Introduction

Hello, and welcome to the August 2010 issue of DNA Tribes® Digest. This month’s feature article will re-examine Celtic genetic relationships based on more detailed sub-regional definitions within Northwest Europe. This article will also include a more speculative discussion of legendary dynasties described in the medieval *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (“Book of the Taking of Ireland”).

These legends will be compared with archaeological evidence of early cultural contacts over considerable distances, highlighting geographical relationships in Europe and the Near East that might have influenced early Celtic cultures.

A cautionary note: previous writers have associated these legends with a wide range of events, ranging from the Bronze Age to as late as the Migration Period. For this reason, the possible links between legend and archaeology presented in this article are uncertain and entirely speculative. More important than the guesswork involved in relating myths to prehistory, this discussion will highlight archaeological evidence of early relationships in Europe during the Bronze Age.

Best regards and I hope to speak with you soon,

Lucas Martin,
DNA Tribes

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1 A map of current DNA Tribes® Europa sub-regions can be viewed at [http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-europa.html](http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-europa.html). The previous DNA Tribes® analysis of Celtic relationships is available at [http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2008-11-28.pdf](http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2008-11-28.pdf). The “Norse” zone referenced in the 2008 article has since been split into the more specific Norse (Scandinavian) and Belgic (Low Country and Northern France) sub-regions.
A Closer Look at the Celtic Sub-Region of Europe

Background: Two Legendary “Takings”

The Celtic sub-region of Europe characterizes populations of the British Isles associated with Celtic-speaking peoples, including Irish, Scottish, and Welsh populations. During the period of Classical Greece and Rome, these cultures were part of a larger Celtic world that also included Gaulish lands of present day France, the Low Countries, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, as well as parts of the Iberian Peninsula and East-Central Europe.

Although much of what is known today about the ancient Celts comes from outside observers such as Julius Caesar, the ancient Celts also kept their own traditions. This druidic body of knowledge was passed down in oral form, codified in verse and memorized during a period of up to twenty years. Some of this lore survived beyond the fall of Rome and was later written by Christian monks during the Middle Ages. One such medieval text is Lebor Gabála Érenn (“The Book of the Taking of Ireland,”), which records (in prose and possibly more ancient verse) a series of legendary conquests of Ireland, culminating in the Milesian dynasty of the Goidel (Gaels or Goidelic Celts).

With the exception of the early female dynasty of Cessair, most of these invasions originated in a group of related Nemedian (“Noble”) dynasties from Scythia. These legends are of unknown antiquity. However, the Lebor Gabála Érenn (LGE) mentions several concurrent Biblical events, which provide clues to the general time frames for some of these legends.

This article will speculatively relate two legendary dynasties to two periods: the Tuatha Dé Danann legends, possibly related to the Mycenaean Period (1600-1100 BC); and the Milesian legends, possibly related to the Atlantic Bronze Age (1300-700 BC). However, more important than the guesswork involved in relating myths to prehistory, this discussion will highlight archaeological evidence of early relationships in Europe during the Bronze Age.

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3 Caesar’s famous text is Commentarii de Bello Gallico (“Commentaries on the Gallic War”).
4 The earliest known version of the Lebor Gabála Érenn (The Book of the Taking of Ireland) was in the 12th century Book of Leinster. An English translation is available at http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/leborgabala.html.
5 This replacement of an earlier matrifocal society by later patriarchal invaders from Scythia recalls Marija Gimbutas’ Kurgan hypothesis, which proposes that a more peaceful, female centered “Old European” civilization was transformed in several waves by conquering Kurgan societies from the Eurasian steppes. The earliest steppe conquest listed in the LGE is the dynasty of Partholón (a relative of Nemed). This is dated to the time of Abraham, which traditional Jewish chronology dates to the early second millennium BC. This would date Partholón’s conquest late in the period when Ireland was influenced by the continental Bell-Beaker culture (a “kurganized” culture possibly associated with proto-Celtic languages). See http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/lebor2.html.
The Mycenaean Period and Legends of the Tuatha Dé Danann

