

## What Language was Spoken in Ireland before Irish?

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That the Celtic languages were of the Indo-European family was first recognised by Rasmus Christian Rask (\*1787), a young Danish linguist, in 1818. However, the fact that he wrote in Danish meant that his discovery was not noted by the linguistic establishment until long after his untimely death in 1832. The same conclusion was arrived at independently of Rask and, apparently, of each other, by Adolphe Pictet (1836) and Franz Bopp (1837). This agreement between the foremost scholars made possible the completion of the picture of the spread of the Indo-European languages in the extreme west of the European continent. However, in the Middle Ages the speakers of Irish had no awareness of any special relationship between Irish and the other Celtic languages, and a scholar as linguistically competent as Cormac mac Cuillennáin (†908), or whoever compiled *Sanas Chormaic*, treated Welsh on the same basis as Greek, Latin, and the *lingua north-mannorum* in the elucidation of the meaning and history of Irish words.

The consciousness of the relationship of the Celtic languages among themselves was not one of ancient date either. In the Middle Ages the speakers of Irish had no awareness of any special relationship between the Celtic languages, and a scholar as linguistically competent as Cormac mac Cuillennáin (or whoever compiled *Sanas Chormaic*) treated Latin, Greek, Welsh, and the *Lingua north-mannorum* as equals in the elucidation of the meaning and history of Irish words. In the tenth-century ethnographic poem by Airbertach mac Cosse, *Ro-fessa i gcurp domain dúir* (Olden 1884) the countries we now recognise as Celtic, Gallia Narbonensis, Lugdunensis, Belgica, Hispania, and Britannia (LL 16405 - 16412) are mentioned just like the various other nations who were listed in the poem's Latin source but with no hint that the Irish author saw any greater significance in their names than in any other name in his poem.

When Irish was introduced to Ireland for the first time, did it replace a non-Indo-European language spoken in the country before it? If so, does this language or a relative thereof survive anywhere today and can we identify it? It is

more than a century since the first article on the subject appeared, in an Appendix by Sir John Morris-Jones, Professor of Celtic at Bangor, to a book called *The Welsh People* (Rhÿs, J. & J. Brynmor-Jones, 1900). He drew attention to typological correspondences between Welsh (and Irish) and some languages located on the African continent, such as Egyptian and Berber. Since then scholars like Julius Pokorny (1926) and his student Heinrich Wagner (1959), and in our own time Professors Peter Schrijver (2000, 2005), whose work has been criticised by Graham Isaac (2003), Karl Horst Schmidt (1990), Orin David Gensler (1993) and Theo Vennemann (2003 and many other publications) have contributed, each in his own way, to the discussion on the pre-Irish language of Ireland.

But typological correspondences between languages are no evidence for contact between those languages or for the existence of a language of a particular type as a substrate to any of them. This has become clear from the work on language universals carried out by Joseph Greenberg (1963) and others, who have shown that the same bundles of typological features can occur in languages which never came into contact with one another. Therefore the fact that similar features occur in Irish and African languages does not necessarily mean that Irish came into contact with a language of that type or that such a language was a substratum underlying Irish.

It is clear too that this question is exclusively a linguistic one and not an archaeological one. Equally, however, it must be admitted that linguistic communities are also cultural communities, though the two kinds of community may not be co-terminous. The spread of a language or of linguistic change involves of necessity contact between linguistic communities, just as cultural change demands contact between cultural groups. This contact has to be intense or prolonged for linguistic change to take place. When the communities are close to one another in an inland environment, linguistic change may take place through social or economic contacts between tribes or villages without any change of population. When however, as in the case of Ireland, a sea-crossing has to be made between the communities involved, contact between them is hindered by barriers which contact overland is not subject to. This means that, for one community to transfer its language to another, contact between them must be more prolonged. A military invasion on its own does not, of course, lead to language change, as the incoming warriors find wives among the women of the country invaded and set up families which will be at best bilingual in the first generation and will most likely revert to the original community language in the second generation, according as the sons of the invaders in turn marry local women.

