

# The First Germanic Origin of the English Language

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## *The indigenist approach*

In the past few years, a group of researchers (myself included) from different specialities and nationalities, have been refuting the traditional version of the origins of the Indo-European languages, as well as its revision of Neolithic tendency made by Sir Colin Renfrew [specially 1990, 1999].

We agree – and this assertion could have further consequences – on carrying back in time the dates, not only of the Indo-European linguistic conglomerate, but also those of the emergence of its different groups. In the same way, we have been rejecting as an explanation of the spreading of the Indo-European languages the two competing linguistic theories, invasion or supremacy inclined, not only the ones referring to war, which are totally phantasmagoric in their empirical manifestations, but also the ones referring to peace.

We suggested, instead, an indigenist background within a more general frame which has been named *Teoria della Continuità* by the no doubt most manifest representative of this proposal Mario Alinei [1996, 2000], probably in agreement with the similar Uralic theory (in Finnish *jatkuvaisuusteoria*) which prevails at the moment, and antedates the formation of this linguistic conglomerate to the Paleolithic period. These ideas had very early precursors such as Kühn [1932]. Along with the most modern glottologists and Alinei, we would like to mention Costa [1998, 2001] and Cavazza [2001].

On the other hand, the emergent interdisciplinary consensus is playing a very important role in the consolidation of these new postulates. This consensus is represented by archaeologists such as Poghirc [1992], climatologists such as Adams [1999 with Otte], historians such as Häusler [1996, 1998], or prehistorians such as Otte [1997, 1998, 1999 with Adams, 2000]. Given the convergence of their data, we should also add some genetists such as Richards [2000], Semino [2000] and their research teams, as well as Sykes [2001], whose studies support the Palaeolithic origin of the genes of most Europeans. Even though these findings are not decisive or direct proof that the Indo-European conglomerate should also be dated to that period, they, for obvious reasons, represent a major obstacle to any theory claiming a later dating.



At the same time, the new proposals affect the Germanic languages in different and varied ways. In this paper we will be dealing with the question of the first Germanic origin of the English language, given its relevance and greater separation from the traditional theories. Alinei's exposition [especially 2000: 301-463] is by far the most elaborated in this respect.

According to the traditional theory, no Germanic language was spoken – at least in a collective way – in the British Isles before the arrival of the Germanic peoples, Angles, Saxons and Jutes from northern Germany. This event is officially or in a symbolic way dated in the year 449 B.C based on a passage (1.15) from *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* by Bede completed in 731. The new proposals would include, instead, the presence of germanophones in old Britannia at a much earlier period. This is based on two *autochthonic* options:

In the Mesolithic period, within the Maglemose culture, in the transcendental ecoclimatic context of deglaciation, and

In the Neolithic period, within the culture of Linear Pottery (in German *Linienbandkeramik*), of Balcan origin, which, from the 5th millennium onwards, spread along the Danube up to central Europe and on to peripheral areas including, possibly, old Britannia.

### *The Mesolithic Setting*

Given its greater intrinsic relevance and its greater explanatory potential, we will focus on the analysis of the Mesolithic proposal, since the Neolithic one is proven by the simple but convincing fact that «Vi sono sviluppi semantici tipicamente neolitici, che l'Inglese non condivide con alcun'altra lingua germanica. Questi sembrerebbero dimostrare che il Neolitico di una parte dell'isola fu di lingua germanica», thus Alinei [2000: 401], who uses the English words *lady* and *lord* as examples. These Neolithic Germans would have introduced, within the Linear Pottery culture, the Germanic agricultural lexicon of the modern English language: *cow, goat, hoe, horse, ox, pot, rye, sheep, swine, wheat...* [Alinei 2000: 400].

It is obvious that the retrodating supported by the new proposals, means not only a change in figures but, above all, a radical change in contents. As it is, on discarding the traditional theories, we move away from the Bronze Age societies, which are at the threshold of History – in short, societies essentially like the modern one, only not as technologically complex. From these Bronze Age societies we move back to others which are completely different, both in a cultural and in an ideological way. We move from old societies back to primitive collectivities; from kings, priests and merchants to hunters and gatherers, and, needless to say, back to a very different ecosystem. This last aspect is crucial for this subject, since the territory that we are dealing with here was precisely one of the most affected by the brusque climatic and ecological changes which set an end to the Palaeolithic period, that is, the end of the Ice Age.



