at the origin of Venetia and were speakers of their native Venetic idiom. As studied by M. Lejeune and Colin Renfrew, Venetic was an idiom halfway between Celtic and Illyric. Other Venetic peoples were found on the Paphlagonian shore of Northern Anatolia. The Greeks knew about their close kinship with the Adriatic Venetes and reported it. The ancient homeland of all of these scattered Venetes seems to have been what pre-historians call the Lusacian cultural area. The Venetes were therefore the descendants of the Lusacians (J. Monard 1995).

Recently (around 1997), the epigrapher Hans-Rudolph Hitz was successful, I truly believe, in decoding the Glozel inscriptions of France as ancient Gaulish. The inscriptions, bearing a dialectal idiom of ancient Gaulish, express the metaphysical preoccupations of the Celts. Among many other transcriptions, on a schist funeral ring was found the idionym: Tece eu Aphu Divana which he translates as “Tece has given (to) Aphu Divana”. Tece is the accusative of Tecos = “fair”, “handsome”; eu.: abbreviation of ieureu = “I donated” if not eu-apu = “good-water”; Apu / Apo = “water”, “estuary”; Diuan(n)a = “She Flood -Light”, “Divine”, was the Gaulish name of a water or river goddess. I would translate it as: Tece eu-apu Divana = “Fair the good water Divana”. This being, that the soul of the deceased crosses the white waters of the Goddess. Or on another tablet: Kuva tot antiutcnoui = “The Cube Tote – made it – (for) the son of Antiautos” should read as : Kuva tota Antiutcnoui (Kuva < Cuua / Cuba < Couba < Couia = “Cave-dwelling”; tota < totta // touta = “womb”, “female”, “community”, “tribe”; Antiutis = “He of those of the Front or Head” (Antiutcnoui = “The sons of those of the Front”). Another similar ring inscription reads: Veda sinte au octu translated by Dr Hitz as probably meaning “Veda this made (for) Octu”. Veda < Ueda = “Wisdom”, “Lady”, “Welcome”, “Slope”; sinte < accu. of Sintos / Sentos = “Way”, “Path”; au = preposition “far away from” or as a conjunction = “if”; octu / octo = “eight”. Again, I read it differently: Veda sinte au octu = “Wisdom (Lady) way / path far away from (the) eight”. Eight being, the “eight paths of Life”. A big tablet also bears the toponym nemu Chlausei which Dr Hitz translates as “Holy site of Glozel” (Nemu < nemusus / nemosos = “hallowed place”; Chlausei < Clausia = “Enclosure”). Finally, many inscriptions translated as personal names : Attec < Adtec-a/-os = “Very fair, handsome”; Setu < Setu-a/-os = “The Long”. Dating for the site inscriptions using the thermo-luminescence technique (McKerrell. 1999), from the La Tène to Gallo-Roman period ranges from around 300 B.C. to 100 A.C. Interestingly, the Glozel artefacts and script bear much resemblance to the Burrows artefacts’ main script, and both read as a dialect of Old Celtic.

Cosmic origins of sacred key or seed sounds and letters in early indo-European cultures

According to the Vedas :

“When the four-headed Brahmâ projected the universe from his mind, the seed ingredient was Shabda, sound. The prime sound was the original Om or Aum and from that Om, the mantras are born. In this sound, the fourteen planetary worlds spew forth as expressions of pure sound. Therefore, the constellations and planets are also expressions of sound, each an utterance of the Brahmâ.”

And according to the traditions of the Lebor Gabala Erren (Book of the Taking of Ireland) and the Auraicept na N-Éces (The Scholars' Primer), the Irish originated in Scythia and were descendants of a King Feinius Farsaid, a King of Scythia. This Feinius Farsaid and his son, Nel, went into Asia to work on the Tower of Nimrod (Tower of Babel in biblical history) and were present at the subsequent dispersal of the races after the destruction of the tower. Feinius and his son, both learned in the new languages which resulted from the dispersal, returned to Scythia where Feinius opened a great school of languages on the Scythian plain.