Among the legendary Nemedian dynasties to invade Ireland was the Tuatha Dé Danann (“Tribes of the Goddess Danu”). According to the LGE, the Tuatha Dé Danann came from four island cities in the north. Legends describe this dynasty as bringing highly developed technical skill and a competitive culture emphasizing the new games of chess, ball play, and horse racing. Later Irish folklore transformed the Tuatha Dé Danann into supernatural figures known as the Aes sídhe and imagined the earthen mounds (sidhe) of the countryside as their dwelling places. Despite mythological associations, Dé Danann legends suggest contacts with a northerly seagoing culture (perhaps with links to Scotland or Scandinavia) that introduced new technological and cultural developments to Ireland.

The LGE does not provide a concurrent Bible event for the Dé Danann invasion; however, associated events are consistent with a timeframe sometime during the second millennium BC. Although vague, this general timeframe coincides with a period of culturally enriching contacts between distant parts of Europe, rooted in the Mycenaean palaces of the East Mediterranean.

More specifically, The Rise of Bronze Age Society: Travels, Transmissions and Transformations by archaeologists Kristian Kristiansen and Thomas B. Larsson documents evidence linking early cultures from the British Isles and Scandinavia to the East Mediterranean during this period. According to the authors, “elite” specialists skilled in war, technology, and trade transmitted sophisticated cultural traditions rooted in the Minoan civilization deep into Europe, attested by Mycenaean artifacts discovered as far away as Britain and Ireland.

This “heroic” culture linked to the Mycenaean palatial elite was memorialized in later Greek mythological figures such as Odysseus (Ulysses). Homer called these adventurers Danaoi (Danaans) and Akhaioi (Achaeans), names that were understood as local ethnic groups in later times, but perhaps had older cultural meanings that were lost by the time of Homer. Similar names appear in several parts of

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6 See http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/lebor4.html. These formalized competitions recall the Iliad’s description of funeral games held in honor of Patroclus after his burial mound was built. The archaeologists Kristiansen and Larsson compared Achaean funeral games with scenes depicted in the petroglyphs found in the “King’s Grave” burial mound near Kivik, Sweden, dated to near 1000 BC. The Kivik petroglyphs appear to depict scenes of people participating in chariot riding, a ball game, and other activities, attended by processions of sinuous figures (possibly goddesses similar to Danu or Achilles’ mother Thetis). See The Rise of Bronze Age Society, pp. 267-270.

7 According to the LGE, the Tuatha Dé Danann were conquered by the Milesians, whose arrival is dated 440 years after the Biblical Exodus. If the Exodus took place sometime near the mid second millennium BC (possibly between 1700-1300 BC), this would suggest that the Danann rule of Ireland ended near the late second millennium BC. Also consistent with this general timeframe, the Irish historian Geoffrey Keating proposed a date of 1477 BC for the defeat of the Tuatha Dé Danann in his Foras Feasa ar Éirinn (“History of Ireland,” available online at http://exclassics.com/cetinn/forintro.htm).

8 One possibility for Danu and similar names would be an association with Indo-European water goddesses (perhaps rooted in “Old European” traditions described by Gimbutas). A similar personage appears in the Iliad: the hero Achilles is the son of the Nereid (sea nymph) Thetis, who plays a role as Achilles’ instructor and divine benefactress. These names also recall a series of river names found around the Black Sea, which are thought to possibly derive from ancient Scythian names (see map in Figure 1).