As is currently believed, during that period most of the modern British Isles was uninhabitable since the northern part of Europe was covered by a vast layer of ice. At the same time, the inhabitable area of the territory was united with the Continent by an enormous terrestrial bridge because the subsidence of the water level in the Ice Age – about a hundred metres below the present level – left the North Sea's vast continental platform uncovered. The temperature rise gave way to the melting of the ice caps and started the deglaciation process. According to experts, this process lasted longer than a millennium and caused the water level to rise all over the planet an average of a hundred metres. The melting process led to the flooding of numerous territories and changed, literally, the face of the Earth.

As a consequence of all this, the old continental *bridge* that joined the British territory to northwest Germany, disappeared under the water. Ireland became an island probably towards the 7th millennium B.C. *Only* half a century later, at around 6500, the North Sea's continental platform must have been completely submerged. For a long period of time, from the onset of the warm climate – around 8,000 B.C. – up until 5,800, the later-to-be islands of Ireland and Great Britain remained united by one or more continental bridges.

It was, therefore, a later period than the first vestiges of human settlement in Ireland, which date from the 9th millennium [Alinei 2000: 517]. Undoubtedly, the flooding of such a vast and rich territory led to a migratory move of all the communities to safe land, which was accessible and nearby. Since the process was gradual, these people had sufficient time to ensure their survival. Moreover, they were good sailors as proven by the remains of wooden oars found in the Mesolithic English archaeological site at Star Carr (Yorkshire).

This process was surely of great human and economic relevance because the submerged area, given its rich resources, had been inhabited by a population which was dense for that time and for Northwest Europe [Jacobi 1973: 245], since that extensive land interrupted «by the estuaries and flood-plains of the Rhine, Meuse, Weser, Elbe, Thames and Lyn Rivers and their tributaries [...] have provided a concentration of food resources unparalleled elsewhere in Northern Europe either at this time or subsequently» [Jacobi 1973: 245].

Another great people affected by the floodings, probably on a larger scale, were the Celts. We have previously argued that concerning mythological tales about quasi-worldwide spectacular floodings – the most prominent example of which would be The Deluge – the oldest stratum must correspond to the deluges and floodings contemporary to the deglaciation. Such an important occurrence could not be absent from Celtic mythology, especially, as we argued, in the tales regarding submerged cities. These tales are abundant all over the Celtic culture. Thus, for example, in Galicia there are numerous localities which, in the traditional lore, were flooded and submerged, but whose names still remain: *Malverde, Petronia, Reirís, Teixidelo, Traba...* [Cuba et al. 2000 ss. vv.].



Even though there have recently been forced explanations of the Celtic topic – such as «un retorno brusco del clima húmedo y frío en la Europa central y septentrional» at around 530 B.C. [Sopeña 1995: 88] – it is clear that the extent and depth of the subject of the submerged city (*city*, evidently, in a modernization of an older stratum of the myth) which also occurs in more meridional areas of Europe, is too widely spread all over the Celtic world to be explainable by such punctual events from the Iron Age. As is known, the fear of drowning in an overflowed sea has been, along with that of dying crushed by collapsing skies a constant in Celtic folklore and mythology at least since the Classical period.

As we move from the probable myth to the certain reality, the hypothesis, not only simpler but also the most reasonable given its agreement with the data, is that of a common culture in a territory economically and ecologically common and well communicated. Concerning the most part of that territory, we must do without, at least at present, the archaeological evidence whose proofs lie at a hundred metres below sea level. However, the existence of sufficient traces of a common culture on the edge of the flooded territory, make it clear that the best hypothesis is that of a same culture – Maglemose – for that whole territory, where we would find the same type of people and the same type of languages.

The culture of the *Forest People* or *Forest Folk*, as has been named by some authors, referred to inhabitants of coasts, lake shores and river banks. That explains why these days it is better known as the *Maglemose Culture*. This name has its origin in a Dannish word meaning ‘big lake’ from the archaeological site found in the peatbog of Maglemose, near Mullerup, on the west coast of the island of Seeland (or Sjaelland), which has been studied since the beginning of the 20th century.

This culture would make up a cultural compound, which spread from (depending on the dates) the Baltic sea-lake-sea to modern England through the continental platform of the North Sea between 8000 and 5600 B.C. approximately. Its irradiation centre was probably located in the most southern part of the Scandinavian area [Alinei 2000: 305f]. The Maglemose Culture presents itself as a phase in the continuity and transition between the Palaeolithic – since this period’s bone and lithic industries refer us to the Maglemose world – and the Neolithic, which is characterized, among other things, by the use of hooks made of bone and the presence of macrolithic instruments for the elaboration of timber. This – let it be noted – would harmonize the use, both in Germanic and in Celtic of the Indo-European root *\*uaid[u]-* ‘divide’ for ‘forest’ (Anglo-Saxon *widu*, Old Icelandic *viður*, Norwegian *vid*, Swedish *ved...*), since this could imply according to Alinei [2000: 439], «una considerazione del bosco come ‘confine’ [...] e quindi una coscienza oramai netta della diversa funzione economica dei territori» (see Alinei 2000: 440-3 for more examples related to the forest and the work on wood). Therefore, it can be conjectured, with a high degree of credibility, that a great part of the Maglemose Culture disappeared under the water, especially, if, as done by experts, we as-



sign to the Maglemose man the archaeological culture of Broxhourne in England [Alinei 2000: 376], which would establish the western end of that culture.

