

A LINGUISTIC BREAKTHROUGH FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE'S PREHISTORY

VENNEMANN'S THESIS OF A VASCONIC AND PROTO-SEMITIC EUROPE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

by

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Summary

Vennemann's thesis of A) a pre-Indo-European, Vasconian, pan-European ethno-linguistic substrate, and B) an early colonizing influence on Western Europe by a more sophisticated, seafaring, superior Atlanto-Semitic civilization is described. It is shown that this scenario constitutes a breakthrough for the reconstruction of Europe's prehistory, by incorporating ethno-linguistic and cultural diffusion as a decisive factor in the forming of Europe's identity.

IT MAY SEEM rather daring to the specialist in the relevant fields of learning when somebody, who is "only" a historian of the sciences, takes the risk to offer a synopsis of a truly revolutionizing, comprehensive linguistic thesis (plus a broad synthesis and discussion of its ramifications) which – since there seems to be a good chance that it will become the new "paradigm" in the sense of the great Thomas Kuhn(1) – will be of the greatest consequences for our understanding of European late prehistory. But I take some consolation and exculpation from the words of Stuart Piggott on the very first page of his *ANCIENT EUROPE*(2), where he was faced with the same problem:

"I say 'take a risk', for I knew that if I chose to navigate on such wide and inevitably

shallow waters of learning, I should obviously lay myself open to a charge of superficiality and a lack of comprehension of the complexities involved. Indeed, I might lose any reputation I might have had for being a 'sound scholar': here, however, we may recall the famous definition of this phrase as 'a term of praise applied to one another by learned men who have no reputation outside the university, and a rather queer one inside it'."

Problems of traditional scenario for pre-Celtic Europe

The traditional scenario for pre-Celtic and pre-Roman Europe, as it is conventionally presented by our mainstream prehistorians and archaeologists, by historical linguistics

and our historical atlases, can only be called highly unsatisfactory and suspect. Quite quickly we get into the nebulous mists of prehistory where almost nothing is clearly discernible and recognizable. It has become impossible to discriminate between real, once-existing facts, and shadowy phantoms, or figments fabricated by the involuntary acrobatics of our mind, before about 280 BC. i.e. for almost all of Europe. This is the same epoch during which the extreme southeastern tip of Europe (Macedonia, Greece) had come into direct terrestrial contact with Inner Asia (Bactria) and, in the Punjab, with the ancient, advanced civilization of India.

THOUGH THERE do exist certain non-mainstream, non-Establishment proposals in this field(3), we do as yet not even have a clear conception about the relationship which must have existed between the Celto-Germanic peoples and the Megalithic civilization, all the more so since there have been published recently several proposals, also by non-Establishment critics of the traditionally presented scenario, to the effect that our conventional chronology for these epochs should be regarded with deep distrust(4). But the fact remains: without an understanding of pre-Indoeuropean Europe, and especially of the Megalithic culture, we can never hope to see late prehistoric Europe in proper perspective, especially with regard to diffusionist interrelationship with other civilizations.

The Megalithic civilization and the "Sea Peoples" invasion of Egypt

There can be no doubt that the Atlanto-European Megalithic civilization has been of a rather advanced character. Only recently, Meier & Zschweigert(5) have presented overwhelming evidence for this view. There is, however, as yet no general agreement with respect to the relationship of the Celtic culture with this civilization. Barry Fell(6), an ex-Harvard professor in marine biology

and later non-Establishment prehistorian and epigrapher, states in this respect:

"It is a peculiarity of European archaeology texts that the books that deal with the Celts say very little about Megalithic structures ... On the other hand, the European archaeology texts that deal with the megalithic buildings of Europe say little if anything about the people who built them". Fell asserts that the Western European megalithic monuments had mostly been built by the Celts, and speaks – in view of similar megalithic monuments in the eastern United States – of a spread of Druidism to North America. The present author, in contradistinction, tends to the opinion that the original Megalithic civilization may have been more or less annihilated by great cataclysms of nature, and that only afterwards the Celts may have become the inheritors of this culture, albeit on a far less sophisticated level. But that remains to be seen. As yet, in my view, we have too little grasp of the Megalithic as well as the Celtic phenomenon.

