

## *Some island names in the former 'Kingdom of the Isles' revisited\**

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### Introduction

In the context of Britain and Ireland, the majority of place-names in Britain are recognised as being of Celtic or Germanic origin, each comprising two main components: British (or Brittonic) or Goidelic (or Gaelic) in the Celtic group, and English or Scandinavian in the Germanic group, with wide zones where one or other of these four predominates. Despite almost four centuries of Roman occupation and several centuries of French cultural dominance following the Norman invasion of England in 1066, the Latin and Romance contributions to British place-names are comparatively small.<sup>1</sup> In Ireland the great majority of place-names are of Celtic (mainly Goidelic) origin, though a small number are either of British or of German origin, usually English, occasionally Norse, and a smaller number still of uncertain provenance.

The combined chronological span of these linguistic sources of our place-names, of which Celtic is the earliest, covers at most probably some 2500 years, but the total time-span of human residence in these islands runs at least to some eight or nine thousand years in Ireland and probably considerably more in parts of southern Britain. During the vast stretch of time before Celtic speech came to Britain and Ireland, earlier peoples would have used place-names for at least the most prominent features of the landscape, and it is possible that some of these survived the shift from languages now lost to those that have come down to us. One such group of identifiable names consists of river names dating from a very early stage of western Indo-European, before its Celtic, Germanic and Italic branches had emerged as separate entities. Such names have been identified on the Continent by Hans Krahe (1949-55, 1962, 1964), in Britain by W. F. H. Nicolaisen (1957, 1982) and in Ireland by Patrizia de Bernardo-Stempel (2000, 2005, 2007). These names have been described as "Pre-Celtic" or "Old European (*Alteuropäisch*)".<sup>2</sup>

During the last Ice Age, which ended some 10-11,000 years ago, both Britain (except possibly for the south-west) and Ireland lay under thick ice. Once the ice began to melt, people began to drift back. According to Stephen Oppenheimer (2007: 118), such early arrivals into Britain and Ireland following the Ice Age came from two main areas: (1) from either side of the Pyrenees in southern and eastern France, the Basque Country and northern coastal parts of Spain, and (2) from the Ukraine via Germany or Scandinavia. The Celtic, Germanic and Romance-speaking settlements of Britain and Ireland within the last 2500 years represent intrusions into the periphery from the east, from central Europe and beyond, ultimately from the western Ural area where the Indo-European languages are believed to have arisen (cf. Gimbutas 2000).

Other possible intrusions (on a much smaller scale) from beyond the peripheral lands of western Europe are those represented by the activities of the prospectors for metal who seemingly reached

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\* First published in *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 7 (2013): 1-28. Here with slight adjustment.

1 cf. Rivet & Smith 1979.

2 In his interpretation of 'Old European (*Alteuropäisch*)', Krahe refers to the Central European river names which can be etymologised in western IE, but which cannot be assigned to any particular later western IE language group, though recent advances in Indo-European studies have now made such assignments possible. In the meantime, Theo Vennemann has reclaimed "alteuropäisch" for his Vasconian etymologies (cf. Willms 2013: 129, fn. 100). For a cursory sketch of Krahe's "Old European" IE hydropony, see *ibid.*: 128-129.

Britain and Ireland during the second millennium BC. If they came, as seems probably, from more developed areas, such as the Phoenicians from the eastern end of the Mediterranean, where they would almost certainly have spoken some variety of Northwest-Semitic (the language stock of which Ugaritic, Hebrew and Punic are later forms), then it would be reasonable to expect that such prospectors and traders would have named the principal landmarks in their own language, and that their names for such prominent geographical features, such as bays, headlands, islands, mountains, etc., that may have served as landmarks, might well have entered the later Celtic languages. In this regard we would need to assume that any other pre-Celtic place-names that have survived derive from the unknown languages of the older peoples of the Continent and beyond who came to Britain and Ireland during the course of time.

It is in this context that the following discussions will take place. In this regard we shall confine ourselves to an area of the British Isles that may possess early names of uncertain origin, namely, to the islands that made up the former Scandinavian 'Kingdom of the Isles'<sup>3</sup> (i.e. Man and the Hebrides), or *Sodorenses*, to see whether we can offer satisfactory solutions today to names that may have caused us problems in the past. The running-order will start with Man (as the seat of the kingdom), then with the name for the Hebrides itself, followed by most of the individual main island names from Lewis to Bute.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. MAN

Pliny (fl.23-79AD) NH IV, 103 *Monapia* [\**Manavia*],<sup>5</sup> Ptol. (c.150AD) II, 2, 10: Μοναοῖδα {*Monaoida*} [\**Monaua*], var. Μοναρίνα {*Monarina*}, Paulus Orosius (fl.415) I, 2, 82 *Mevania* [\**Menavia*], Julius Honorius (5th cent?) *Cosmographia* 16: *Mevania* [\**Menavia*], var. *Mebania*, *Meubania*, Jordanes (fl.550) *Getica* I, 8: *Mevania* [\**Menavia*], var. *Evania*,<sup>6</sup> Ravenna Cosmography (early 8th cent.) 108,19: *Manavi*, Bede HEGA (731) II, 5 (via Orosius): *Mevanias* (acc. pl.) as in: [...] *Mevanias Brettonum insulas, quae inter Hiberniam et Britanniam sitae sunt. Anglorum subiecit imperio* '(King Edwin) subjected to English rule the Mevanian islands of the Britons, which lie between Ireland and Britain'.<sup>7</sup> Bede's use of the (acc.) plural here apparently refers both to Man and to Anglesey. ON (H: MBS 28-29): *Manverjar* 'people of Man island', Fordun II, 10 *Eubonia* now *Mannia*, MWIS §1 called in the Latine tongue *Mona, sive Sodora, in English Man, and in Irish leid called Maniun / Manain*, §2 *Isle of Man*. G. *Manainn, An t-Eilean Manainneach* 'the Manx island', (formal) *Eilean Mhanainn*, MxG. *Mannin* [manɪnˠ] (HLSM/II: 507), (formal) *Ellan Vannin* [elˠənˠ 'vanɪnˠ] (HLSM/II: 501).

3 The 'Kingdom of the Isles' is a tenth century Scandinavian construct comprising the islands of Man and the Hebrides (including Kintyre), with its base in the Isle of Man. Control of the 'Isles' meant control of the Irish Sea and the Minch, i.e. the trade route between Norway and Dublin, then the main trading-post in western Europe. Therefore control of the kingdom was necessarily (initially at any rate) in the hands of Scandinavian settlers in Ireland, principally in Limerick, then in Dublin. An independent dynasty, founded by the strong king Godred Crovan c.1079 in Man, ruled the Kingdom of the Isles - from 1156 onwards, Man and the northern Hebrides only - until the demise of the kingdom in 1266 (cf. Megaw 1976, Broderick 1980, Duffy 1992, McDonald 2007).

4 Richard Coates addresses a similar theme in *Nomina* 35 (2012): 49-102, essentially a re-presentation of an original article in Coates 2009, with adjustments and additions.

5 Pliny in fact has *Monapia* which originally would have been something like *Manavia*, as the MW name *Manaw* demands, as the British etymon would likely be \**Monāuiā* or \**Manāuiā* (cf. Jackson 1953: 376, PNRB 410). In view of the *-ia* forms in the sources the first form is to be preferred. Ptolemy's form also requires modification from *Monaoeda* to \**Monaua* (PNRB 410).

6 The forms of the name in Orosius, Honorius and Jordanes are similar in that they all display scribal metathesis of *n-v*, also in Bede, who is known to have used Orosius as source material (cf. also PNRB 41). However, the metathesis need not necessarily be attributed to the authors, but perhaps to scribal misreading of *n* as *u* in cursive script.

7 The note about their position comes from Pliny (quoted in PNRB 411).

● Isle of Man. The name Man is now generally acknowledged as probably<sup>8</sup> deriving from IE *\*men-*, *\*mon-* 'protrude, rise', cf. ModW *mynydd* 'mountain' < *\*monijo-* (cf. LEIA s.v. *muin*), with suffix *\*-aua*, the sense being 'mountain island' or 'high island', i.e. protruding out of the sea, as seen either from the sea or from adjacent coasts (cf. also PNRB 411, Sims-Williams 2000: 7, Schrijver 1995: 96). The same would also apply to Anglesey, Lat. *Mona*, ModW *Môn*, PCelt. *\*mon-*, etc., but is more appropriate to Man. The earlier Welsh name for Anglesey appears to have been the tautological *Monfynnid* (= *Món-fynnydd*), now *Môn*, probably referring to Holyhead Mountain (PNRB 419-20; cf. also Broderick 2005: 337-338, 2008: 166-167).