In any case, always within the paradigm of Palaeolithic continuity and based on the most elemental and reasonable hypothesis, the human group that roamed the area and then moved away in order to survive the floodings would belong linguistically to the same group as the Frisian languages, the nearest to this area, there not being any reason «per escludere che vi fossero Germani in Inghilterra ancora prima che questa diventasse un'isola, e che quindi Angli, Sassoni e Juti, ed altri Germani migrati nell'isola in epoca protostorica e storica, avessero potuto trovarvi genti loro affini» [Alinei 2000: 376], no reason to exclude therefore that «tutte le ondate di Germani che fossero arrivate in Inghilterra orientale, a partire dalla cultura neolitica [...] fino agli Angli, ai Sassoni e agli Juti storici avrebbero quindi trovato un ambiente linguisticamente affine» [Alinei 2000: 400]. Once we accept the indigenist approach it would almost become «inconcepibile pensare che all'epoca della sommersione del ponte continentale fra Inghilterra e Danimarca tutti i Celti eventualmente presenti nell'area si fossero rifugiati in Inghilterra e tutti i Germani sul continente» [Alinei 2000: 399].

Moreover, as is the case of the Celtic language, such an early appearance of the Germanic linguistic group already singularized within the Indo-European linguistic conglomerate, must not surprise us if we bear in mind the peripheral position of this group in Europe, its sure contact with non Indo-European (mainly Uralic elements; Gendreau 2001), and its greater physical isolation in the Palaeolithic period from the big cluster of Indo-European languages of Eastern Europe. This set of circumstances would have hindered the perdurance of linguistic convergence processes and favoured, therefore, the appearance of divergences.

### *Why Palaeolithic. The testimony of the Germanic languages*

Both the existence of the Indo-European linguistic compound in the Palaeolithic period and the appearance of some individualized groups, at least in the Neolithic period, would be provable by an enormous amount of pluridisciplinary data. It will suffice to refer only to those linguistic and Germanic data which can simultaneously add more information to the main subject with which we are dealing here. From among the numerous data presented by Alinei, we have selected only a few which we regard as the most illustrative.

Very much in agreement with the general setting of the flooding would be the development of a word for 'island', sometimes 'fluvial island' (Faroese *hólmur*, dialectal English *holm*, Old Icelandic *holmi*, Swedish *holme*...) from the Indo-European root for 'height' (Gothic *hallus* 'rock', English *hill*, Latin *celsus* 'raised' or *collis* 'hill', Lithuanian *kalnas* 'hill - mount' or *keliu* 'I raise'...),



which, as noted by Alinei [2000: 446], «si lascia spiegare bene solo nello scenario della deglaciazione».

In that same vein, Alinei [2000: 322] also points out that with regard to northern Scandinavia the Theory of Continuity claims that «i Maglemosiani che dopo la deglaciazione penetrarono nella penisola scandinava [...] avendo già a loro disposizione il termine corrispondente al ted. *Furt* e all'ingl. *ford* 'guado - passaggio', e scoprendo il paesaggio tipico della Scandinavia settentrionale, innovarono portandolo al significato attuale di *fjord* 'fiordo'».

This would be the case of Faroese *fjørður*, Old Icelandic *fiörðr*, Norwegian *fjord* or Swedish *fjärd*, all of them meaning 'ford', while besides the Gothic *furt* 'ford', an older meaning close to that of 'ford', would be supported by the correspondences in Avestan *pərətuš* 'ford - passage - pass', Gaulish *ritu-* 'ford', or Latin *porta* 'door - passage - pass - defile', *portus* 'harbour', all of them very likely deriving from the same Indo-European root. Given all this, rather than the meaning of 'ford', for which an Indo-European root *\*pant-* would provide a better adjustment (Armenian *hun* 'ford', Greek *πόρτος* 'sea', Latin *pont-* 'bridge - gangway', Serbo-Croatian *put* 'road - travel', Vedic *pānthā-* 'road'...), that root must have contained originally, or at least previously, the meaning of the place through which the ford reaches the land, that is, 'cove' [Alinei 1996: 581] or 'wharf - harbour'.