This appears to be what happened to the Norsemen who under Göngu-Hrólf, whom the English call Rollo, invaded Normandy in the tenth century and turned into the French-speaking Normans of the eleventh. These French-speaking Normans invaded Ireland in the twelfth century and became the Irish-speaking Gaill of the fourteenth. The archaeologists have been unable to find evidence of a military invasion of Ireland at a period which might be relevant to the introduction of Irish. But this is a total superfluity. For a military invasion to lead to linguistic

change it must be accompanied by a more general movement of population which will include family units capable of founding a rival linguistic community in the new country, as appears to have happened in the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain or in the European invasion of America, north and south. But language change can take place without a military invasion, provided the right demographic or economic circumstances are present. If there is a movement of population which includes family units of sufficient size over a long period, this can lead to language change. Therefore the absence from the archaeological record of evidence of a military invasion does not mean that a population movement did not occur. Such a movement need not have left any trace which would be easily discerned in the archaeological record, particularly if the people involved were mobile and possessed little or no metal, and above all if it was a gradual infiltration of smallish groups over a long period of time.

Even if we agree with Professor Colin Renfrew (Renfrew 1987, 145-177) that Indo-European began its spread from an eastern homeland about 7000 years before Christ, its rate of expansion would not have allowed the language to reach Ireland with the earliest populations of the country, which took place about that time. Therefore we may assume that the mesolithic inhabitants of Ireland were not speakers of an Indo-European language. The traditionally accepted time-frame for Indo-European spread would also exclude the neolithic people who might have been admissible as possible Indo-Europeans under the Renfrew model. If the first attestations of Indo-European languages in Anatolia, India, or Persia are datable to the first half of the second millennium B.C., even allowing for the fact that the first attestation is not necessarily contemporaneous with the introduction of the languages to those countries, the earliest possible date for the introduction of Indo-European to Ireland can be no earlier than that. In fact a date about the end of the second millennium B.C. could be considered as the earliest possible period for the Indo-Europeanisation of Ireland. We must then ask: What Indo-European language was then introduced? Was it Celtic, the language we find in Ireland when the first evidence begins to filter through about the end of the first millennium B.C.? Or was there another Indo-European language in Ireland before Celtic? This is a question worth posing, as it will determine our attitude to the possible substratum which may underlie Irish. There is no evidence for any other Indo-European language in Ireland before Irish. Neither is there any such evidence in continental Europe. It would then appear that the Celtic people were the first Indo-Europeans to settle in Western Europe. In trying to establish what language preceded Irish in Ireland the evidence available to us is very slight indeed, for there are no written records surviving from the pre-Irish period. The same is true too of the neighbouring countries, Britain and Gaul, so that it is impossible to examine the picture of Western Europe, say, and make an educated guess as to the language which may have been spoken there or in Ireland.

The only possible route of research is to look at the Irish language itself and to consider whether there are not some traces in it of a language mixture arising

out of contact with the language or languages which it replaced. This would be a normal consequence of one language replacing another, just as the English of Ireland, even in localities where English has been the only language spoken for centuries, still bears the traces of the Irish language it replaced, in phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. This task is not without its difficulties when one knows the language of the substratum or when the question of its identity is limited to one or other known language. But when the identity of the substrate language is unknown, the solutions to the problem suggested by scholars in the past are based on typological arguments and suggest that Irish may have taken over this or that feature from a substrate language of the same type as Language X. This argument might hold water if language X and Irish were the only two languages in the world to show the feature in question, but typological features are found widely distributed in languages which can have nothing to do with one another, so that one must conclude that they may have arisen independently in Irish and in Language X. The disparity of the languages proposed as substrate for Irish, ranging from Lapp in the extreme north to Berber and Egyptian in the south, illustrates this vividly.