→ 'mountain island, high island'.

## 2. EBOUDAI - (Southern Inner) Hebrides

Pliny NH IV, 103: *Hebudes*, Ptol. II, 2,11: Ἐβοῦδαι {Eboūdai} (pl.), Ἐβουδα {Ebouda} (sg.),<sup>9</sup> Almagest II, 6, 28 Ἐβούδων {Eboúdōn} (gpl.), Solinus (Additamenta of later date) XXII, 12: *Ebudes*; ab *Ebudibus* (abl. pl.), Marcian (via Stephanus of Byzantium): Αἰβοῦδαι {Aiboūdai}, with adjective Αἰβοῦδαῖος {Aiboūdaios}; cf. OIr. ethnonym *Ibdaig* < *\*Ebudākoī* (cf. Isaac 2005: 192). G *Innse Gall*.

● (Southern Inner) Hebrides. Meaning uncertain. No Celtic etymology known. In her discussion on the Ptolemy place-names in and around Ireland, de Bernardo-Stempel (2007: 155) sought to explain the name *Eboudai* in the context of the nearby name *Epidion*<sup>10</sup> (referring to the peninsula of Kintyre), suggesting that there was a development of uncertain provenance from /p/ to /b/ in the name *Eboudai*, "for which otherwise no etymology is known" (*ibid.*). Isaac (2005: 192) regards the name as "[o]paque, non-Celtic, non-IE".

Given this situation, however, and in the context of known Phoenician merchant activity in the western Mediterranean and east Atlantic (including the waters around Britain and Ireland) ca. 700 BC (cf. Broderick 2009: 160, fn. 14), Theo Vennemann (1999: 46), taken up in Coates (2009: 234, and 2012: 70-71), suggests a Proto-Semitic<sup>11</sup> provenance for the name deriving it from the plural form of the generic *\*y* 'island', viz. *\*yym*, together with the specific to which two Proto-Semitic roots of the form *\*phd* 'lamb' and 'fright' belong. The development of initial /p/ to /b/ would be occasioned by the word being borrowed / taken over into Celtic, so Vennemann (*ibid.*), whereby /b/ would result from *\*/m-p-/*, as found in Ancient Greek, thus giving something like:

→ *e-bhd* + *a(i)* 'lamb / sheep island(s)'.<sup>12</sup>

Given the frequency of the name-form 'sheep island(s)', also noted by Coates (*ibid.*), around or near the British Isles and Ireland, viz. Färø (Faroe) Islands, Fair Isle, Soay (often), Lambay, Eilean nan

8 As noted by Sims-Williams (2000: 8), the problem is that neither the sequence /mVn/ nor the /-a:/ are sufficiently distinctive for us to be 100% sure. It is well known that identical roots C1VC2- are also found in the same semantic field in unrelated languages, and in place-name studies this is particularly a problem, as we do not have sufficient semantic control, except perhaps in the case of topographically very distinctive places.

9 αἱ τε καλούμεναι Ἐβοῦδαι πέντε τὸν ἀριθμὸν, ὧν ἡ μὲν δυτικωτέρα καλεῖται Ἐβουδα ἢ δ' ἐξῆς αὐτῆς πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ὁμοίως Ἐβουδα 'the so-called Ebudai, five in number, of which the most westerly island is called Ebuda, that east of it and adjoining to it is also called Ebuda' (GB). Meant here are the Inner Hebrides (except Skye), though the two Ebuda islands cannot be identified for certain, but may possibly refer to Islay and Jura.

10 *Epidión*, gen.pl. of the ethnonym *Epidioi* < *\*ek-wé/idyoi* 'the horsemen', transferred from an old Cumbric name in Scotland (cf. de Bernardo-Stempel 2007: 155), *hiek' u-i-d<sup>h</sup>-io-* (descriptive) 'horsey people', with *\*k'w > \*k<sup>w</sup> > p* if the etymology is correct (cf. Isaac 2005: 193), cf. also the G. name from the same area *MacEachairn* 'son of the horseman'.

11 For an overview of a possible Hamito-Semitic language contact in the context of Britain and Ireland, see Willms (2013: 131-133).

12 Coates (2012: 71) has reservations about the phonology here.

Caorach (Durness, Sutherland), Sheppey (nr. London), etc., a name 'sheep islands' as a possible explanation for the Hebrides<sup>13</sup> would therefore not be out of place.

→ ?'lamb / sheep islands'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

### 3a. DUMNA - Lewis

Pliny NH IV, 104 *Dumnā* (acc.), Ptol. II, 3, 31 Δοῦμνα\* νῆσος {Dumna nēsos}, LG *Domon*,<sup>14</sup> PPR 20.

● Lewis (i.e. the Isle of Lewis and Harris). Watson (1926: 40-41), quoting Macbain, suggests the name may refer to the whole of the Long Island, i.e. the Outer Hebrides (Butt of Lewis to Barra Head).<sup>15</sup> Watson (*ibid.*) adds that the name turns up twice in an Early Modern Irish praise-poem to King Ragnall of Man (1187-1229),<sup>16</sup> viz. PPR 20 *rí in domnán* 'king of Domnan', PPR 26 (Ms. H) *do mhoigh domna* 'of the plain of Domon',<sup>17</sup> with retention of the genitive *Domhna*. These references would likely relate to Ragnall's overlordship of Lewis as part of the Kingdom of the Isles (cf. CMI s.v. Lewis f43r, f41v, f42v, f44v; see also under Lewis).

Cf. OIr. *Domon / Doman* (CPNS 40) < \**d<sup>h</sup>ub<sup>h</sup>-neh<sub>2</sub>*- 'deep'. The *-o/ā-* flexion as seen in Neo-British (Brittonic) sources is secondary. Originally \**d<sup>h</sup>ubno-* the nominal form, 'world' vs. \**d<sup>h</sup>ubni-* the adjectival form, 'deep' (still seen in OIr. *domun* 'world' vs. *domain* 'deep') < \**d<sup>h</sup>eub-* 'deep', cf. Gaul. *dubno-* (DLG 150-151 s.v. *dubnos, dumnos*).

→ 'the deep (i.e. far out, outer) island' (also PNRB 342).

### 3b. LEWIS

ON (H: MBS 28-29): *Ljóðhús*, CMI f34r. *in insulam leodus*, f41v. *insulam quandam que uocatur lodhus*, f42v. *ad lodhus*, f44v. *in insula que uocatur lodws*, Fordun II, 10 *Lewys*, MWIS §211 *Leozus* passim, MM 1 *Lewis*, ScG. *Leòdhas* [L'əu-əs] (GL 350), [L'[ou]əs] (DOH 246), *Eilean Leòdhais* [e'lanj-'ljou] (SAG 184).

● Uncertain. The Scandinavians, as already noted by Coates (1988a: 22), were "past masters" in the art of analogical reformation, e.g.

- their *Ljóðhús* (Lewis) as if 'song-house',
- their *Í-vist* (Uist) as if 'inner-abode' (cf. Field 1980: s.n.),
- their *Skið* (Skye) as if 'wooden hut',

13 The *r* in 'Hebrides', not to be seen in any of the early forms, may likely result from scribal miscopying.

14 LG: *Luid Matach 7 hErglan 7 Iartach, .i. tri maic Beóain co Domon 7 co hErdomon i tuascirt Alban* 'Matach and Erglan and Iartach, the three sons of Beóan, went to Domon and to Erdomon in the north of Scotland' (after Watson 1926: 40).

15 The alternate (?later) name 'Lewis' may also have referred to the whole of the Long Island, though there is no evidence that 'Lewis' or 'Dumna' ever did. The Uists along with Rum, Eigg, Benbecula, Barra seem to have been annexed by Somerled or his sons, perhaps in or around the time of the partition of the Kingdom of the Isles in 1156, or a little later c.1180. They later became part of the Lordship of Garmoran (Moidart, Arisaig, Morar and Knoydart) (cf. Megaw 1978: 266-267, Duffy 1992, McDonald 2002: 70).