And to quote the Scholars' Primer:

“Query, well, then, whence are the Ogham vowels and consonants named? Not hard, Secundum alios quidem, it is from the school of Fenius Farsaidh, to wit, the school of poetry which Fenius sent throughout the world to learn the languages. There were five and twenty that were the noblest of them so that it is their names that were put for the Bethé Luis Nin of the Ogham, both vowels and consonants; and there were four who were the noblest of these again, so that it is their names that were given to the seven principal vowels: 15.

It is Gaedel Glas who fashioned the Gaelic language out of the seventy-two languages: there are their names, Bithynian, Scythian, etc. Under - poeta cecinit- who of the school went to it thither? Not hard. Gaedel, son of Ether, son of Toe, son of Baracham, a Scythian Greek.

To what is this beginning? Not hard. To the selection that was selected in Gaelic since this is the beginning which was invented by Fenius after the coming of the school with the languages from abroad, every obscure sound that existed in every speech and in every language was put into Gaelic so that for this reason it is more comprehensive than any language. "Er» then is every beginning, for this was the beginning with the

poets, that every obscure sound should come in the beginning, to wit, the Beithe Luis of the Oghan on account of obscurity.

Query, what is the reason why select language should be said of Gaelic?

Not hard. Because it was selected from any language; and for every obscure sound of every language a place was found in Gaelic owing to its comprehensiveness beyond every speech.

Query, how much did he bring of it? Not hard. The whole of it except what the poets added by way of obscuration after it had reached Fenius.

Query, what language of the seventy-two was published by Fenius first?

Not hard. The Irish language . . . for it is he whom he preferred of his school, and whom he had reared from his youth, and it is he that was the youngest of the school, and on account of its comprehensiveness beyond every speech, and it was the first language that was brought from the Tower. Fenius had Hebrew, Greek, and Latin before he came from Scythia, and he had no need to establish them at the Tower, wherefore on that account it was published first.”

The seed sounds are the three first utterances of the god of eloquence, Ogma. Each of the strokes simultaneously represents a vowel and a consonant. For example: -| = “A” and “M”, -|| = “O” and “G” and -||| = “U” and “Nc > Ng”. In this respect, the three strokes combined -||: O/G, -|: M/A not only spell out the name of the god Ogma, the name of the signs Ogmon > Ogham, plural Ogma, but also Om, the most sacred prime or seed sound found in Vedic mysticism. That is, ÔM, as in the Vedic OM or AUM. OAMos/-a/-on = “greatly”, “intact”, “mystic groove”;

O:-||- Og- : Og-os/-a/-on = “pure”, “virginal”, “intact”; Ogios, the youth of sound;

A: -| Am- : Am-os/-a/-on = “great”, “super”, “empowered”; Ama, the mother of sound;

M: -/- Ma- : Ma-/ios/-ia/-ion = “greater”, “much greater”; Maiia, the home of sound.

Nc : -///- U: -||| - : Ncu / ‘Ncu < Ancu < Ancouo = “fatality”, “fatal outcome”, “death”.

The Aúraicept maintains that Soim was the first thing to be written in Ogham and that “R” is for Graif. What is the meaning of this? First, Soim from Soimos < Soibos means “Magic”, “Illusion” and Graif < Grauon = “Writing”. It couldn’t be clearer, Ogham is magic writing! Og-uaim < Actusama = “perfect alliteration”, the Ogham, in accord with sound, comes from Ogma / Fenius, its prime inventor. And the learned are the prime agents who apply it to poetry. In the order of intellectual values, thought is superior to the spoken word, most often its imperfect expression. The spoken word is superior to writing, which kills it by fixing it

forever. This fixing of word is nevertheless binded by magic. Graif (Grauon), writing, is superior to Delb (Delua), image, in that writing is the property of the learned, the initiated to the mysteries, while imagery is understood by the ignorant and unlearned, therefore the initiated. As Eochra ecsi (< Axario Axscas "Key to writing (grooves)", writing forces reflection. Only meditation generates intelligence. Therefore, voice and sign, through mantric binding, are forever fixed in eternity. This is why the Ogham belongs to the god Ogma, Lord of Yoga, magic, mantric sounds, and martial arts.