In addition, a group of similar goddess names can be found in cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, including the Mycenaean A-ta-na Po-ti-ni-ja, Egyptian Neith, Phoenician Tanit, and Ugaritic Anat. Later Greeks were aware of these similarities: for instance, Plato proposed that the cult of Athena had come to Greece from Libya. Plato did not specify whether this signified the return of an originally Greek (i.e., Mycenaean) goddess or else the introduction of a new non-Greek (i.e., originally Afroasiatic) divinity. Although Classicists have documented cultural imports to
Europe that were linked during this period and are mentioned in literature as far away as India (see Figure 1), suggesting a comparison to Irish myths of the competitive, technically sophisticated culture of the Tuatha Dé Danann and Aes sidhe. However, the far flung cultural links of the Mycenaean period did not last forever. Around the time of the legendary Trojan War, the East Mediterranean and Near East were disrupted by a widespread event known as the Bronze Age collapse. Greece suffered a destruction of the elite Mycenaean palace system and loss of literacy. The expansive, heroic world described in Homer was replaced by a fragmented Dark Age, only later to see the emergence of the more familiar Greek city-states. Like the Irish Tuatha Dé Danann and Aes sidhe, the exploits of the Mycenaean Danaoi and Akhaioi faded into legends of a vanished “Heroic Age,” and their burial mounds became objects of nostalgic veneration.

Greece from the Near East during the later Iron Age (see The East Face of Helicon by M. West and The Orientalizing Revolution by W. Burkert), the possibility of earlier cultural contacts during the Bronze Age remains comparatively unexplored outside of the controversial Black Athena books by the non-Classicist Martin Bernal, critically summarized in Heresy in the University by Jacques Berlinerblau. Because Homer’s songs were composed several centuries after the Bronze Age collapse, the Iliad and Odyssey contain some notable anachronisms. For instance, while Homer described infantry engaging in hand to hand combat on foot, actual Mycenaean warfare emphasized swift moving chariots, a Kurganized style of combat ultimately derived from the Sintashta-Petrovka steppe culture.

See Europe Before History by K. Kristiansen, pp. 128-138. As one example: a religious temple and statue in memory of Achilles (one of the Mycenaean Akhaioi) were maintained during the period of Classical antiquity on Leuce Island in the Black Sea. According to the lost epic Aithiopis, the remains of Achilles had been transported to...
The Atlantic Bronze Age and Legends of the Milesians

According to the Lebor Gabála Érenn, the Tribes of the Goddess Danu were conquered by a new dynasty, the Milesians, who became the historical Gaels of Ireland and Scotland. In contrast to the relatively close northern origins of the Dé Danann (perhaps in Scotland or Scandinavia), the Milesians entered Ireland after a remarkable journey over great distances.

According to Irish and Scottish legendary accounts (including those recorded in the LGE), the Milesians were a group of professional soldiers who had established a kingdom in Spain, but who were originally descended from Scythians present in Egypt during the time of Moses. Recalling Kristiansen’s and Larsson’s description of specialist elites acting as transmitters of technical skills, these Scythian soldiers in Egypt had “learned the arts of that country” and “propagated their various arts and their various actions.” One among them, Nél son of Fénius Farsaid, married Scota, a daughter of the Pharaoh; their son was named Goidel Glas, ancestor of the Gaels.

However, these soldiers left Egypt at the time of the Biblical Exodus, returning to Scythia and finally venturing to Spain and then Ireland after a journey of 440 years. The synchronization with the Biblical Exodus plus 440 years suggests a Milesian conquest of Ireland sometime near the late second millennium BC, which approximately coincides with the Atlantic Bronze Age (1300-700 BC).

The Atlantic Bronze Age was a period of trade and exchange between Ireland, Britain, northwestern France, and the central and northwestern Iberian Peninsula (present day Portugal and parts of Spain) that emerged in the wake of the Bronze Age collapse. Until that time, Iberian cultures such as El Argar (in southeastern Spain) had been in contact with Mycenaean and Egyptian cultures. In place of this earlier Mediterranean trade, a new system of contacts developed along the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean that included both local trade as well as long distance contacts between Ireland and Portugal.