16 cf. Ó Cuív 1957.

17 Ó Cuív (1957: 291, 293) seems not to have understood the reference of the name Dumna to Lewis in the poem.

- their *Tyrvist* as if 'food-land' (from a folk-etymology of G. *Tir-ithe* (OIr./MÍr. *ithe* 'act of eating' translated by *vist*)),
- their *Íl* (Islay) (monosyllable) as if 'spring',
- their *Orknaeyjar* (Orkney Islands) as if 'seal islands' (ON *orkn* 'seal') instead of the expected \*\**Orkeayjar* (cf. Ptol. II,3,31 Ὀρκάδες {Orkades}).

That is to say, when the Scandinavians heard the various names, they clearly did not understand them, but adjusted them to known words or phrases in their own language. Scandinavian forms in this respect, therefore, cannot be regarded as genuine representations of earlier names. What *Ljóð-hús* originally meant to represent is not known.

→ etymology and provenance unknown.

#### 4. St. KILDA

ON (1202) *Hirtir*, RMS 1370 *Hert*, *Hyrte*, Fordun II, 10 *Hirth*, MWIS §184 *Hirta*, *Skildar* / *Skilder* 1540, *Skilda(r)* 1583, *S.Kylder* 1573, *S.Kilda* 1578, 1592, *Skilda*, *S Kilder* 1610, *St. Kilder*, *St. Kilda* 1698 (St. Kilda 153), G. *Hirt* [hirftj] (Lewis) (St. Kilda 151), [hiRsd] (Lewis) (GL 348), [hy(r)ft] (Argyll) (SAG 180).

● Watson (1926: 97-98) discusses the name briefly. He notes that the Gaelic form is *Hiort*, also *Hirt*, a genitive form used as nominative, and that a Norse saga has *Hirtir* to denote certain islands near (to the west of) the Hebrides. He adds that the name is identical with OIr. *hirt*, *irt*, explained by Cormac as *bás* 'death', inviting the suggestion (quoted in Macbain (1922): 177) that

[...] the ancient Celts fancied this sunset isle to be the gate to their earthly paradise, the Land-under-the-waves, over the brink of the western sea (Macbain 1922: 177).

Watson (*ibid.*) also brings in the notion of St. Kilda being a saint's name, and that the form Kilda derives from ON *kelda* 'a well'. He notes this element (i.e. *hirt*) is also to be found in other Scottish place-names with the notion of 'death'.

However, the most detailed analysis of this name to date has been made by Alexander B. Taylor (1967, 1969). In dealing with the ON name *Hirt* Taylor comments:

A review of the evidence shows that it is not and cannot be of Celtic origin [...]. The name can be traced back to 1202. In that year an Icelandic ship under Guðmundr Arason touched at an island on the west of the Outer Hebrides called *Hirtir*. *Hirtir* is the plural of ON *hjørtr* 'a stag'; and 'Stags', it is suggested, is a very suitable name for a seaman approaching the islands to give to their rugged outlines [stacks] rising out of the sea [...]. [The name] first appears in Scottish sources in the fourteenth century as *Heryte*, *Hyrte*, *Hert* and *Hirth*. It is found Latinised in the sixteenth century as *Hirtha* and *Hirta* (Taylor 1969: 151).

With regard to the name St. Kilda itself Taylor (1969) shows the development of the name on successive maps and sea-charts from 1540 to 1698 (see above). In so doing he summarises his findings as follows:

There is cartographic and other evidence that the place name *St. Kilda*, earlier *S.Kilda*, was originally applied in a Scots archtypal form \**Skildar* or \**Skilder* to an island or island group much nearer to the west coast of the Outer Hebrides.

This archetypal form beginning *Sk-* makes it clear beyond doubt that the name was not originally a saint's name. It also invalidates a long-standing theory that the name is derived from ON *kelda* 'a well'.

The archetypal form is probably derived from ON *skildir* 'shields'. There are in fact at least two groups of islands off the west coasts of Harris and North Uist which have the appearance of shields lying flat on the surface of the sea. [namely, *Gaskeir* (seen from West Loch Tarbert, Harris) and *Haskeir Eagach* (seen from the north-west shore of North Uist)].

The name was first transferred further westwards to Hirta, in the form *S.Kilda* in a set of sailing directions and a chart in L. J. Wagenaer's *Thresoor der Zeevaert*, Leyden 1592. This is the first recorded occurrence of the name in the shape of a saint's name. Its form and its application appear to be the result of faulty copying of *Skilda(r)* in Nicolas de Nicolay's chart of Scotland, Paris 1583 (Taylor 1969: 153-154).

Finally, Taylor (*ibid.*) reiterates that the name *St. Kilda*, though now well established as a place-name, received its present form and connotation as a result of an orthographic error in the late 16th century.<sup>18</sup>

→ ?'shields' / ?'stags'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

## 5. UIST

ON (H: MBS 28-29): *Ívist*, Fordun II, 10 *Vyist*, MWIS §180 *Vyst* passim, MM 42 *Uist*, ScG *Uibhist* [ü-is'ıt'] OT, *Uisteach* [u'iftjax] 'Uistman' (SAG 231).

• Watson (1926: 37) mentions *Uist* but does not discuss the name. In an article on a possible meaning for Uist (a longish island in the Outer Hebrides comprising North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist), Richard Coates (1988a: 21-23, 2012: 63-65) compares the name with that of the Balearic island of Ibiza in the western Mediterranean. Ibiza, Lat. *Ebussus* (Manilius & Pliny), Gr. Ἐβουσόος (Diodorus Siculus), Ἐυσόος (Strabo), *et sim.* E. Hübner 1905, the commentator in Pauly-Wissowa, in the context of heavy Phoenician trading activity in the western Mediterranean during the second half of the first millennium BC, suggests a possible Phoenician derivation of the name Ibiza and offers *î-bûsim*, *î-bôsem*, *'i-besim*, with the meaning '(island) of the fir-trees', '...of the palm-trees'; Ibiza is apparently lush in vegetation.

In this regard Coates (*ibid.*) suggests a common origin for both the names Ibiza and Uist. In the latter case he proffers something like [iβis-]. The islands of both North and South Uist boast a lush green stretch of open field on their western side, the only extent of lush land in the whole of the Hebrides, with perhaps the exception of Islay, and in this respect is comparable with the island of Ibiza, also lush, but in fir / palm trees. The intervocalic spirant, retained in the ON reflex *Ívist* and in the Balearic name *Ibiza* despirantised, is realised as something like [ü] in the Gaelic rendering of *Uist*, viz. [ü-is'ıt'] (native South Uist speech).

→ ?'lush island'.<sup>19</sup>

→ ?'pine-tree island'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

18 Coates (1990: 55-59) discusses the name similar to the above discussion but comes to no conclusion, noting only (p. 58) that the form "*Kilda* (or the like) never appears alone on maps, and that there are good late sixteenth-century map-forms of the type *Skild-*."

19 Bennett *et al.* (1990: 289), citing Wilkins (1984), quoted in Coates (2012: 64, fn. 12), observe that pine (*pinus sylvestris*) has been noted "from the archaeological record of peat bogs in South Uist, even though this tree is now extinct in the Western Isles."

## 6. SCITIS - Skye

Ptol. II,3,31 Σκιτις νῆσος {Skitis nēsos}, Ravenna (7th cent.) 109<sub>15</sub> *Scetis*, Adom. [I 33], II 26 *in Scia insula*, Adom. I 33 *in insula demoraretur Sci*, AT (13th) 668 *cum plebe Scith* (gen.), AU (16th) 668 *com plebe Sceth* (gen.), AU 701 *imbairecc i Scii* (dat.) 'a fight in Skye', AU 1209 *cath for feraibh Sciadh* (gen.) 'a battle (won) over the men of Skye', BL (12th cent.) *Scetha* (gen.), ON *a Skipi* (H: MBS), *i Skip* (HákS), CMI f42v. *ad insulam ski*, f43r. *ad ski*, MxB *Skey*, Fordun II, 10 *Sky*, MWIS §132 *Sky*, MM 131 *Skie*, Mercator (map) 1564 *Skye*. ScG *An t-Eilean Sgitheanach* [(ə)n-djeˈlanj-ˈskjianaχ], [(ə)-njelanj-ˈskjian(h)anax] (SAG 210), [skˈiə(h)anəχ] (DSR 28) 'the island of the man of *Sgith*', *an cuan Sgì* 'the (narrow) sea of Skye' (CPNS 39) (the Minch between Skye and North Uist / Harris, cf. *Skið sund* (HákS) 'the sound of Skye').