On the Antiquity of Ogham

In strict archaeological terms, the Oghams are dated at best at the time of Ireland's Christianisation by St. Patrick and followers around the IVth and Vth centuries C.E... this argument is solely based on epigraphic evidence provided from scattered bilingual inscriptions in Goidelic Oghams and Latin letters from the Isle of Man, Southern Wales and Devon. In this light, the Oghams are viewed strictly as an Irish invention and its diffusion restricted to parts of Man, Scotland and Wales. Its origin is explained as the alphabetisation effort in the hope to recruit illiterate members of the Druidical class. The problem with this theory is that the Druids were far from being illiterate, mastering Oghams, (apart from their glozelian script from which the Coelbrenni, Celtiberian scripts derive) at least three of the four or five different alphabets known to the Celts: Greek, Etruscan and Roman.

"It is said that these young men have to memorise endless verses, and that some of them spend as long as twenty years at their books ; for although the Druids employ Greek characters for most of their secular business, such as public and private accounts, they consider it irreverent to commit their lore to writing. I suspect, however, that a double motive underlies this practice; unwillingness to publicise their teaching and a desire to prevent students relying upon the written word at the expense of memory training; for recourse to text-books almost invariably discourage learning by heart and to dull the powers of memory." (Julius Caesar, The Gallic Wars, Book VI)

In most cultures of Antiquity, literacy was a guarded secret in that it was an instrument, the key of power. It was not only irreverent to commit teachings to writing but politically dangerous to disseminate the secret code of written language. The alphabetisation effort of masses is a recent event in history.

The more informed sources (C. Sterckx, J. Monard) see the Oghams as a transitional sign system constructed from tally marks (Azilian Art) notched on wooden rods prior to the generalised use of the Latin script adapted to the Irish usage.

The most ancient Irish artefacts show that the Oghams were used in very short dedications of one or two words, most often the name of the deceased on the edge of commemorative gravestones. This practice leads to necessary upkeep of glossaries such as the "Auricept Na n'Eces" and the Leabhar Bhaile Mhota or "Book of Ballymote" given in latter horizontal form. However, these myopic views are broadened by other experts such as Prof. Claude Sterckx of the Université Libre de Bruxelles and linguist Joseph Monard. Sterckx has demonstrated how the oghamic inscriptions were written in a standardised archaic Proto-Irish very close to Gaulish and Latin. For example, the inscription "Degos maqi Mocoli Toicaci" (singular genitive) reading (Grave) of Degos (= "Studded") son (of) the descendant of Toicacos (Togicocos = "Charming-Red"), (Maqi and Toicaci being singular genitives and Mocoli, a plural genitive)¹.

According to J. Monard, the Oghams are (our translation) "writing solely of Celtic or of Goidelic origin most probably elaborated by the Druids from an analysis of sound, sorting out vowels from consonants: truly a systematic and original alphabet."²

Nevertheless, no one before went as far as Barry Fell to connect the Oghams with the many examples of Ogham-like tally marks found in prehistoric rock art. Fell went very far in his attempt to decipher the "Indian Oghams", much too far according to the experts of the field! Most problematic is his notion of an Arabic Ogham. I for one do not subscribe to it. The main problem resides in the nature of Oghams in their intrinsic essence. Remember that Oghams were traditionally the product of the Celtic Druids, the Western counterpart of Vedic Brahmins?

Oghams are structured on the model of zodiacal constellations, making them difficult to adapt to other traditions. In other words, there needs to be a transposition of sound lore from one culture to the other. The most suitable host for this is the Algonquian culture. The other point is that most believe the Oghams to derive from the Roman alphabet. This assumption has yet to be proven for it might be the other way around.