The best-known attempt to identify a known substrate language was surely that of T.F. O'Rahilly, who tried to show (on his own model of the settlement of Ireland) that Irish contains or contained many words whose linguistic shape could only be explained as borrowings from a British or P-Celtic language which had been spoken in Ireland before the coming of Irish, an event which he placed in the century or two before the birth of Christ (O'Rahilly 1936). These were typically words which contained the sound /p/ which was missing from the sound-repertoire of Irish until about the seventh century A.D. They were also words associated with humble occupations, such as agriculture and housekeeping, and as such were not likely to have been borrowed across the sea from British-speaking Britain. The most telling argument against O'Rahilly's proposal came from David Greene (1965: 132-4), who pointed out that, if loanwords containing /p/ had entered Irish before the time when Irish developed the sound /p/ in about the seventh century A.D., that they would have been treated in the same way as the early Latin loanwords containing /p/, i.e. /p/ > k<sup>w</sup> > /k/ written *c*, as Latin *pascha* appears in Irish as *cásc*. If the words were borrowed after the seventh century, one would expect to find some literary indication of the presence of such a population in Ireland at this late date. A more recent assessment of O'Rahilly's theory has been given by McManus (1984: 179-196, esp. 181-187), citing the literature which followed on O'Rahilly's publication and providing a much expanded critique of O'Rahilly's ideas.

The question of when Irish or its early ancestor was first introduced into Ireland is one on which opinions vary widely and, in the absence of documentary evidence, there will never be any final proof. But a few points can be taken into consideration.

There is a vast difference between the Celtic civilisation known to us from continental Europe in the second half of the first millennium B.C. and the civilisation of Ireland at that same time. While today in eastern France and

sation of Ireland at that same time. While today in eastern France and Western Germany every small-town museum is packed with archaeological artifacts ascribable to the Celtic Hallstadt and La Tène periods, in all of Ireland there are scarcely enough items attributable to these cultures to fill a single room in any one of those museums. As well as that the great wealth evidenced in the continental burial sites from this period, with weapons, ornate wagons, gold items of personal ornament, and great craters for wine, is completely lacking in Ireland. These riches were the result of trade between the Celts and the Mediterranean, especially with the Etruscans and with the city of Massilia (Marseille), founded by the Greeks c. 600 B.C. From these same Greeks the Celts of the South of France learned to write with the Greek alphabet in their own language, and later adapted this to writing in the Latin alphabet, which the Irish learned to do only in the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Those who came to Ireland with a language related to that of the continent must have come from a different time, a different place, or a different social group from those who possessed such wealth.

We have seen just now that it is unlikely that the Celtic language was introduced by a one-off invasion of Celtic warriors from beyond the sea, as on the *Lebor Gabála* model, partly because incursions of male warriors do not effect a change of language and partly because there is no archaeological evidence for any invasion at the relevant period. Such a change of language must have been brought about by the arrival of more stable groups, in other words, families. These are most likely to have been peaceable people who did not carry fine weapons such as we find on the continent. They may have had metal knives, but their principal weapons must have been of wood or stone, so that they would have left no trace in the archaeological record but, if they were numerous enough, could well have effected a change of language in the country.

Where did they come from? Various ideas have been put forward as to their place of origin. It seems to me that the simplest answer is that they came from Britain. There was always contact across the Irish Sea between the two coasts which are mutually visible. This is evident from archaeology and when you drive around the coast of County Antrim from, let us say, Coleraine to Belfast, and see Scotland only 13 miles away, it makes sense.

More difficult is the question: Why did they come? Was it a push or a pull force which caused them to take to the sea? One or other of these factors would have been necessary. Where I live in Bearna, a few miles west of Galway city centre, we look across Galway Bay to the hills of County Clare, about eight miles away. Traditionally there were some fishermen in the village of Bearna, but the majority of the population lived off the land. I made some inquiries of the older farming population as to whether they had ever visited the Clare coast which they could see every day. Their answer was always in the negative. They had no business there, they said. The comparison with the people who lived on the west coasts of Britain in early times is evident. Why should British people leave their own country and go to settle in one that was visible some miles away? It may have been that they had been pressurised by force from some other part of the

population. It may have been that their land had become exhausted from over-cultivation.