• Isle of Skye. Possibly Celtic, as Isaac (2005: 208). If so, then possibly an *i*-stem < PIE *skēi-d-*, *-t-* (*d*, *t*, *z*. T. "präsenbildend"), cf. OInd. *chinátti*, themat. *chindati* 'schneidet ab, spaltet', Gr. σκίζω 'spalte, trenne', Lat. *scindō*, *scidi*, *scisum* 'schlitzen, zerreißen, spalten', MB *squeigoff*, ModB *skeja* 'schneiden'; W *ysgwydd* (\**skeid-*), C *scuid*, B *scoaz* 'Schulterblatt', OIr. *scíath* 'Schulterblatt, Schwinge', etc., Goth. *skáidan* 'divide', OE *scide* 'a piece of wood' OIr. *scian* 'knife', *sciath* 'wing' (also derived from the above root) (cf. IEW 920-921, Taylor 1958: 52-56). Adomnán's form in *Scia* is likely a latinised rendering of the OIr. form.

→ 'the split, cut island', i.e. from its many inland-penetrating fjords (also CPNS 38-39. PNRB 452). Otherwise etymology unknown.

## 7. EIGG

Adom. III 18 *in Egea insula*, Félire of Oengus *Donnán Ega huare* 'Donnan of cold Eigg', AU 617 *Combustio Donnáin Ega*, AU 725 *Oan princeps Ego* (*moritur*), AU 752 *Cummene nepos Becce religiosus Ego*, MxB *Ege*, MWIS §130 *EGge*, MM 276 *Egg*, ScG *Eige* [ekˈə] (CPNS 85), *Eilein Eige* [elanj-ˈekjə] (SAG 160), *An t-Eilein Eigeach* [(ə)n-djeˈlanj-ˈekjax] (SAG 161).

• Eigg. As Anderson (2002, lxxii) notes, there would seem to have been two forms of the name. The Gaelic genitive *Ego* suggests an *i*-stem nom. *Eig*. Adomnán's form suggests nom. *Ege*, perhaps an *ia*-stem (GOI 186). Similarity between these two declensions led to some confusion at an early date. Watson (1926: 85) explains this name as of Gaelic provenance, equating it with Ir. *eag* f. gen. *eige*, dat. *eig* 'notch' (Di. 388), ScG *eag* f. gen. *eige* 'nick, notch, gap' (Dw. 379), "with reference most probably to the marked depression that runs across the middle of the island from Kildonan to Bay of Laig" (*ibid.*). The ScG disyllable pronunciation (above) probably reflects an oblique case form, as possibly also below.

Although the highland area of Eigg is divided by a glen cutting its way through the centre of the island, as sketched out above, the feature of Eigg that strikes one most, to my mind, is the long precipitous cliff on the eastern side facing Scotland, culminating in *An Cruachan* 'the wee stack', a head-like stack of rock at the southern end. Could the name of the island derive, rather than from Gaelic, from ON *Egg* f.; g. sg. and nom. pl. *eggjar* [eǥː], [eǥːːar] (IGTG 326 s.v. *egg* 2), Lat. *acies*, Eng. *edge* 'edge' (CV 116-17) relating to the cliff? Such a derivation would be quite fitting in the

circumstances.

→ '?gap island'.

→ '?edge island'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

## 8. RUM

AU 677 *Beccan Ruimm*, AT 676 *Beccan Ruimean quievit in insola Britania*, Fordun II 10 *Rumme*, MWIS §126 *Rum*, MM *Rum*, ScG *Rùm* /Ru:m/, /Rɔum/ OT.

● Watson (1926: 95) reminds us that the adjective is *Rumach*, as found in *Cuillionn Rumach* 'the Cuilin (i.e. mountain) of Rum, as distinguished from *Cuillionn Sgitheanach* 'the Cuilin of Skye'; also *na h-Earadh Rumach* 'the Harris (mountainous district) of Rum', as distinguished from *na h-Earadh Ìleach* 'the Harris of Islay' and *na h-Earadh (?Leòdhasach*, my suggestion GB) 'the Harris of Lewis?' Otherwise he offers no solution to the name: "may be pre-Celtic."

Coates (2009: 237, 2012: 80-81) offers PSem. *\*rām*, as in the modern place-name *Ramat Gan* in Israel and *Ramallah*, Palestine (PSem. root *\*rwm*).<sup>20</sup> He cautiously adds that he (in Coates 2006: 7-8) suggested this for Cornish Rame, apparently the name for a conspicuous conically-shaped hill on a headland in that parish overlooking Plymouth Sound. He notes that Rum "is mountainous from every angle" (*ibid.* 2012: 80-81) and boasts the highest mountain (Askival, 2664ft./812m) anywhere in the Western Isle, excepting the Cuilin of Skye.

However, Orel and Stolbova (1994: 450 s.v. 2120 *\*rim-*) (*pace* Coates) give [HS] *\*rim-* 'rise', Sem. *\*rūm* 'be high', Hebr. *rwm*. Based on *\*rVm*, WCh. *\*rim* 'stand (on hind legs)', HS *rīmī*. The Semitic reflex would readily give *\*/Ru:m/*,<sup>21</sup> ScG /Ru:m/, /Rɔum/ OT, with later shortening of the vowel in the southern Hebrides?

→ '(island of) height, high island'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

## 9. ETH - Tiree

Adom. I 19 *Ethicam terram*, *Ethicam insulam* (acc.), *Aethici pilagi* (gen.), II 15 *ad Aethicam terram*, *ad Etheticam terram* (acc.), II 39 *in Ethica terra* (abl.), III 8 *ad Ethicam terram* (acc.), BB 205 a 11 *i tír iath seach Íle* 'to Tir-iath beyond Islay', Rawl. B 502, 115 a 5 *ort ocht turu Tiri iath* 'Razed eight towers in Tiree', RD *Tirieth*, *Tiryad* 1343, *Teryed* 1354, *Tiriage* 1390, MxB *Chorhye*, Fordun II 10 *Tyree*, *Tyriage* 1494, *Tiereig* 1496 (CPNS 86), MWIS §118 *Thiridh*, MM 267 *Tir-iy*, ScG *Tiriodh* [t<sup>h</sup>ir'əy] ?> [t<sup>h</sup>ir'i:] OT (CPNS 86).

● Watson (*ibid.*) notes that Adomnán's *eth* became OIr. *iath*, reflecting the Early Celtic long *ē* (< IE *ei*) in Adomnán which had been broken to *ia* by 800, thus the saint's name *Cēran* became *Ciaran*.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, MIr./EModIr. original neutral *dh* /ð/ became /ɣ/ and palatalised *dh* /ð'/ became /j/

<sup>20</sup> Coates (2012: 80, fn. 27) observes that the root is given as *\*rVyVm* in Militarev (2007, entry 1179), though Hebr. has alternating /w/ for the second syllable.

<sup>21</sup> In Phoenician-Punic, *r* is an alveolar median resonant /r/, which may be geminated, as seen in the Greek and Latin transcriptions of the Pi'el active participle *M'RĤ me'rreh* as **Μηρρη** and **Merre** respectively, with gemination of /r/ (Krahmalkov 2001: 25).

<sup>22</sup> Though not in Manx, which retained *Cēran* (written *Kerron* but pronounced [kɛ:rən]) (GB).



around 1200, thus falling in entirely together with original *gh* (Jackson 1955: 87). This might perhaps be seen in the various spellings (above), earlier with *-th* but later with *-d*, *-g* (representing */-γ(ʰ)/*, finally disappearing altogether in the name, except apparently in Tíree itself, viz. [tʰirʰə] (with strong initial stress), but seemingly lost outside Tíree, viz. [tʰirʰi:] OT, probably via palatalised */-γʰ/* in an oblique case (cf. also Watson 1926: 86). The second element *-ēth* does not seem to represent any known Gaelic or Celtic root.<sup>23</sup>

→ 'land' + unknown second element.