¹ Claude Sterckx, *Manuel élémentaire pour servir à l'étude de la civilisation celtique*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, p. 59-60.

² Joseph Monard, *Notice sur les Oghams*, (monograph), 1994.

When one studies the ancient inscriptions found in rock art in many ancient sites occupied by the early I.E. peoples, next to the historical alphabets, one is confronted with a dual origin of writing. The alphabet is said to have derived from Phoenician scripts, this is what historians maintain. There is, however the possibility that the alphabet evolved much earlier in the areas of the Aegean Sea and the Carpatian mountains and was later introduced into Phoenicia and Palestine, if not Egypt, by the I.E. invaders, the Philistines in particular. "As long ago as 7000 years, pottery of the Vinca culture in the Balkans bore signs, some of which are identical with the form of runes from over five millennia later. Also, many sigils which are known now as runes already existed as forms used by rock carvers. In various parts of Europe, most notably during the late Bronze and early Iron Ages (1300-800 BCE), pictographic rock carvings were made at various locations."³ Oghams seem to originate in Europe's Neolithic culture, which would strongly point to a shamanistic background to its creation. Ogham-like petro glyphs are found in many areas of continental Europe, in cave art and Neolithic artefacts (Mas-d'Azil), and in the Seine river-valley petro glyphs and in the Alpine rock art in particular. It seems that the Illyrian Etruscans developed an alphabet at quite an early date and were responsible for the script's diffusion along the many river trade routes of Northern, Eastern and Western Europe. We know that they also had contact with the Phoenician and Greek traders since at least the eighth century BCE. The Greeks, much like the Celts and Germanics, claimed a godly inspiration to the invention of writing. According to the Roman writer Caius Julius Hyginus, the first seven letters of the Greek alphabet were the work of the Fates, these goddesses who presided over the destinies of mortals. The Irish myths tell the same of the first seven strokes of the Ogham. They were made in honour of Lugh's wife, a mortal, as a sign of protection against death. The Greek letters were Alpha, Beta, Eta, Ypsilon, Iota, Omicron and Tau. The Goidelic Ogham gives Beth, Luis, Nion, Fern, Sail, Nin, Dur. The poet Ovid in his *Fables* informs us that after these seven Fate signs were in use, Palamedes, son of Nauplius, invented eleven more, taking the count to eighteen. Then it is said that Epicharmus of Sicily added Theta and Chi or alternatively Pi and Psi. In the Ogham, "X" (Ch) for Xquiats, Spetes, for "Whitethorn or Xotia for "Coppice" and Xassanos for "Oak", "Ea" Elto / Aminarios, "Lombardy Poplar, and "Th" for Tannos. Finally, the last letters, Omega, Epsilon, Zeta and Psi or Phi were added to the alphabet by Simonides. In the Ogham, the order was, "Ph" Pharion, for "wayfaring tree", or Phagos (Beech), "I" luos (Yew) and "Xs" (ks) or Maros Xi ("Big X") for 'Xslemos (Wych Elm), and latter "Ae" Aemhancoll, for Uanocoslos, "wych-elm" or Sxobies (Elder). These borrowings from the Greeks and Etruscans could indicate a strong Hermetic (Hermes) influence on the Druidical belief systems or that they all drew from a common source. In fact, it was believed that Hermes after seeing a flight of cranes and shapes they took, inspired him to transcribe these into alphabetical signs (Nigel Pennick). This account has a parallel in the story of the magical Crane Bag of Manannan. The bag was made from the skin of a Crane, who was in truth Aoife, second daughter of Ailill of Aran (Alpilis the Cattleman), and who was wed to Manannan Mac Lir, the ocean god. The Treasure Bag was said to contain the shirt of Manannan and his knife, Guibne's girdle, a smith's hook, the King of Scotland's shears, the King of Lochlainn's (Norway) helmet, the bones of Asal's swine, a girdle of the great whale's back, and when the sea was at high tide the

³ Nigel Pennick, *The Secret Lore of Runes*, p. 78.

contents were made visible and when the sea was in ebb, the Crane bag was in turn empty. ⁴ In the Ogham, this could probably correspond to the vowels "E", Elto (Aspen) or Etana (Etain) for "poetry", A for Auentia "divine inspiration, O for Onuana, "faultless memory", and U for Uiriona, "truth".