In any event Ireland was probably under-populated with plenty of room for new citizens. There is also the possibility that the population of Ireland had become depleted by plague or some such disaster, and that the British saw a good opportunity of acquiring land there. However, the population cannot have been so depleted that there was no one left to hand on the knowledge of the holy places, like Tara and Emain Macha, which had been sacred for centuries before the coming of the Irish and have remained centres of respect among the people to our own time, almost. We just do not know what pushed people out of Britain or attracted them to Ireland. It seems to me most likely that the movement of people from Britain to Ireland was part of the movement of people from the European continent to Britain. On the 'wave of advance' model advocated by Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza and described in Renfrew (1987: 126-131), the first settlers in Britain would have occupied the best available land in the South of Britain. Those who followed would have been forced to move ever northwards. Those who reached the shores of the narrow straits between Britain and Ireland might have found that there was no land available for them in Britain. They could have seen Ireland from the coast of Scotland or from the higher ground in Wales and could have decided to push on across the sea. Having established a bridgehead in Ireland they might have encouraged others to follow them and settle there.

The earliest evidence for the presence of a Celtic language in either Britain or Ireland in the second half of the first millennium B.C. is the mention by Pytheas of Massilia of Britain as the  $\pi\rho\epsilon\tau\alpha\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\eta}$   $\nu\eta\sigma\omicron\varsigma$  'the British island' about 325 B.C. This name alone shows that, at that time, not only was the language of Britain Celtic but that it had already undergone the phonetic change of  $k^w > p$ , an alteration which it shared with the Celtic languages of continental Europe outside of Spain and some traces in Gaul. The population-movement from Britain to Ireland must have taken place before the  $k^w$  of their own language had changed to  $p$ . The original consonant is preserved in the Irish name for the inhabitants of Britain, *Cruithin*, which was later restricted to the British living north of the Roman *limes* (called *Picti* by the Romans) and was also used as an alternative name for the Dál nAraide, the people who inhabited, among other places, the region around the modern Belfast, and who, interestingly enough, must have been later settlers from Britain. Whether these settlers were among those who introduced their own Celtic language to Ireland is impossible to say, but there are settlements of Cruithin in Ireland in Dál Riata, in County Meath, in County Cork, in Mag nAí, and in many other locations. It is notable that these Cruithin people, besides their name of 'Britons' also have another Irish name, that their language was in historic times Irish, and that their nomenclature was thoroughly Irish. This indicates that they must have been a long time in Ireland when we meet them in the earliest annals and in the *Vita Tripartita*.

It is true to say that Irish has not yet been reliably shown to contain any word, placename, personal name, or syntactic construction which has been convincingly credited to the language which preceded it in Ireland. Admittedly, since we do not know what that language was or even if it has any known relatives, living or dead, we would have difficulty in identifying its congeners in the Irish lexicon, as we might expect them to have been thoroughly gaelicised by the time of our earliest sources. Nonetheless, since Celtic placenames have survived in parts of Britain where no Celtic language has been spoken for at least 1500 years, and since many placenames of Latin origin (*Baslick* < L. *Basilica* (*Sanctorum*), *Killashree* < L. *Cella Auxilii*, and all the Kill- (< L. *cella*) and Donagh- (< L. *dominica*) names) have survived in Ireland for a similar length of time, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that pre-Irish placenames may live on and lie behind some of the less transparent placenames in Old and Middle Irish sources.

What then are we looking for? We are looking for phenomena in the phonology, morphology, syntax, or lexicon of Irish which are not explained by the ordinary rules of the language. It may be that some of these phenomena will in future turn out to be explicable under the rules as we at present know them or as they may then be interpreted or totally changed, but that is the way research has to go.

It may be that one particular phonetic feature, which has the advantage of having been present in the language, if only to a limited extent, before the sixth century or so, might be worth investigating. I refer to the sound /f/.