## 10. COLL

Adom. I 41 *de insula Coloso*, II 22 *inter Maleam et Colosum/colosam insula*, MxB *Cole*, Fordun II 10 *Coel*, MWIS §120 *Coll*, MM 271 *Coll*, ScG *Cola* [kʰɔL(ə)] (SAG144).

• The presence of an intervocalic */s/* in the name is a problem, as noticed by Watson (1926: 84) and Coates (2009: 236, 2012: 76). Watson (*ibid.*) reminds us that Celtic intervocalic */s/* had long disappeared before Adomnán's time, and medial and final */s/* in OIr. represents older groups, e.g. *cos* 'leg, foot' < \**coxa*, and accordingly suggests that Colosus may be pre-Celtic.

Coates (*ibid.*) accepts the dangers of identifying this form naïvely with Greek κολοσσός (of uncertain origin), especially if we associate it with a standing stone in Coll seemingly of the vintage of those in Lewis and North Uist. Though Coll is traditionally explained as deriving from ScG *coll* 'hazel' (Coates 2009: 237, 2012: 77), it is difficult to reconcile the present forms of the name with that in Adomnán.

→ Of uncertain origin.

## 11. MALAIOS - Mull

Ptol. II, 2, 11 Μαλέος, Μαλαῖος {Maleós, Malaios}, Ravenna 105<sup>29</sup> *Malaca* (assimilation, as Isaac 2005: 197), Adom. I 22, I 41, II 22 *in Maleam insulam* (acc.), ON (H:MBS) *Þjóð mylsk* 'people of Mull', MxB *Muley*, Fordun II, 10 *Mule*, MWIS §100 *Mule*, MM 250 *Isle of Mull*, G. *Muile*, *An t-Eilean Muileach* 'the Mull island', ScG [mulʰə] (SAG 193).

• Isle of Mull. Watson (1926: 38) notes that the suffix *-aios* becomes *-e* in Goidelic and that Adomnán's *Malea* is an adjective fem. from *Maile*, which would regularly appear in Adomnán's time. He suggests for the first element *mal-*, ScG. *mol-adh*, W *mawl* 'praise', cf. OCS *iz-moleti* 'eminere', 'to stand prominent' in the sense of 'lofty', i.e. 'lofty isle'.

De Bernardo-Stempel (2007: 153) suggests 'the evil one' < \**ml̥-yo-s*, possibly related to OIr. *maile* 'evil' (*ibid.* 2000: 105), with reference to *ibid.* (1987: 127), but without discussion.

In view of the foregoing Coates (2009: 234, 2012: 68-69) offers PSem. \**mlh* 'salt', cf. Hebr. *mallûadh* 'a salt marsh plant (?marsh-mallow)'. Given that Mull is not known archaeologically for salt production, it seemingly does have salt-marshes, albeit small ones. Coates (*ibid.*) notes that the

<sup>23</sup> Watson (1926: 86) adds that *-ēth* cannot be OIr. *ith*, *etho* 'corn' < PIE \**et(e)n* 'Kern, Korn' (IEW 343) (even though Tíree is reputedly rich in barley), as the diphthong *ia-* (not the single vowel *i-*) is a development from Early Celtic long *ē*, as noted above.

presence of salt-marshes in the Hebrides is not unusual.<sup>24</sup> Coates (2012: 69) cites the reconstructed PSem. root *malaw* 'desert' (Orel & Stolbova 1994) but adds "[...] its credibility depends on what sort of agriculturally useless terrain the term could denote at the relevant period, and in what areas".

More likely, however, the name derives from PCelt. *\*malo-* 'rising, prominent' (cf. MIr. *mell* < *\*mel-no-*, *mull* 'ball, clump'). To PIE *\*melh<sub>3</sub>-* 'hervorkommen' LIV 433-34, IEW 721 s.v. *\*mel-*, *melə-*, *mlō-* 'rise up, rising land', Alb. *mal* 'mountain'.

→ 'rising-up, mountainous land' (as DCCPN 24, Isaac 2005: 197, Falileyev 2008: 37-44), "A sense of 'hill(-island)' seems appropriate [...] whatever the ultimate origin of *\*mala*, *\*mel-*" (PNRB 409).

Mull is quite mountainous.

## 12. HY - Iona

Fél. May 25 *Dunchad Híae húare*, AU I 356.13 *Indrechtach abb Iae*, Tfrag. 20.12 *do muintir Iae*, BCC 200.4 *an t-oilen darub ainm hÍ Colaim Cill* (DIL I s.v. Í 1(II) 9), Adom. I 29 *in Ioua insula*, II 27 *in campulo occidentali Iouae insulae*, II 45 *ad Iouam insulam*, CMI f40r. *ad insulam que uocatur hy*, f43r. *in quadam insula que uocabatur insula sancti columbe*, f44v. *in Iona insula*, Fordun II, 10 *Hy Columbkille*, MWIS §103 *...lyis ane Ile callit in Irish leid Icholum chille, that is to say in English Saint Colms Ile, ...this Ile of Colmkill*, MM *Iona G Í, Í Chaluim Chille, Eilean Í* (Dw. 1016).

• The origin of the name *Iona* (a seemingly scribal misreading for *Ioua* in a text ultimately derived from Adomnán), OIr. nom. *hÍ/Ia*, acc. *hÍ*, gen. *Hiae, Ia*, dat. *in Hi, in hÍ* DIL I s.v. Í 1(II), 9) is unknown. Adomnán's *Ioua* is an adjective formed from the name of the island. Watson (1926: 87-89) expresses some uncertainty about its origin, but tentatively suggests (p. 88) that *Ioua* might go back [...] to *Iuoua* "which might mean 'Yew Place', cf. the Gaulish [deity] *Ivavos* [...]", though yew trees are seemingly unknown in Iona.

Again, in the context of the presence of Phoenician traders in the area of Britain and Ireland during the earlier part of the first millennium BC, the G. form *Í/hÍ* may derive from the PSem. word *\*(a)y-* 'island, isolated place' (cf. Sauren 2005), with the foregoing meaning or following meaning: 'island of a special sort, a holy place'.<sup>25</sup>

Old Irish *Í*, according to DIL I: Í 1(II) 9, is derived from ON *ey* 'island' and is the ON name for Iona. However, ON would seem to me to be too late to provide such a derivation, as it implies that the island had another name before the Vikings arrived? Anderson (2002: xxxi) quotes the tradition that

[s]oon after his arrival in Britain Columba stayed (*conversatus*) with the overking of the Dál Riata, Conall son of Comgall (i. 7). A tradition that Conall gave the island of Iona to Columba was mentioned in the Ulster Chronicle (AU s.a. 573), so it is not later than the early tenth century, but the form *Columbe cill(e)* suggests that the entry was not made much before 750. Bede, probably relying on a Pictish source, said that Iona was given to Columba by the Picts. There could have been truth in both traditions, though Bede's account is difficult to accept as it stands. Adomnán and Bede both write of Columba's coming to Britain;

<sup>24</sup> Coates (2012: 69) brings in a suggestion from Orel & Stolbova (1994) of the reconstructed PSem. root *\*malaw* 'desert' as a possible solution but is not convinced of its suitability in the context.

<sup>25</sup> In discussing this same topic Coates (2009: 233) also suggests a PSem. solution, and asks whether "the form *Ioua* contains more than *Í* does?" But he has seemingly taken *Ioua* to be a form of the name *Í*, whereas, as we have seen, it is in fact an adjectival form as used by Adomnán (see above).

neither actually mentions his arrival in the island [?of Iona] (Anderson 2002: xxxi).

According to Seán Duffy (AIH 24), the first recorded Viking attack on Ireland took place in 795. By the mid-ninth century the Vikings had set up permanent bases in various parts of Ireland, in and around Dublin (841), around Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Wexford (AIH 25 map). This would suggest that ON *ey* for Iona entered Old Irish as *Í* during the early years of the ninth century. Nevertheless, its arrival in Old Irish in the context of Columba would seem to be late.

However, if OIr. *Í* derives from PSem. *\*(a)y-*, a form of long standing (as with other possible PSem.-derived place-names in the area of Britain and Ireland) used by Phoenician traders that would filter down to others as and when necessary. If so, then the form *Í* / *Hí* referring to Iona as a remote island possibly of some religious significance (as such isolated places tended to be, even so today<sup>26</sup>), then the reputation of Iona as a holy place would have existed long before the time of Columba. In which case, it is suggested, Iona did not achieve the aforesaid reputation because of Columba, but that Columba was sent thither precisely because of the long-standing reputation that Iona already had.