Spanuth's scenario(7), according to which the "Sea Peoples", which invaded Egypt during the reigns of pharaohs Merenptah and Ramses III. came from the Atlantic seaboard of northwestern Europe, does not in any way seem so far-fetched as some may think. In view of the obvious nautical capabilities of the bearers of the Megalithic civilization it would have been outright incomprehensible if they should not have known the Mediterranean. But there were chronological problems as well as ethno-linguistic ones. The present author has tried to reconcile these problems and contradictions(8) in going beyond Spanuth, and at the same time refuting Velikovsky's rather absurd "identification" and dating of the "Sea Peoples".

TO SHOW the complexity of the problem, an illustration (Fig.1) is reproduced here from the 2nd, enlarged 1990 edition of that book, where the interdependency of the sub-

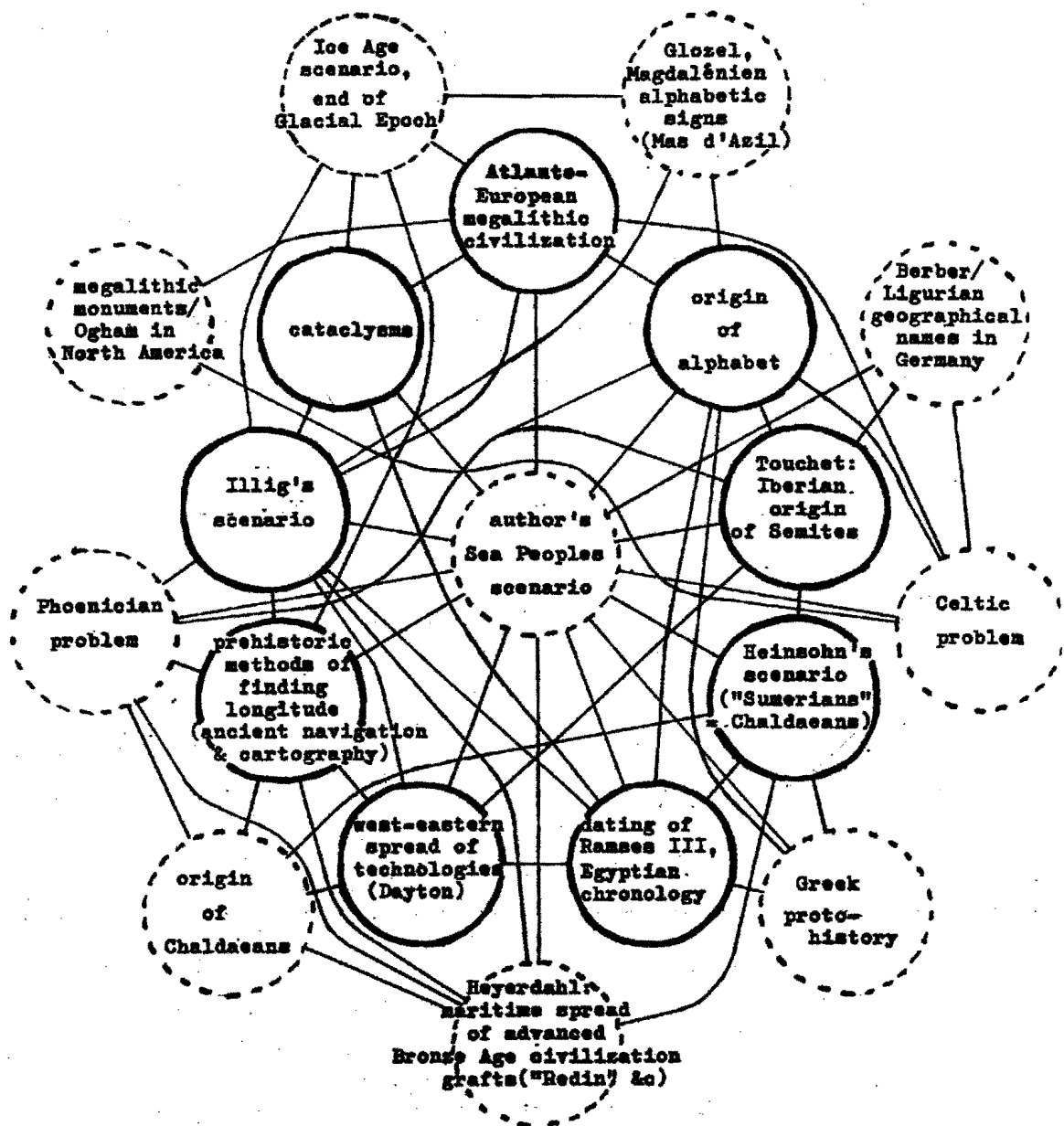


Fig.1: The Sea Peoples on Intersection of Lines Connecting Interdependent Problems