Originally Irish did not possess this sound (Thurneysen 1946: 44-46, 122-125; Greene 1976: 26-45; Uhlich 1995: 11-48, esp. 12-18). In absolute initial position it developed from /w-/ probably during the seventh century. Adomnán, writing at the end of the seventh century, occasionally spells the proper names *Fergna* and *Finnio* as *Virgno* and *Vinniauus*, but otherwise he writes *f-* (Anderson 1991: 94, 208-210, 226). The *prima manus* of the Würzburg glosses, also dated about 700 A.D., spells exclusively *f-* (Thes. Pal. I, xxiv). Neither was /-f/ found in final position. In borrowings from Latin, where one might have expected an *-f*, this is replaced by the voiced correspondent, *-b* /v/, L. *philosophus*, *antigraphum* > Ir. *felsub*, *angraib*. But in final position also, in the course of a couple of centuries, final *-f* was introduced through the force of Latin borrowings, as in *graif* ‘pin, brooch’ (Mulchrone 1936: 1019, 1021), *graph* ‘snake’s bite, sting’ SR 1341 (which rhymes with *aslach* SR 1341 thus proving the voiceless quality of the final consonant) < L. *graphium* ‘stylus’ (< Gr. γραφεῖον). Alternation between *-f* and *-b* is frequent, e.g. *sraif* / *sraib* ‘sulphur,’ which may be < L. *strophā* ‘trick, device, artifice’ (< Gk. στροφή). Note also *scaf* ‘vessel, boat,’ < L. *scapha* ‘id.’ as against the diminutive *scabal* < L. *scaphula*.

Between vowels /w/ was lenited and completely disappeared (Thurneysen 1946: 85, §133). Intervocalic *-f-* also developed in the post-Ogamic period from the lenited form of the consonant *\*s<sup>w</sup>*, that is where the consonant, whether in word-initial position or internally, stood between vowels. When *\*s<sup>w</sup>* stood between vowels it appeared as *-f-*, e.g. *siur* (< *\*s<sup>w</sup>esōr*) ‘sister’ gives *mo fiur* ‘my

sister,’ and, in the initial of the second element of compounds when stress falls on the preceding syllable, e.g. *tofunn* ‘hunt’ VN of *do-seinn* ‘hunts’ (< \*to-s<sup>w</sup>enn-) and in the second syllable of reduplicated verbal forms, e.g. *sefainn*, 3. sg. pret. of *seinnid* ‘plays music’. Another frequent instance of medial *-f-* is in the *f*-future where, according to the explanation of Alfred Bammesberger (BBCS xxviii, iii, 1979, 397), the lenited *b-* of the verb ‘to be’ was devoiced by a preceding *-h* (< \*s) at the end of the present participle with which it was compounded.

*/ff/* then was a phoneme which, in the earliest documented period of Irish, had recently entered the language and was spreading. Leaving the *f*-future aside as a special case, the only way in which intervocalic *-f-* could occur in prehistoric Irish was as the lenited form of \*s<sup>w</sup> in the initial of nouns in lenited position, in compound verbs, or in reduplicated verbal forms. The consequence of this restriction on the distribution of medial *-f-* is that there are very few words in early Irish which show this consonant between vowels or otherwise internally. Most of those which occur can be explained as compounds with \*s<sup>w</sup>- in the second element, e.g. *grafann* ‘horse-race’ < \**grag-s<sup>w</sup>enn-*, *greifel* ‘staggers, an equine disease’ < \**greg-s<sup>w</sup>el-*. Other words with internal *-f-* which are not patently compounds are poorly attested, being found mostly in glossaries, so that one has no context to judge them by and they suffer the corruption which unfamiliar words without context are prone to. They are also without date. The following list is taken from DIL and does not claim to be exhaustive:

***bréife*** ‘ring’ (var. *bréifne*). Attested in Sg. 59b13 where it glosses *annulus*, Cormac’s glossary (Meyer 1912: §141), where a translation ‘ring, loop’ suits the context, and several examples from later verse texts.

***cufar*** .i. *cos* ‘pes’ in *Dúil Laithne*, Stokes (1872: 75). However, the distortion of so many words on the list in *Dúil Laithne* must cast a doubt on the authenticity of the word *cufar*.