→ 'island, remote place (of some religious significance)'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

### 13. ÌLE - Islay

Adom. II 23 in *Ilea insula*, var. *ilia*, OIr. *Ile* (gen.) LBr. 14, *Ili* (dat.) LBr. 23, AU 739 *Ila*, *Ile*, *Ili* (dat.), ON (H: MBS) *Íl*, CMI f33v. in *insula que uocatur yle*, RD 251 (c.1173) *Hyle*, LSP 1297 *Yle*,<sup>27</sup> MxB *Ile*, Fordun II, 10 *Ile*, MWIS §70 *Il*, MM 231 *Ila*. ScG *Ìle* [i:l(ə)] (SAG 179).

● Isle of Islay. Watson (1926: 86-87) suggests a Celtic provenance, comparing the name with the Gaul. PN *Ilio-māros* 'big-flanked, big-buttocked', < ?PIE *īli-* 'Weichen, Eingeweide, Geschlechtsteile?', gr. ἰλία, lat. *īlium*, *-a* 'flank', ob hierher cymr. *il* 'Gärung, (\*Schwellung?)', gall. PN *Ilio-māros* 'mit großen Weichen' und die schott[ische] Insel air. *Ìle*, engl. *Islay* (Watson, Celtic Place-Names 87)? Vielleicht hierher slav. *\*jelito* (aus *\*jilito*?) usw. 'Weichen, Darm, Hoden', in wruss. *jal'ity* 'Hoden', poln. *jelito* 'Darm', dial. 'Wurst', usw. (IEW 499). Like *Scia* Adomnàn's *Ilea* is likely a latinised variant of the OIr. form.

→ 'flank-like island, island of flanks' (from its shape, though this is only noticeable with a bit of fantasy, if one stands at the head of Loch Indaal; otherwise not).<sup>28</sup>

Taylor (1958: 57) notices that the name appears in a number of river-names in Britain, e.g. River *Isle* (with the towns Ilford, Ilchester, Ilminster in Somerset, England), River *Ilidh* / *Ullidh*, (Sutherland, Scotland), River *Isla* (Angus, Scotland), but offers no solution. Here Isaac (2005: 193) does not regard the element *Íla* in the river-name *Íla potamoû ekbolai* (Helmsdale) as obviously Celtic or IE, but speculatively compares it with OIr. *ilach* 'howling, ululation'(?), suggesting an onomatopoeic name for the river-name, 'the howling river'? This would obviously not apply to the island name, however.

Coates (2009: 233-234, 2012: 68) notes the European proclivity for regarding islands to the west as sacred, bearing in mind in this context the western-most position of Islay in its sector of the Inner

26 e.g. Skeilig Mhíchíl, Inis Bó Finne, Lindisfarne, Mont St. Michel (St. Malo), St. Michael's Mount (Cornwall), etc.

27 Cf. also Taylor (1958: 56-57).

28 See under Arran (below) Ian Fraser's caveat about island names from their apparent shape.

Hebrides, and with regard to Phoenician mercantile involvement suggests PSem. \**hll* 'pure, holy', cf. Phoenician *l*, "with the second syllable in the modern name attributable to an extended form of the root comparable to those seen in Hebrew *'Eloah*, Biblical Aramaic *'Elāhā* and Arabic *Aḷlāh* (< PSem. \**al-ilāh* 'the god, God' [...]" with generic \**y* 'island, remote place', viz. *y'lāh* 'island of the god'. The phonetics seem somewhat strained here.

Krahmalkov (2001: 23) notes that in Phoenician *l* was an alveolar lateral resonant, viz. *ll*, as in *'allōnīm* 'gods' (*LNM*), similar to the lenis alveolar *l* in G *Īle Ā:l(ə)* (SAG 179). As a possible extension of Coates's suggestion, given Islay's greenness and lushness, perhaps 'God's island' in the sense of 'lush island', as in the case of Uist (above)?

→ '?island of the god' (sense 'holy island').

→ '?the god's island' (sense 'lush island').

→ Or the first element *Ī-* may contain PSem. *'(a)y* 'island, remote place' (see under HY-Iona above) + an unknown specific. Otherwise etymology unknown.

#### 14. HINBA - Colonsay / Oronsay or Jura?

Adom. I 21 *ad Hinbinam insulam* (acc.), I 45, II 24, III 5, III 17-18 *in Hinba insula* (abl.), III 23 *Hinba in insula* (abl.).

● According to tradition, it was in Hinba that Columba allegedly founded a monastery at a place called *Muirbolc Már* 'great seabag'. As Watson (1926: 82) notes,

it was not very far from Iona, for Columba often visited it. It appears to have lain in the track of vessels coming from Ireland, at least that seems to be the inference from the fact that Comgell, Cainnech, Brendan, and Cormac, coming from Ireland to visit Columba, found him in Hinba (Watson 1926: 82).

The identity of Hinba is therefore dependent on the whereabouts of *Muirbolc Már*. As this clearly lies on the way from Ireland to Iona, two possibilities come into focus, namely Colonsay (with Oronsay) and Jura. Watson (1926: 82-83) notes:

The choice seems to lie between Colonsay and Jura. At the south end of Colonsay is Oronsay, separated by a channel fordable at low water, and with extensive remains of a medieval priory<sup>29</sup> [...]. The channel between Colonsay and Oronsay widens into a broad bay, with a bag-like horn on the north side about half a mile wide at the mouth. The island of Jura is almost bisected by the deep inlet on its western side, known as Loch Tarbert. At some distance from its mouth the loch contracts, and then widens, thus forming an ideal *bolc* or bag [...] (Watson 1926: 82-83).

In a recent survey of Hebridean island names found in Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae*, Kelly Kilpatrick (2013: 2-4) discusses the identity of Hinba on the basis of the whereabouts of *Muirbolc Már*. She notes (*ibid.* 3):

*Hinba* (KP's italics, and elsewhere) is the second most widely attested island-name [in Adomnán]. After extensive research, I have concluded that *Hinba* is likely to be identified with Colonsay, and perhaps both Colonsay and Oronsay. The place-name *Muirbolc már* 'great seabag' is comparable with other *muirbolc* places (e.g. Kentra Bay, Adomnán's *muirbolc paradise*, and Murlough Bay, Co. Down, both characterised

<sup>29</sup> Watson (1926: 82) quotes the following tradition: "It is on Oronsay that Columba is traditionally said to have landed first with the intention of settling there. But finding on ascending the little hill that he could see Ireland thence, he went on to Hí, and so the hill still bears the name of *Cúl ri Éirinn* 'back to Ireland'."

as being nearly empty of water when the tide is out, exposing sands). *Muirbolc már* should be identified with The Strand [between Colonsay and Oronsay] (Kilpatrick 2013: 3).

At first sight Kilpatrick's argument sounds convincing, and the possibility of The Strand being Columba's *Muirbolc Már* cannot be ruled out. However, if we come to look at the name Hinba itself and analyse it, as Watson (1926: 84) suggests, as a latinised form of OIr. *inbe* 'notch, incision' (cf. DIL I 204, s.v. *inbe* 2), then *inbe* (assuming that this interpretation is correct) is unlikely to refer to a wide strand, but more likely to a deep-penetrating inlet of the sort exemplified by Loch Tarbert in Jura. Jura, as we have seen, also lies on the route between Ireland and Iona.

→ 'incision island, island of the incision'. Jura [tju:ra] (SAG 154)?<sup>30</sup>

Otherwise etymology unknown.

## 15. ARRAN

OIr. nom. *Ara*; *Arand*, *Arann na n-aighedh n-imdha* 'Arran of the many stags', gen. *Arann*, *loing-sech Ile ocus Arann*, dat. *Araind* (cf. Watson 1926: 96), MxB *Aran*, Fordun II, 10 *Arane*, MWIS §3: *Aran*, MM 217 *Arran*, ON (HákS 322) *til hereyeia* (var. *uið hereyar*), (*ibid.* 326) *hers-ey*,<sup>31</sup> G. *Arainn* [eriñ] (GA 6),<sup>32</sup> [aːrinj] (SAG 123).