problems involved, and the great number of those sub-problems, are indicated. Not least among them ranks the problem if these "Sea Peoples" have been of Indoeuropean or Hamito-Semitic origin. Spanuth sees them as of (proto-)Celts-Germanic origin. But according to Ramses' III. inscriptions in Medinet Habu at least part of these warriors have been circumcised! This does not exactly fit how we visualize a Celtic or Germanic warrior.

Vennemann's scenario a breakthrough in several respects

At this point in time, Vennemann's theses of an ancient European Vasconic substrate, and of a pre-Indoeuropean Proto-Semitic past of Western Europe, can only be highly welcome. This scenario will enable us to arrive at a much clearer understanding of late prehistoric Europe. Vennemann's research results and theses have, over the years, been published in many scholarly articles, respectively journals. The more important ones are listed in the APPENDIX. Now these separate publications have at last been assembled in an impressive volume(9), and so the occasion does not seem inappropriate to give here a synopsis of Vennemann's general thesis, so that many readers may judge for themselves the great merit of Theo Vennemann's work, who incidentally is a professor for Germanistic linguistics at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich.

VENNEMANN has arrived at this scenario, partly in the tracks of forerunners like Julius Pokorny, Johannes Hubschmid, Hans Krahe, and Linus Brunner, by a study of on the one hand toponyms (place, mountain and river names) throughout Europe, and on the other of words in many, especially western and central European languages, for which no sensible etymology can be given in an Indoeuropean framework. In this way he has been able to arrive at a, so to speak, multiple breakthrough not only in (ethno-) linguistic, but also in prehistoric respect, with important

consequences for the historian of cultural diffusion.

General nature and subtheses of Vennemann's scenario

Vennemann assumes that after the "Great Ice Age" (as it is generally understood in contemporary, i.e. non-catastrophic, geological doctrine) Europe was slowly resettled from the south and southwest by peoples who followed the receding ice, but reminds us to keep in mind that the relevant time to consider is relatively short:

"WHEN THE CONTINENT was becoming warmer, about ten thousand years ago, and the ice sheet was beginning to withdraw from large parts of Europe... the Vasconic Old Europeans moved forward into Western, Central, and Eastern Europe starting from southern France so that nearly the entire Continent became Vasconic"(10). He adds that there was also Ligurian, but that too little material has survived for a genetic identification. As to his general thesis, Vennemann says:

"Leaving aside the Finnic languages with all their own problems, but including Indo-European, I assume three and only three language families in prehistoric Europe north of the Alps:

1. Old European
2. Atlantic
3. Indo-European.

1. The Old European languages I consider Vasconic, i.e. related to contemporary Basque, the only survivor of the Vasconic family of languages.
2. The Atlantic languages I consider Hamito-Semitic, and indeed most closely related to Semitic, which is why I set up a branch of Hamito-Semitic including both the Semitic and the Atlantic languages. For want of a better term... I

call this group Semitidic. Among this group, the Semitic languages are the ones that survive into modern times, while the Atlantic languages died out in prehistory or, perhaps, in early historic times, namely during the Middle Ages if my thesis that Pictish was the last survivor of the Atlantic languages is correct...

3. The Indo-European languages are those which ousted most of the other languages from the continent. Whether they have relatives outside Indogermania will not be discussed in this paper”(11).

The Semitides as the bearers of the Megalithic culture

In Vennemann's scenario the Semitides are the “Megalitheans” and the “Vanir” of northern legend(12). With respect to them, he has this to say:

“From about 5.000 BC. onward, Semitidic peoples, bearers of the megalithic culture, moved north along the Atlantic coast to all the islands and up the navigable rivers as seafaring colonizers... Their main economy ... was an advanced form of cattle breeding as well as agriculture including fruit-culture, and increasingly, mining and trading.