***cuífre/cuípre*** occurs in *Bretha Crólige* (Binchy 1934: 20-21, §24) in the ancient text: *Ni dlig nach inuitir mani doa cuipre acht ni bis i m(b)iad a aireagais* ‘No patient is entitled, unless it be [given] out of kindness[?], to anything save what is in accordance with the dignity of his rank.’ Binchy’s tentative suggestion (ibid.: 62) that *doa* could be a verbal form may be along the right lines. If we read *manid ō[n] a cuipre* it will be possible to retain Binchy’s translation with the mere restoration of the *n*-stroke, *lit.* ‘if it is not a giving out of kindness’ with the verbal noun of the verb *oidid* ‘offers, grants, lends’. This is paraphrased in O’Davoren’s Glossary: *Cuípre .i. lind, ut est mani tuca a cuipre .i. mana tucthar ara caradrai[d] do in ní ara mbi a cuip [i.] in lind, ni dlig ni bes mo. No mene tucthar do ar cobol cair* (Stokes 1904: 264, §427). ‘*Cuípre* that is ale, as in: Unless you give it out of kindness; that is unless the thing with the froth on it (i.e. the ale) be given for friendship’s sake, he is not entitled to anything more. Alternatively, unless it be given to him through generosity’. In a glossary entitled *Dúil Droma Ceta* in H.3.18, 6 we find: *cuífre .i. connaircle t comsuilge, ut*



*dicitur: muna doa cuifre* Senchas Már, where *Senchas Már* is written suprascript after *muna* (CIH II, 609) and in O'Mulconry's Glossary: *Cuipre .i. conircle nó comsuilge, ut dicitur: muna som* [= Senchas Már, see previous quotation] *dō [a cuifre .i.] a conaircli* which is explained by Stokes as 'indulgence?, indulgent?' (Stokes 1900: 264, §427; 290).

**fafall/fubhal:** One of the hazel-trees at the well of Segais: *Itté an-manna na naoi ccoll .i. sall, fall, fubhall, fiondam, fonnám, fo fhuigheall, crú, críonám, cruambhla dofuaired an iomhus* (Gwynn 1940: 26, 27-28). O'Davoren's Glossary reads: *Sall .i. salcad, id est sall fall 7rl. .i. a tsalchad ima anmáim 7 fall 7 fafall .i. salchar gach ní díb* which Stokes translated: 'Sall .i. foulness, ut est 'sall, fall etc., i.e. its foulness about his name. And fall and fafall, i.e. filth is in every whit of them.' (Stokes 1904: 454, §1446). But see *fáball* 'a going, movement, time, occasion'.

**lufe:** There are two occurrences in texts of *Dúil Dromma Ceta*, (1) H.3.18, 71c = CIH II, 616, 39, where it is glossed *bandae*, (2) H. 3. 18, 636<sup>a-b</sup> = CIH III, 1074, 38, and in O'Mulconry's glossary 796 (Stokes 1900: 270, §796) where it is glossed *banda* 'feminine'.

**slife** glossed *.i. lethnughadh, ut est imat slife laithirt leisge .i. curra leth imat leisce i llaithi t'oirgne* H. 3. 18, 62a = CIH II, 604, 11-12, cited in Gwynn (1940: 55, §20). Trans.: 'i.e. broadening, as is [for example]: [may] drunkenness [and] laziness be very widespread, that is: that much laziness be spread abroad on the day of your despoliation.'

**strophais** Attested only in the phrase *séis (s)(t)rophais* which is found in a verse quoted in the prose *Dindshenchas* of Lia Nothain (LL 22271) and in Cormac's Glossary (Meyer 1913: 92 = §1059, *prüll*), where it is given as *sēs rophuis* and is glossed *scuap adnacail*. It is also found in a note on the top margin of LL 161a: *seis strofaiss .i. cained. Strophais in scuap bís im-mon corp ica thabairt dochum relggi. 'Seis strophais that is lamentation. Strophais is the straw which is accustomed to be around the body when it is being brought to the graveyard.'* Meyer (1891: 462-3) suggested a derivation from *\*stró* < ON *strá* 'straw' + *\*peis* < L. *pexa* 'clothed in material with the nap on,' but this has been rebutted by Marstrander (1915: 126).

The uncertain status of these words in the Irish vocabulary as well as the alternation with *-bh-* serves to emphasise how marginal medial *-f-* was in Irish. It may be that some future etymologist will propose good etymologies for these words, but I cannot.