• Watson (1926: 97) regards the meaning of Arran (w. short init. *a*) as "unknown, and the name may be pre-Celtic, but views (*ibid.* 87) Ir. *Árainn* (w. long init. *ā*) as deriving from OIr. *áru* 'kidney' from its shape. In this regard Ian Fraser (1999: 11) makes the following pertinent remarks:

The fact that Arran is roughly kidney-shaped is not in dispute, but to suggest that those who coined the name were aware of the nature of the physical outline of the island is stretching credibility to the limit. There is absolutely no reason to believe that Dark-Age man looked at Arran as an entity in the shape of a kidney. Nevertheless, islands and island groups, viewed from the sea can present characteristic shapes and outlines, to the extent that sailors approaching from a distance may well have been influenced by such impressions when selecting a name. This is true also of mountains, since many peaks are named because of the shape or outline which they exhibit, and not from any characteristic which may be obvious when one views the land from their summits (Fraser 1999: 11).

However, Deirdre and Laurence Flanagan (2002: 17) suggest that Ir. *Árainn* (w. long init. *ā*) "is a word construed as meaning 'ridge' and is virtually confined to Aranmore, Co. Donegal, *Árainn Mhór* 'large ridge', and the Aran Islands, Co. Galway, *Árainn* + 'Islands', 'ridge (islands)', presumably from their shape as seen from a distance, though without any discussion. In this same vein, but with some discussion, Owen and Morgan (2007: 17-18) regard the two examples of *Aran* that they cite, viz. *Aran Benllyn* and *Aran Fawddwy* as 'ridge' names < *âr* + dim. suffix *-an*, including the two diminutive forms. viz. *Arenig Fach / Fawr*, as well as the related 'ridges' of the collective variant *Eryri* (*ibid.* 443).<sup>33</sup>

30 *Na Beanndan Diùrach* [na pjendən 'tju:rax] 'the Paps of Jura' (SAG 154).

31 As noted by Nicolaisen (1992: 3), the ON name for Arran, *Hersey*, "is only recorded in connection with the movements of Hákon Hákonsson's fleet in 1263. It is therefore difficult to judge how widely the island was known by the Norsemen and for how long they used a name of their own for it." However, given that there are seemingly similar names in Norway (e.g. *Hereyar*, *Hereane*, as supplied to Nicolaisen by Hermann Pálsson, the Arran variant may owe its existence to the Norwegian names.

32 Note also a form w. init. [a]: [dɔl ə ɣariñ] 'going to Arran', [bɔñ 'i mi də ɣariñ] 'I belong to Arran' (GA 100).

33 Watson (1926: 97) notes also that there are several Welsh names which appear similar: *Afon Aran* (Radnorshire), *Aran Mawdd- [w]y* and *Aran Benllyn* (hills nr. Bala); *Arenig Fach / Fawr* (hills NW of Bala).

In this context see also PCelt. \**ar-*, *ara-*, *aro-* 'moving, rising, raised' with *o*-grade root cognates in OIr. *or* m. *o* 'border, limit', MW *or* m. 'border, edge'; Av. *ar-* 'get moving', Gk. {oros} 'mountain', Hitt. {ara:i} 'gets up'. PIE root: formation originally preconsonantal zero-grade PIE \**h<sub>3</sub>r-* < \**h<sub>3</sub>er-* 'get moving' (IEW 326-332, LIV 266-267). The meaning 'border' of the Neo-Celtic reflexes derives from the frequent appearance of mountains and ridges as political and ethnic boundaries (cf. Isaac PNPG/CE s.v. *ar-*, *ara-*, *aro-*). The Irish, Scottish and Welsh forms in *a-* would predate the *o*-grade forms of Neo-Celtic. All the same, a pre-Celtic origin of the name, as Watson suggests (above), cannot be ruled out either.

→ '?ridge (island)'. This meaning in my view, from what I have seen either in real life or from photographs, could apply to *all* examples of *Aran* (variously spelt) in Ireland, Scotland and Wales (*pace* Coates 2009: 232, 2012: 62).

## 16. BUTE

Ravenna *Botis*, Paisley Reg. (1198 x 1204) *insula de Bote*, Paisley Reg. (1241 x 1249) *de Buyt*, Icel. Sagas (c.1260) *inn til Bótar*, *til Bótar*, *Bót*, CMI f44v. (c.1274) *Both*, f51v. (1348) *Buth*, *Both*, MxB *Bothe*, Fordun II 10 *Bothe*, RMS 1392 *apud Bute*, MWIS §6 *Buit*, MM 214 *Boot*. Current OS maps *Bute* (cf. also Márkus 2012: 125-127), G. *Bód* [bo:d], [bɔ:d] (GA 55).

● Rivet & Smith (PNRB 273) suggest that the name may be derived from a root which gives W *bod*, Ir. *both* 'dwelling', here in an apparent plural form, though this may be deceptive: we could assume here \**Bot* *īs* (for *insula*), misread or misunderstood by earlier map-makers as a plural form.

However, Gilbert Márkus (2012: 129-130), given that W *bod* [bo:d] can mean 'dwelling' (~ NBr. \**bot*) and has a long *ō*, as does the modern Gaelic name for the island, urges that we perhaps look to North British or Pictish, i.e. *p*-Celtic, as a possible provenance of the name. Márkus cites John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scottorum* (ch. 28) as possibly coming quite near to a solution:

*sanctus Brandanus in ea botham idiomate nostro bothe .i. cellam construxit. Unde et deinceps et usque tempus nostrum habetur binomina quod aliquando Rothisay .i. insula Rothay, sic et aliquando insula de Bothe ab indigenis nuncupatur* (Fordun, 28).

'Saint Brendan built a church there, in our language *both*, that is a cell; therefore from then on up to our own time it is known to the natives by two names, sometimes *Rothesay*, i.e. island of *Rothay*, and sometimes the island of *Bute*' (after Broun 1999: 55-56).

In addition, Márkus (*ibid.*) notes that W *bod* can also mean 'church, chapel', and given the presence there of the church of Kingarth, a church of some apparent significance in times gone by, suggests that *Bute* may take its name from North British \**bot*. However, taking his cue from Watson (1926: 97), Márkus (2012: 130) does not rule out the possibility of a pre-Celtic origin of the name, as seems to be the case with other Hebridean island names.

Finally, it is worth considering the possibility that the name *Bute* was not coined in any Celtic language, but that it is pre-Celtic and therefore that its origin and meaning are lost to us. This would align the name with several other islands off the west coast of Scotland whose names do not seem to contain elements drawn from Celtic languages [...] (Márkus 2012: 130).

However, Coates (2012: 81) observes that Neo-British \**bod* 'dwelling' (W *bod*, C *bos*, PBr. \**bot-*)

can be compared directly with P.Sem. *\*but* 'hut' (Orel & Stolbova s.v.),<sup>34</sup> though his suggestion of 'dwelling(s) island', inferring "an entire territory marked by a difference of status expressed in building technology, or simply naming from a, or the, prominent settlement", is formally possible, but unlikely.<sup>35</sup>

→ '?church island, island of the (renowned) church'. Otherwise etymology unknown.