WHY IS IT plausible to assume that those Atlantic colonists and megalithic builders of the Atlantic Seaboard spoke Semitic languages? At the dawn of history we find the Western Mediterranean dominated by Phoenicians, a Semitic people ... I assume the megalithic culture to have spread along the Atlantic coast from the south and west of the Iberian Peninsula ... and thus to have its origin in the coastal regions between the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic, where I locate the homeland of the Semitidic peoples ...”(13).

Amalgamation of languages: Substrata, superstrata, and adstrata

It goes without saying that we cannot present here all the details and aspects of Vennemann's scenario. Suffice it to emphasize some important points. First: the really ancient toponyms all over Europe are originally Vasconic. Second: languages belonging to the above-mentioned three language families have influenced each other in many different ways, with respect to e.g. especially vocabulary and grammar. The character of the resulting amalgam or creolized language depended in addition upon factors like the arrival time of different languages in a certain region, the charisma of the newly arriving ethnic entity, the numbers of the newly arriving group vis-à-vis the substratum, social stratification, and so on.

IN THIS WAY Vennemann analyzes in a really masterly and convincing manner Western and Central European languages like Insular Celtic, modern English, or the vocabulary of Germanic, to demonstrate the most remarkable ethno-linguistic mixtures between Old Vasconians, Hamito-Semitic and Indo-European peoples with which we will have to reckon in the gradual “nation building” of today's European peoples.

Consequences of Vennemann's theses for scenarios of cultural diffusion

Let us recapitulate the most important aspect of the Vennemann scenario: There is the well-known Hamito-Semitic language family, and this has a sub-family, or branch, or language group called Semitidic. And he locates the homeland of the Semitidic peoples in the coastal regions between the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic, i.e. in the coastal regions (Atlantic plus Mediterranean) of the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula. This Semitidic branch has again two rather closely related branches, to wit the “Atlantic” languages, the speakers of which were the bearers of the Megalithic civilization, and the well-known Semitic languages.

This means two things.

First: That the Celto-Germanic peoples, in spite of Vasconian substratal and Indo-European superstratal linguistic and cultural heritage, are not only linguistically but also culturally heavily indebted to the Hamito-Semitic "Atlantic" (i.e. almost-Semitic) speaking bearers of the Megalithic civilization in Western Europe, who hailed from either the Maghreb or the Iberian Peninsula. The thesis is not so far-fetched after all that they may have some connection with the ancient, advanced metalworking civilizations on the Iberian Peninsula described by Whishaw(14) and Topper(15), to which I have alluded in an earlier issue on the pages of this journal(16).

Second: Since the Semitic speaking peoples (Akkadians, Aramaeans, Assyrians, Hebrews, Proto-Arabs etc.) are another branch of the Semitides, their original homeland – as proposed already earlier by Milosz(17) and Touchet(18), and in line with Dayton's scenario(19) – has also been the Maghreb and/or Iberian Peninsula, or what I like to call the Greater Iberian West, from where they only later colonized countries in the Near East.

Two textbook cases of cultural diffusion indeed!

Great importance of Vennemann's "Europa Vasconica – Europa Semitica"

AFTER HAVING studied Vennemann's voluminous (977 pages) work, the present author cannot see the slightest possibility, how anybody could try to successfully refute its main theses: to wit A) a common Vasconian, pan-European substrate, and B) a colonizing and culture-bearing influence by a more advanced, more sophisticated Hamito-Semitic ("Atlantic", "Semitic"), proto-Semitic, possibly proto-Phoenician, seafaring nation on Western Europe, including the proto-Germanic ethnic entities.

Vennemann's methodical reasoning e.g. in "Andromeda and the Apples of the Hesperides", two chapters on "Germania Semitica", or in the chapter "Testing the West: Hesperia, Euskal Herria, Europe, Abendland and supporting etymologies", is much too convincing for that.