On the other hand, Germanic forms such as German *See* (masc.] 'sea' and (fem.] 'lake', Danish *sø* 'lake', Gothic *saius* 'lake - inland sea - lake', Dutch *zee* 'sea', English *sea*, Old Icelandic *sjör* 'sea' or Swedish *sjö* 'lake' have already been explained by Pokorny [1959/69: I 877] as derivations, seemingly adjectival of an Indo-European root *\*sāi-* 'pain', that is, formations totally comparable to the Latin *saeuus* 'fierce - wild - terrible'. In a Neolithic frame, this interpretation is absurd, since, what could be 'terrible' about lakes and seas in a culture that knew so well how to make the most of the hydric resources?

But again Alinei [2000: 430] warns that Pokorny's theory «acquisterebbe senso se venisse collegata all'epoca della sommersione di intere regioni settentrionali per effetto della deglaciazione. Inoltre, essa si lascia avvicinare all'analoga innovazione lessicale del Goidelico per il nome del mare, la cui motivazione è anche 'rabbia'». In effect, the Celtic testimony – Celtic precisely – of Scottish Gaelic *fairge* 'see', Old Irish *fairge*, *foirce* 'ocean - see', Irish *fairge*, especially – *nota bene* – 'tempestuous sea - swell', Manx *faarkei* 'sea', letting itself be related to Old Irish *ferg* 'rage', provides the desirable typological parallel which makes, at least in theory, the proposal of that *wild* etymology for the Germans' sea admissible.

Also in agreement with the setting of the flooding would be the use of the Indo-European root for 'defence - defend' *\*uar-* in its meaning of 'dyke', for example Middle Old German *werder* 'land protected by dykes', Anglo-Saxon *wer* 'palisade or stockade for fishing - dyke', Old Icelandic *ver* 'stockade or palisade for fishing', Icelandic *vör* 'high shore made of stone or sand', Longobardian *wōra* 'dyke'... [Alinei 1996: 595, 2000: 430].

In strong support of the Palaeolithic theory, we find the Germanic etymon



for the more common word 'house'. As Alinei [2000: 432] points out: «La sua etimologia mostra chiaramente che in origine si trattava di una tenda di pelle». Words such as Old High German *hus*, Danish *hus*, Old Frisian *hus*, English *house*, Old Icelandic *hús*, Faroese *hús* or Swedish *hus*, which mean 'house - dwelling' can be related to the same root as we also find in Greek *κῦτος* 'skin', Latin *cutis* 'skin - screen - hide', Lithuanian *kiautas* 'wrapping', Old Prussian *keuto* 'skin', that is, the same root as we find in Old High German *hūd* 'skin', Anglo-Saxon *hýd* 'skin', Faroese *húð* 'bovine hide', Old Frisian *hēd* 'skin', Icelandic *húð* 'bovine hide' or Old Saxon *hūd* 'skin'.

*Mutatis mutandis* the same could be said about the Germanic word for 'bed'. In Alinei's words [2000: 432]: «Il nome del 'letto' nelle lingue germaniche si origina dalla radice PIE per 'scavare', e dov'è indicare quindi un giaciglio scavato nella terra, probabilmente per proteggersi dal freddo, oppure un 'giaciglio di animale'». Thus, German *Bett* 'bed', Anglo-Saxon *bedd* 'bed', Danish *bed* 'bed', Faroese *beð* 'cover', Old Frisian *bed* 'bed', Gothic *badi* 'bed', English *bed*, Old Icelandic *beðr* 'cushion - bed', Icelandic *beður* 'bed', Norwegian *bed* 'bed' or Swedish *bädd* 'bed' must contain the same root found for example in Welsh *bedd* 'grave', Latin *fodere* 'to dig', Latvian *bedre* 'grave - pit' or Lithuanian *badyti* 'to pick - to butt'.

As a last example, we would like to mention the fact that, in the bosom of a culture where hunting and gathering are common activities, it is likewise not surprising to find the possible specialization of an Indo-European root *\*saku-*, probably documented as well in many other linguistic groups and meaning generically 'to follow - to track' ('I follow' Greek *ἐποικα*, Irish *sechur*, Latin *sequor*, Lithuanian *seku*...) in its sense of 'scour - see', as we find it in Germanic, German *sehen*, Gothic *saihan*, Dutch *zien*, English *see*, Icelandic *sjá* or Swedish *se* [Alinei 2000: 438].