I suspect that a much earlier version of the Oghams could have existed in the Alps and Danubian valleys, and that it could very well have merged with the Trans-Alpine script which evolved from a mixture of Proto-Celtic and Pre-Celtic magical signs (Azilian Art) long before the Celto-ligurian script was borrowed from the Etruscan and Greek alphabets... Here is my reasoning following Livy's description of the Cisalpine Gaulish tree alphabet called Litana Uidua (Broad Forest):

1. "It was a year of dire tribulations L. Postumius⁵, the chosen Consul, perished with all of his troops on the Roman side of the Alps, in the cisalpine⁶ region. In this area, there was a vast forest which the Gauls called Litana⁷, and in which he was to lead his army.

2. Left and right to the path, the Gauls were chopping down trees as to remain standing and fall at the slightest gust of wind. Postumius had two Roman Legions, and from the Adriatic⁸ Sea, he raised an army of 25 thousand men that was to take the enemy territory⁹.

3. The Gauls set themselves up on either side of the path to push the trees on either side so they may fall on the men and horses crushing them mortally. Only six of our men escaped. A few were made prisoners while attempting to cross a bridge, this is where Postumius perished. The body and severed head (letter "P") of the General were taken to the Boian temple, the most respected in the land; the head cleaned empty in accordance with their customs, a golden rim fastened to it, and placed to serve as a sacred vessel for ritual libations. It also served as a cup for the temple priests, and in the eyes of the Gauls, the prey was no less prized than the victory.¹⁰

⁴ John Matthews, *Taliesin*, p. 81.

⁵ punning with - postumus meaning "last born" and posthumous meaning "born after his father's death".

⁶ Indicating that the Oghams were Celtic.

⁷ Litana Silua in latinised Cisalpine Gaul, or Litana Uidua in Gaul meaning "the broad forest" (J. Monard 1994).

⁸ An indication that the alphabet originated from across the Adriatic in the Balkans.

⁹ In reference to the 25 letters of the Greek alphabet including digamma.

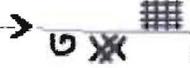
¹⁰ Livy, Book XXIII, 24.

The *Auraicept Na n-Éces* ("the scholars' primer") is said to be the work of VIIth century Irish grammarians, collected and copied by the scribe Longarad. The only remaining copy of the *Auraicept* is found in the Book of Ballymote compiled in 1390 by Maghnus Ó Duibhgeánáin of County Sligo, Ireland. Glossed over by clerics, however, most of the text material is much older, therefore preceding the Christian era. The *Auraicept Na n-Éces* is one of the three main medieval manuscript sources treating of Ogham and its writing system, the others being the *In Lebor Ogaim* ("In book of Ogham") and the *De dúilib feda na forfed* ("Of elements of fews ("letters") and over fews (additional letters)"). In the Book of Ballymote, a copy of the *In Lebor Ogaim* is found just before the *Auraincept* with its great variety of secret Oghams replacing the usual *Briatharogam Con Culainn* given in other copies. Also included in the list is the early Futhark referred to as *ogam lochlannach* ("Ogham of the Scandinavians or Norsemen").