## Conclusion

As can be seen above, many of the island names seem insolvable, suggesting that they were coined very early on, some perhaps by the earliest settlers after the Ice Age. We do not know what languages the people spoke who may have coined some of these names. All we know for certain is that the languages that generally shaped the nomenclature of Britain and Ireland, as we saw at the beginning, are Indo-European. There are, however, as Wilhelm Nicolaisen (1992: 2) also noticed, a number of names which we seemingly cannot ascribe to any language we know of. These include some of the major island names in the west and north, viz. *Islay*, *Tiree*, *Rum*, *Uist*, *Lewis*, *Unst* *Yell*, as well as the name of the *Hebrides* itself. There was evidently no shared tradition regarding the name *Hebrides*, for instance, since various peoples had their own names for them: the Gaels: *Innse Gall* 'the islands of the strangers', the Norse: *Sudr-eyjar* 'southern isles', the English: *Western Isles*. In terms of re-interpreting some of the island names, Nicolaisen (1992: 2) had his to say:

Attempts have been made to re-interpret several of the individual island names through what is called 'folk-etymology' in terms of Gaelic, and the Norse had a go at Lewis calling it *Ljódhús* ['song-house'], *Islay*, for example, has been said to be related to the elements *ilio-* in the Gaulish man's name *Ilio-márus* meaning 'flank' or 'buttock'. *Tiree* is etymologised as *Tiriath* 'corn-land', *Mull* has been connected with Gaelic *moladh* 'praise' and *muileach* 'dear, beloved' in the sense of 'Lofty Isle' (in Ptolemy it is *Malaios*), and *Skye* has had two alternative explanations imposed upon it, depending on whether we link it more closely with Gaelic *sgian* 'knife' or *sgiath* 'wing'; if the former, then a meaning 'Divided Isle' seems to be a possibility, if the latter 'Winged Isle' is to be preferred. One can observe recrudescences of such thinking at all times, and there have been various suggestions for the name *Arran* in the same vein. The one most frequently quoted is Early Gaelic *aru* 'kidney', offered like the etymologies for *Skye* and *Islay* because of the shape of the island. If, in fact, *Skye* is indeed wing-shaped, if *Islay* looks like a behind and *Arran* like an over-sized kidney, the potential perception of such similarities in outline is more likely to belong to a later age when maps and charts had become available, or to an even later period when one could see the shape of the islands from above; circumnavigating an island and viewing it from the sea are less likely to suggest toponymic metaphors even if there are homophones in the vocabulary which might trigger such speculation. In my view we are on safer ground when we think of *Arran* and other island names as pre-Celtic and also as pre-Indo-European, a solution - if it solves anything - that leaves us with the thought that practically all the major islands in the Northern and Western Isles have very old names, so old and so linguistically and lexically opaque that we do not have any plausible referents for them elsewhere. They are linguistic fossils, perhaps some three thousand years old or even older (Nicolaisen 1992: 2).

34 Oliver Padel (1985: 25), quoted in Coates (2012: 81), notes that the British word denoted or connoted a dwelling-place of humbler status than *\*treβ-*, the usual word for 'farm' or 'village' in the Neo-British languages.

35 Nevertheless, such allusions are made, even by earlier peoples. The name *Great Orm* for the headland adjacent to Llandudno in North Wales, for instance, was apparently given by Scandinavian sailors, as the headland concerned looked serpent-like (*ormr*) coming out into the sea (Gillian Fellows-Jensen, personal communication 1999). In addition, Watson (1926: 96-97) quotes the following west coast triad: "*a' Chearc Leòdhasach, an Coileach Arannach agus an Eireag Mhanannach* ('the Hen of Lewis, the Cock of Arran and the Pullet of Man (i.e. Calf of Man) - to see these three all in one day was reckoned good sailing - too good to be true." Note that all these are place-names given by Gaelic speakers to landmarks from their shape.

Until recently, solutions to the meaning of the names of the various major Hebridean islands have been looked for within a Celtic framework, and this has in a number of cases led into a cul-de-sac, resulting often in a frustrating admission that the names might be 'pre-Celtic'. In recent years, in the context of Phoenician mercantile activity around Britain and Ireland during the early first millennium BC, a possible Proto-Semitic solution in a number of cases has been sought. Given this situation, the present article seeks to loosen the log-jam to some extent in offering a few suggestions. But for many names it is likely that we may never get to know their provenance or meaning at all.

## Abbreviations

- Adom. - Adomnán's Life of Columba (c.696 AD) (Anderson 2002 (1991)).
- AIH - Atlas of Irish History (Duffy 2000(1997)).
- air. - altirisch.
- Alb. - Albanian.
- AT - Annals of Tigernach (13th cent.).
- AU - Annals of Ulster (15th cent.).
- Av. - Avestic.
- B - Breton.
- BCC \_ Betha Colaim Chille.
- BL - Book of Leinster (12th cent.).
- C - Cornish.
- CMCS - Cambridge (later Cambrian) Medieval Celtic Studies (Aberystwyth).
- CMI - Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles (c.1257-continuation till 1377) (Broderick 1995 (1979)).
- CPNS - Celtic Place-Names of Scotland (Watson 1926).
- cymr. - cymrisch..
- CV - An Icelandic-English Dictionary (Cleasby-Vigfusson 1991).
- DCCPN - Dictionary of Continental Celtic Place-Names (Falileyev).
- Di. - Dinneen's Irish-English Dictionary (Dinneen 1927).
- dial. - dialekt.
- DIL - Dictionary of the Irish Language (Royal Irish Academy, 1913-1976).
- DLG - Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise (Delamarre 2003).
- DOH - The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides (Borgstrøm 1940).
- DSR - The Dialects of Skye and Ross-shire (Borgstrøm 1941).
- Dw. - Dwelly's Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary (Dwelly 1911).
- EModIr. - Early Modern Irish.
- engl./Eng. - englisch / English.
- Fél. - Féilire.
- Fordun, John of, c.1380 (*Chronica Gentis Scottorum*) (Skene 1871-72) (List of LNN (in Megaw 1978: 313-14) seemingly from an informant in Scottish Royal court circles of late 14th cent., cf. McDonald 2002: 15).
- G - Gaelic.
- GA - The Gaelic of Arran (Holmer 1957).
- gall./Gaul. - gallisch / Gaulish.
- GL - Gaelic of Leurbost (Oftedal 1956).
- GOI - Grammar of Old Irish (Thurneysen 1946).
- Goth. - Gothic.
- gr./Gk. - griechisch / Greek.
- H - Heimskringla (Snorri Sturluson, 1223-1235).
- HákS - Hákon Hákonsson's Saga - *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (13th-cent.).
- HEGA - *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (Bede, 731 AD).
- Hebr. - Hebrew.
- Hitt. - Hittite.
- HLSM - Handbook of Late Spoken Manx (Broderick 1984-86).
- HS - Hamito-Semitic.
- IE - Indo-European.
- IEW - Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (Pokorny 1959).
- IGTG - Icelandic Grammar Texts Glossary (Einarson 1967).
- Ir. - Irish.
- lat./Lat. - lateinisch / Latin.
- LBr. - Lebor Bretnach (11th cent., Ms. 15th cent.).
- LEIA - Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien (Vendryes 1959-).
- LG - Lebor Gabála (in Book of Leinster, ca. 1150).
- LIV - Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben (Rix 2001).
- LSP - Latin State Papers (Scotland).
- LN(N) - Location Name(s).
- MB - Middle Breton.
- MBS - Magnus Barefoot's Saga (Heimskringla).
- MIr. - Middle Irish.
- MM - Martin Martin (1698).
- ModB - Modern Breton.
- ModW - Modern Welsh.
- MW - Middle Welsh.
- MWIS - Monro's Western Isles of Scotland (1549 (Ms. 1661) (Munro 1961)).
- MxB - Manx Bull of 1231 (c.1340-1505). For list of LNN see Megaw (1978: 313-314).
- MxG. - Manx Gaelic.
- NBr. - North British.
- NH - *Naturalis Historia* (Pliny the Younger 23-79 AD).
- NTS - Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap.
- OCS - Old Church Slavonic.
- OE - Old English.
- OInd. - Old Indian.



- OIr. - Old Irish.  
ON - Old Norse.  
OS - Orel & Stolbova (1994).  
OT - Oral Tradition.  
PBr. - Proto-British.  
PCelt. - Proto-Celtic.  
PIE - Proto-Indo-European.  
PN(N) - Personal Name(s).  
PNPG/CE - Place-Names in Ptolemy's *Geographia* - Celtic Elements (Isaac 2004).  
PNRB - Place-Names of Roman Britain (Rivet & Smith 1979).  
poln. - polnisch.  
PPR - Poem in praise of Ragnall (King of Man) (c.1200) (Ó Cuív 1957).  
PSem. - Proto-Semitic.  
Ptol. - Ptolemy (Stückelberger & Grasshoff 2006).  
RD - Reginald of Durham (c.1173).  
RMS - Registrum Magni Sigilli.  
SAG - Studies in Argyllshire Gaelic (Holmer 1938).  
ScG. - Scottish Gaelic.  
Sem. - Semitic.  
slav. - slavisch.  
St. Kilda - The Name St. Kilda (Taylor 1969).  
TFrag. - Three Fragments (Annals of Ireland).  
W - Welsh.  
WCh. - West Chad.  
wruss. - westrussisch.

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