Although influenced by the Central European Urnfield tradition and possibly by early Phoenician cultures of North Africa, this new Atlantic zone maintained a distinct identity characterized by an emphasis on pastoralism (animal husbandry) and a consciously archaic style of metalwork. It was in this Atlantic milieu that early Celtic cultures emerged, including the Gaels of Ireland and later Scotland.

the Danube River Delta by his mother (the water goddess Thetis); there, a tumulus (i.e., kurgan) was built for him and a series of games was held in his honor according to Achaean traditions.


12 Although this legendary marriage sounds unlikely, similar marriages between the Pharaoh’s family and foreign dynasties known for their military skills did take place: for one known instance, during the Amarna Period. Among the wives of the Pharaoh Ahkenhotep III and his son Akhenaten was Tudakhipa, the daughter of Tushratta of the Mitanni-Hurrian kingdom of Hanigalbat. It is sometimes speculated that Tudakhipa was Akhenaten’s wife Kiya, who bore a daughter to the Pharaoh and disappeared under mysterious circumstances during his later reign.

13 The full 440 year journey described in the LGE is more complex: Leaving Egypt via the Red Sea, the Milesians returned to Scythia (presumably through lands of Persia). After dynastic squabbles in Scythia, they sailed on the Caspian Sea, to the “Rhiphean Mountain” (Urals? The LGE’s reference to wine suggests instead the Caucasus), to the “Maeotic Marshes” (Maeotian marshes?), to the “Torrian Sea” (Black Sea near Taurica/Crimea or Tyrrhenian Sea?), to Crete, to Sicily, to Spain, and finally to Ireland. See http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/lebor1.html.

14 For more information, see Europe Before History by K. Kristiansen, pp. 144-160.

15 One point of contact between early Celts, Iberians, and perhaps Phoenicians might have been the legendary Tartessos. Linguistic evidence of a Celtic presence was discussed in the recent article, “A Case for Tartessian as a Celtic Language” by John T. Koch, available at http://ifc.dpz.es/recursos/publicaciones/29/54/26koch.pdf. See also Europe Before History by K. Kristiansen, pp. 144-160.
Details of the elaborate Milesian journeys from Scythia, to Mesopotamia, to Egypt, back again to Scythia, and finally to Spain and Ireland probably cannot be corroborated (barring an unprecedented archaeological discovery in a place such as the folkloric “Scota’s Grave” in southwest Ireland). However, the Atlantic Bronze Age brought populations of Ireland in contact with Iberia, providing a general opportunity for the transmission of cultural elements derived from Mycenaean Greece and even Amarna Period Egypt. Some potential sources of Milesian legends are illustrated in Figure 2, including Greek figures linked to Africa and South Asia (such as Nilus, Belus16, and Perseus17), as well as Egyptian contacts with European and Asian cultures (such as the Sea Peoples and Mitanni).

Nevertheless, despite these heroic legends of dynasties from faraway lands, genetic contributions to the Celtic sub-region remain closer to the British Isles. The next section of this article will explore genetic evidence of these more local geographical relationships in more detail.

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16 The Greek legend of Belus recalls the Levantine title Ba’al (“Lord”), which frequently appears (along with the related name Anath) in the names of Pharaohs during the Hyksos period in Egypt. A similar name appears in Irish legends of Mil son of Bile. According to the LGE, “Mil” itself is also a title rather than a name (Mil’s actual name is given as “Galam”). “Mil” or “Milidh” is usually explained as a contraction of Mil Espáine (“Soldier of Spain”). However, given links to Egypt, perhaps Mil originally referred to the same figure as Nél, son of Fénius Farsaid. Nél is perhaps an early form of the Gaelic name “Niall,” but also resembles the Greek Nilus (personification of the Nile River), which would have been an appropriate title for a person or dynasty known for achievements in Egypt.