But there is a number of placenames, apparently of early date, which show internal *-f-*:

**Aife** (leg. *Aífe?*): Two places: 1. Site of battle in Leinster, BB 35b (= Mag *Aífe* in Offaly?). 2. Place in Munster, Todd (1867: 92) (: *gáithe*). Cf. *Bae Aife* Greene (1955: ll. 82-85). See also P.Ó Riain *et al.* (2003: 59).

**Bréifne** (varr. Breithne, Breibne) ‘Breffny’: LU 296 (gloss M) .i. *i mBrefni Connacht*. Further examples in Hogan (1910: 125) and P.Ó Riain *et al.* (2005: 189-192).

**Crufait**: between the river Delvin and the Boyne = Croboy, County Meath (Hogan 1910: 311). The name is explained as *fót cró* ‘bloody sod’ LU (H) 10460-2 (Toch. Em.), which seems to indicate that the medial consonant was *-f-*. The ‘older’ name of the place is given in the same passage as *Rae Bán*.

**Dún Gaifi**: An unidentified place mentioned in CGG 96, st. 8b, thought by Todd (p. cxxxiv, note 2) to have been one of Donovan’s houses at his fort in Bruree. Cf. **Gaifine mac Athairne** in Gwynn (1940: 25. 24).

**Faffand**: Unidentified place in Uí Fhailghe. Dat. *Faffaind* LL 21232.

**Grafand**: = Cnoc Rafann = Knockgraffan, royal site near Cahir, County Tipperary, Dillon (1962: 619, 653). Cf. **Rafann** (*ibid.*: 623, 664). Seems identical with **Raphe** (var. **Raphi**, **Rafi**) which was located *in airther Femin* (Hogan 1910: 579).

**Grafrenn**: Place on route from Tara to Naas, north of the river Ríge and Dunboyne, LL 37708 (Bórama Laigen).

**Life = Mag Liphi**: The plain of the River Ruirthech = Liffey. Attested from the seventh century, *in campo Liphi* (Bieler 1979: 130.11, 132.30.), *ad campum Lifi* (162.28).

These examples are in the *Life* of St. Patrick which Tírechán wrote in the second half of the seventh century (Bieler 1979: 41-43).

**Máfat**: One of three probably fictitious river-names on Conaire Mór’s journey to the hostel of Da Derga in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 457-8: *Mafat* (v.l. *Madat*), *Ammat*, and *Iarmafat* = LU (M) 6906 (TBDD).

This list is unlikely to be complete, as there are placenames containing *-f-* which are attested only in later documents where it may have arisen through the devoicing of *-bh-* or be an English name, e.g. Effin, County Limerick, which is attested only from 1240, always in English documents.

The list consists of seven or eight placenames of early date which show medial *-f-* and do not appear to be compounds, so that an etymology based on the lenition of *\*sw* seems to be excluded. One might think that *Grafann* was the gen. pl. of *grafann* ‘horse-race’, were it not that the variant *Raphe* makes that unlikely. Anyway *\*Cnoc Grafann* ‘the hill of the horse-races’ seems inappropriate, since horse-races would normally have been held on the flat. It has to be said that these placenames do not have the appearance of Irish words. But if they are not Irish, what are they? They are not borrowed from Norse or Latin, which are the only two languages to have been spoken in Ireland in historic times before the twelfth century, when most of these names are attested. The name *Life* is attested too early to have been borrowed from Norse. I do not wish to advance any theory to explain them at this stage, but merely wish to present them as a strand in the discussion of the possible pre-Irish language of Ireland.

So to sum up: the language which later became Irish was the first Indo-European language to be spoken in Ireland. It was introduced during the first half of the first millennium B.C. from Britain, probably by immigrant family groups. It is impossible to be more precise about the date of its introduction except that it must have been before 325 B.C., the date of Pytheas of Massilia, and may well have been before the formation of the wealthy aristocracies of continental Europe, which postdates the foundation of Massilia about 600 B.C. and the trading contacts between the Celts and the cities of the Mediterranean which were the basis of their wealth. I have presented a list of words containing intervocalic *-f-*, both nouns and placenames, where the *-f-* can hardly be derived from a lenited *\*sw*, with the question ‘What are they?’

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