Copy of a page of the Book of Ballymote showing variants of Ogham from number 43 (*sluagogam*) to number 77 (*sigla*).

and they added other three to them so that from these are named the other three

diphthongs, wherefore  are classified apart. Second of all, it is from the trees of the forest that names were given to the Ogham letters metaphorically. Moreover Beithe, b, is from the birch of the forest for the first letter on the path of the Ogham alphabet. Luis, l, that is rowan, or elm in the forests. Fern, f, that is, alder in the forest. Sail, s, of the Ogham, that is, willow, again, in the forest. Nin, n, of the Ogham, to wit, maw of spear, or nettles in the woods. Uath, h, of the Ogham, that is, test-tree or whitethorn, on account of its thominess. Dur, d, of the Ogham is oak, again, in the forest. Tinne, t, of the Ogham, holly or elderberry in the forest. Coll, c, of the Ogham, hazel in the forest. Quert, q, of the Ogham is holly in the forest, or quicken tree, or aspen. Muin, vine, m, mead [from it]. Gort, cornfield, g, fir. Getal, ng, broom. Straif, str, willowbrake in the forest. Onn, o, furze or ash. Ur, u, thorn. Edad, e, yew. Ida, i, service tree. Ebad, ea, elecampane. Oir, oi, spindle tree. Uilleann, ui, ivy. Pin, io, of the Ogham, pine, again, in the forest. Hence are named caera pinne, gooseberries; ifin, again is the name of that letter. Emancoll, witch hazel, ae, again, c doubled according to fact or according to form, c across c in its form.”

(End of quote : Auraicept pp. 273- 277)

Earlier on in the Auraicept, other than the tree names given to the fews, were the names of legendary wise men. Many of these are biblical so it can only be a recent list devised by Christian clerics. Since the text was glossed over, a careful exegeses of this list is needed before any material, at least at the Antique level, can be extracted.

“There are the names of them after who are named the Ogham vowels and consonants. Here are their names : Babel, Lot, Pharaoh, Saliath, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, David, Talamon, Cae, Kaliap, Muiriath, Gotli, Gomers, Stru, Ruben, Achab, Oise, Urith, Essu, Iachim, Ethrocious, Uimelicus, Iudonius, Affrim, Odines.”

At the most ancient level, these names could have corresponded to legendary sages, poet-seers or druids. It very risky to give the original name using the Irish name list, but nevertheless, the oghamic system permits this kind of word play or replacement.

Possible alternative mythological names for the 25 poet-seers:

B, Babel / Boibel: Babal, Beothach or Bith;

┐ | = B

L, Lot / Loth: Liath;

-/- /| |M| = M

G, Gotli / Gath: Goidel;

-/-/- Γ = Γ

Ng, Gomers / nGoimar: Goibhniu; along with: **Y, Idra:** ?;

-/-/-/- |N| = 'N / Ñ

S, Stru : Sru, Stam;

-/-/-/-/- =

Ruben : Ruadh;

-/-/-/-/- P

A, Achab / Acab: Adna;

-|- A = A

O, Oise / Ose: Oisin;

-|-|- || = O

U, Urith / Ura : Urias;

-|-|-|- Y

E, Essu : Esras, Esru;

-|-|-|-|- ∃ || = E

I, Iachim / Jaichim: Iuchar and Iucharba or Iubdan, Ith and Ir;

-|-|-|-|- I; | = I

X / Ea, Ethrocius : Eolas;

~~X~~ × = X

Th / Oi, Iudonius : Oirbsen;

~~0~~ † ⊙ ∅ = Θ / Þ

P / Ia, Afrim : Iarbonel / Iardanél;

~~✕~~ # = Π

Ph / Ui, Uimelicus : Uiscias;

~~∩~~ ∂ = Φ

Xs / Ae, Odines : Aedh.