DOUBTLESS, as Europeans, we can live with an ancient, common Vasconian substrate. Nobody will therefore have a problem with his or her self-concept or self-identity. But there are people in several European countries who dream dreams of "Rassereinheit" or "limpieza" (purity of blood), and who will therefore not welcome the idea that they might be of partly Hamito-Semitic descent. But it seems that the time has come for them to awaken from their dream. We all have to awaken to the fact that ideologists masquerading as scholars have misused the sciences to create erroneous ideas in the minds of people about "race". There is no such thing as a "pure race" on our planet. All is interconnected: ethnically, culturally, linguistically, genetically. Vennemann's work will be of great help for Westerners, who have for far too long been used to regard themselves as a rather special, even somehow superior race.

Ramifications and problems of Vennemann's scenario

Quite obviously such theses, by their rather revolutionizing character, will be disquieting for the mainstream. It remains to be seen in how far at least the linguistic mainstream, let alone the "majority opinion" among mainstream Ancient Oriental History scholars and prehistorians generally, will be prepared to welcome Vennemann's extremely meritorious research results.

The ramifications of his theses are manifold. We will mention only a few examples. Have these "Atlantic"-speaking Semitides been the original proto-Phoenicians? Or: in view of the penchant or propensity of these

“Megalitheans” for maritime migration, will they not also have long ago discovered the Americas, even other distant continents, and have been active there as overseas merchants, miners, or even slave traders? And, in view of that maritime mobility: Has that “Greater Iberian West” really been their original “motherland”, or have they also there arrived from afar?

VENNEMANN does not mention the Berber people. It has been postulated for them, too, that they might have been the original inhabitants of Europe(20). Was there an interconnection with the Vasconians? And what about the other pre-Indo-European peoples of Europe, e.g. the Raeto-Ligurians?

These are only some examples. In view of the well-known slowness of the Establishment mainstream to accept new theses, and to test them with further researches, it is to be hoped that also serious, knowledgable non-Establishment scholars will do so.

The origin of the alphabet and the Ogham alphabet

In view of Vennemann’s thesis of the original “motherland” of the Hamito-Semitic peoples in the Greater Iberian West, the traditional view that our letter alphabet had been invented by the Phoenicians in the Near East will of course become untenable. It would then also have to be invented in that Greater Iberian West. The present author has already

discussed such a scenario in his Sea Peoples work cited above. The Phoenician, Aramaic-Hebrew, Greek, Etruscan, Iberian etc. alphabets as well the Germanic runic alphabet would then have to be later, simplified versions of the original “Atlantic” alphabet. We must also not forget in this connection that already the great Flinders Petri has shown that a variant of that alphabet has been the very first script in ancient Egypt, and that the hieroglyphs have been a later invention(21).

Lastly we have to suspect that also the Ogham script has been invented by that ancient Hamito-Semitic, seafaring civilization, respectively megalithic culture. The distribution in Europe/Maghreb of Ogham inscriptions is more or less the same as that of the megalithic culture, and of the distribution of linguistic traces of those Hamito-Semitic “Atlanteans” in Vennemann’s view. But Ogham inscriptions have also been found in distant countries, e.g. on the shores of Japan. This could be taken as a hint that those “Atlanteans” with there penchant for maritime exploration were involved in worldwide activities. Vennemann regards them as proto-Phoenicians. Did the later Phoenicians inherit from them knowledge of distant lands, perhaps even reliable world maps and nautical maps?

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APPENDIX

List of selected papers by Prof. Theo Vennemann

Theo Vennemann: *Zur Erklärung bayerischer Gewässer- und Siedlungsnamen*, in: *SPRACHWISSENSCHAFT Vol.18/No.4*, Heidelberg 1993.

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Zusammenfassung

Vennemanns These A) eines vor-indoeuropäischen, paneuropäischen, vaskonischen, ethno-linguistischen Substrats und B) eines schon sehr früh existierenden Einflusses einer überlegenen, maritim aktiven, kolonisierenden atlanto-semitischen Zivilisation auf Westeuropa wird skizziert. Es wird gezeigt, daß Vennemanns Szenario einen Durchbruch für die Rekonstruktion der europäischen Vorgeschichte darstellt, indem es ethno-linguistische und kulturelle Diffusion als entscheidende Faktoren bei der Ausformung der europäischen Identität berücksichtigt.

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