17 Later Greeks, such as Plato, equated Perseus and Perses (Perseus’ son by Andromeda, queen of an Aethiopian kingdom, possibly in Africa or South Asia) with the Persian Empire of the legendary Achaemenes. For genetic evidence of early interactions between Indo-European speaking steppe populations and indigenous civilizations of Southwest Asia, see http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2010-01-29.pdf.
Genetic Analysis of the Celtic Sub-Region

Genetic contributions to the Celtic sub-region of Europe were identified. Results are summarized in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Genetic Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgic</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norse</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Genetic contributions to the Celtic sub-region of Europe.

![Figure 3: Genetic contributions to the Celtic sub-region of Europe.](image)

Discussion: Results in Table 1 and Figure 3 indicate genetic contributions from two adjacent sub-regions of Europe: the Belgic sub-region (70.9%) and the Norse sub-region (26.4%). The Belgic contribution (70.9%) might express gene flow from formerly Gaulish territories of the Low Countries and France, which in turn have been linked to more southerly parts of Europe (such as the Iberian Peninsula). This is consistent with a long history of north-south coastal contacts shaped by the geography of Western Europe, exemplified by the Atlantic Bronze Age.

The Norse contribution of 26.4% suggests maritime gene flow from Scandinavia (perhaps by way of Scotland), represented not only by the well known Viking invasions of the medieval period, but also perhaps by cultures such as the legendary Tuatha Dé Danann described by the Irish of antiquity.

The absence of direct genetic contributions from Spain, Egypt, or Scythia does not nullify the possibility of early dynastic contacts with these lands. However, this does suggest that any cultural transmissions related to these legends were probably “elite dominance” events carried out by smaller groups of specialists rather than mass migrations to Ireland and Britain.\(^{18}\)

New Populations and Panel Options for August 2010

New Populations: DNA Tribes is pleased to announce the addition of several new populations to our global database:

New African Populations:
- Angola (480)
- Berber (Chenini-Douiret, Tunisia) (52)
- Berber (Matmata, Tunisia) (13)
- Berber (Sened, Tunisia) (37)

New East Asian Populations:
- Korea (11,565)
- Russian speakers (Inner Mongolia, China) (148)

New European Populations:
- Belgorod, Russia (50)
- Cres, Croatia (122)
- Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany (339)
- Orel, Russia (51)
- Schleswig-Holstein, Germany (300)
- Southern Poland (154)
- Yaroslavl, Russia (50)

New Global Diaspora Populations:
- Azores Islands (294)
- Corvo, Azores Islands (12)
- Flores, Azores Islands (24)
- Graciosa, Azores Islands (25)
- Orenburg, Russia (50)
- Pico, Azores Islands (37)
- S. Jorge, Azores Islands (34)
- S. Miguel, Azores Islands (58)
- St. Maria, Azores Islands (23)
- Terceira, Azores Islands (46)
- Tomsk, Russia (185)
- Vitoria, Espirito Santo, Brazil (226)

New Native American Populations:
- Maya (Merida, Yucatan, Mexico) (90)
- Purepecha (Tarascan) (Angahuan, Mexico) (103)
- Purepecha (Tarascan) (Puacuaro, Mexico) (62)
- Purepecha (Tarascan) (Zipiajo, Mexico) (168)
- Triqui (Mixteca, Oaxaca, Mexico) (108)

Updates to incorporate these new populations are available for order through our secure checkout system at http://dnatribes.com/order_addons.html.

New Panel Options: Three new add-on reports are also now available:

- **East Asian Panel**: A listing of match scores for all East Asian populations in our database, including all individual Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian populations.

- **Middle Eastern Panel**: A listing of match scores for all Middle Eastern populations in our database, including all individual Arab, Berber, Caucasus, Jewish, Persian, and Turkish populations.

- **South Asian Panel**: A listing of match scores for all South Asian populations in our database, including all individual populations of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Sample reports and orders for these new panels are available at http://dnatribes.com/order_addons.html.