~~⏏~~
= Ξ / Æ

“These are the names of the 25 persons, the noblest that were in Fenius’ school. Others again say that is the alphabet which was invented in Achaidh, and at the Causeway of the Great Estuary that Amergen, son of Mil, invented, the Beithe Luis of the Ogham. What letter, what character, what sound is that with which no word is ended? (i. dinin disoil, no fearn = “it not of Nin not of Sail or Fearn). And what sharp sound is found with which no strong word is begun? (i. ernin Getal = “it great Nin”, that is Ng). The five principal vowels of the Ogham however, it was from the five persons that were noblest there, and that it is from the seven persons that were noblest there that they are named, and the two vowels that were added to those five vowels are ea, oi.” (Auraicept p. 21)

- Please note that the Achaidh here mentioned was most likely Achaea (Achaïa < Αχαΐα) or Arcadia (Arkadía < Αρκαδία), both ancient provinces of Greece in the Peloponnesus and not the biblical Akkad of Babylon. Arcadia was the fabled region of the North ruled by the god Arcas. It takes its name from the mythological character Arcas, the son of the god Zeus (The God of Thunder and the lord over all gods) and Callisto (The goddess of the Great Bear, also known as Ursa Major. The northern

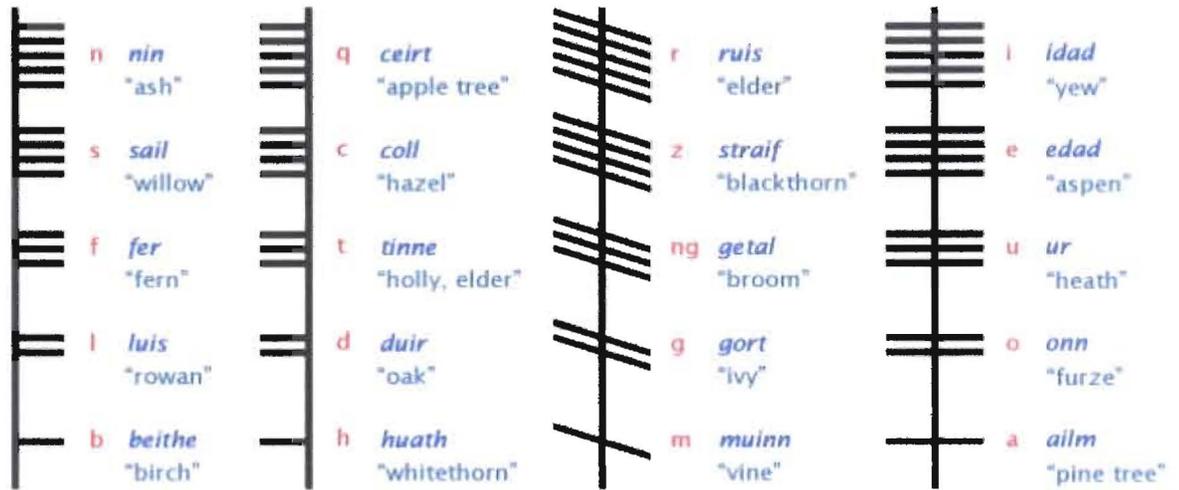
region in the context of Indo-European culture was the dwelling place of the seven prime sages of the Arctic called Septentriones in Latin and Sapta Rishis in Sanskrit. Needless to add that these mythic seers were fabled as the inventors of religion, art, science and language. From them, radiated the seven cosmic rays which contain all knowledge and enlightenment, including the first sounds and letters.

The Ogham alphabet

Translation and trial interpretation of Ogham terminology into modern Irish (from online source : www.ancientscripts.com/ogham.html):

Beithe birch b	Luis blaze/herb l	Fern alder f	Sail willow s	Nion fork/loft n	Uath fear(?) h	Dair oak d	Tinne rod/metal t	Coll hazel c	Ceirt bush q
Muin neck m	Gort field g	nGéatal wounding(?) ng	Straif sulphur z	Ruis red(ness) r	Ailm ? a	Onn ash-tree o	Úr earth u	Eadhadh ? e	Iodhadh ? i
Éabhadh ? ea	Ór gold oi	Uilleann elbow uí	Ifín pine ia	Eamhancholl double c ae	Peith soft birch p	Eite feather	Spás space	Eite thuathail reversed feather	

The traditional Ogham tree names from the Auraicept (from online source : www.ancientscripts.com/ogham.html):



Old Celtic etymologies of the Ogham tree symbols:

Fedha < Uidoues = “woods” as letters and tree constellations:

1-B, Bith / Beithe < Betua = “Birch”;

2-L, Luis < Lusias = “Mountain Ash”;

3-N, Nin / Nuin < Olnos = “Flowering Ash”;

4- F / V (*W), Fern < Uernos (Alder);

5-S, Sail < Salix = “Willow”;

6-H (*SC/*SP > *XQ/*XP), Huath < Scuiats || Spetes = “Hawthorn”, “Whitethorn” and/or variant, Xquiats (gdl) || Xpetes (brt) = “Hawthorn” and/or Scobies = “Elder”;

7-D, Dair / Duir < Daruos (gdl) || Deruos (brt) = “English Oak”;

8-T, Teine / Tinne < Tennos / Colennos = “Holly”;

9-C, Coll < Cosla / Coslos = “Hazel”;

10-Q, Cert < Certa > Qerta = “Crab-Apple”;

11-M, Muin < mUinia < Uiniia = “Vine” and/or Marcos = “Rustic Vine”;

12-G, Gort < Gortia = “Ivy” and/or Gabrostos = “Honeysuckle”;

13-Ng, nGetal / nGéatal or Getal < nCaitalis < Incaitalis or Caitalis = “Reed”, Caitalis Secsca = “Sedge”;

14- Z / sD (*Ð), Straif < Sdragenos < Ðragenos = “Barberry” and/or Ðrausa = “Green Alder”;

15-R, Ruis < Ruscia = Elder Tree, *Roudioscobies = “Red clustered Elder” and/or Reusmen = “Sappy Alder” and Rusca = “Rowan”;

16-A, Ailm < Alamios = “Pine Tree”, “Scottish Pine” and/or Aballos = “Apple Tree”;

17-O, Onn < Odocos = “Ground elder”;

18-U, Ur < Uroica = “Heather”;

19-E, Elto (Aspen, Poplar), Edato (Trembling Poplar), Edenno (Ivy), Ercus (Oak/Beech);

20-I, Iuos (Yew), Ibuos (Yew), and/or Itus (Pine);

Forfedha Uorbenta = “Over Fate (signs):

21- Ch / K / X (Xi = 'X' chi), Koad / Choad < Xotia = “Coppice” and/or Ximalos (Hops), with:

EA, Eadha < Esados = “White Poplar”;

22-/Ð/Th, Tharan < Taranos (gdI) || Tannos (brt) = “Holm Oak” and/or Thesmerion = “Hibiscus”; with:

Oi, Oir, Feorusoir < Uorosorios = “Spindle Tree”;

23-P, Peith / Pethbol < *Petios = “Guelder rose”, “Snow ball tree” / *Petisiaballos = “Little Apple Tree” and/or Petteuroica = “Bog berry bush”; with:

UI, Uilléan < Uillo = “Honeysuckle”, “Woodbine” and/or Uitu (Willow Bush);

24-Ph, Féa, Phogos < Bagos = “Beech”; with:

Ia, Iphin < Spidna / Spina = “Gooseberry” and/or Iauga (Furze);

25-XS (= KS / PS), 'Xslemos, from Uxslemos “Mountain Elm”, “Wych-elm”, “Scotch Elm”; with:

AE, Amancoll Aemancholl < Uaenocoslos = “Wych-elm”; also called Chi Mor < Maros Xi = “Big X”.

Conclusion

It is reasonable to conclude that the Ogham is much older than the alphabet from which it is thought to derive. My reasoning is that the early alphabet evolved from the logosyllabic Danubian tally marks and symbols which derived from the Stone Age the mystical writing of the Eurasian shamans. We must also reconsider the current accepted thesis crediting Sumer, Egypt and Canaan as the birthplace of writing. Archaeology now permits to suppose that it was in the Danubian valley of Europe that the alphabet was invented and that it radiated from there south past the Black Sea into Asia and west to Greece and the Alps.

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