### *And then, they call the Continentals*

The validity of an explanatory paradigm manifests itself by the amount of problems that it can solve, by the amount of explanations that it can face from a better adjustment to the data. Let us see if this is the case, and, if it is, how it measures up to the traditional proposal, which – it should be remembered – postpones to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the appearance on British soil of that Germanic language whose first flow made the Anglo-Saxon language emerge and later, with all its tributaries, the modern English language.

First of all, for many, the Frisian languages historically constituted an independent group within the western Germanic sub-group [Krahe 1994: 39], which, based on Tacitus' tripartition (*Germ.* 2: *Ingaevones*), some call *Ing[a]evonic*. However, a very special link between Frisian and Anglosaxon has always been recognized. It is said that the English language «se relaciona muy estrechamente con el frisón y el holandés» [Fernández 1993: 21]. But that, al-



so in Krahe's words [1994: 40], «estrecha relación» between both linguistic entities must be very old because the phenomena where it appears date back to very early times, there not being, on the other hand, ulterior testimonies of a greater or special link between these two languages. As was to be expected, the Frisian language grew both lexically and structurally closer to the Dutch languages, its main neighbours historically [Hoekstra - Tiersma 2002: 528].

Nevertheless, we can still find certain features in the Frisian language which would prove the old special link to the English language: fronting in [æ] of an old West Germanic [a] [Van Kemenade 2002: 115], palatalizations (*tsiis* - *cheese*, cf. German *Käse*; Dutch *kaas*; *dei* - *day*, cf. German *Tag*, Dutch *dag*), loss of /n/ before voiceless fricatives (*ús* - *us*, cf. German *uns*, Dutch *ons*), fronting of back vowels (*swiet* - *sweet*, cf. German *süß*, Dutch *zoet*) besides lexical parallels such as *boai* - *boy* or *kaai* - *key* [Hoekstra & Tiersma 2002: 528]. The Frisians' awareness of this close relationship can be found in sayings such as *Bûter, brea, en griene tsiis is goed engelsk en goed frysk*, which is very similar in English: *Butter, bread, and green cheese is good English and good Frish* (taken from Bernárdez 2001: 63).

In the traditional version, that 'close relationship' between Frisian and English took place at a later date and was explained through somewhat phantasmagoric special contacts, thus, for example: «nel corso del V sec. d.C., installatisi Angli e Sassoni nelle loro sedi insulari, andò lentamente elaborandosi per intesi contatti commerciali e culturali una specie di lega linguistica lungo le rive del Mare del Nord, della quale fecero parte le fasi primitive dell'anglosassone e del frisone (dove anche il nome di 'angolo-frisone' dato a questo raggruppamento), dell'antico sassone e, in misura molto minore, del nordico (occidentale), non però del tedesco» [Ramat 1993: 414].

Moreover it is also known that the oldest layers of copies in Old English contain lexical elements from the Celtic languages and the Latin [Van Kemenade 2002: 140]. A contact between these two languages is certainly more probable in old Britannia, so celticized and romanized, than on the northern coast of old Germania. Obviously, the eventual certain detection of Old Latin copies in English, which were absent from the continental Germanic languages, reinforced this hypothesis.

In any case, it must be acknowledged that direct copies from the Latin are, in theory possible in instances such as *castrum* 'military camp'. This copy is still frequently found in the English toponymy (*Colchester*, *Chi-chester*, *Doncaster*, *Dorchester*, *Chester*, *Chester-field*, *Glou-cester*, *Lan-caster*, *Lei-cester*, *Man-chester*, *Ro-chester*, *Win-chester*, *Wor-cester*...), while the Celtic copies differ considerably in their adaptation (Irish *cathir*, Welsh *caer*) or derive from the diminutive *castellum* (Irish *caisel* and *castel*, Brittonic *castell*), in the same way as the remainder of the Germanic languages usually do. A similar case could be that of the English toponyms containing *-wich* or *-wick* (*Ber-wick*, *Gat-wick*, *Green-wich*, *Har-wich*, *Ips-wich*, *Nor-wich*, *War-wich*, *War-wick*...), that come, in all probability, from Latin *uīcus* 'district - hamlet - village'.

Certainly, the Latin term was also copied by the Celtic linguistic group



and other Germanic languages, but, as is the case in *castrum*, with the particularity that neither in the celtophonic area (Welsh *gwig*, Irish *fich*) nor in continental German (Old High German *wih*, Dutch *wik*) does this term appear as frequently or makes up as dense a toponymic network as in German-British soil<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the simplest hypothesis is to conclude that both *castrum* and *uicum* were adopted by a Germanic language already on British soil and in a direct way, that is, neither in the distant and little romanized forests of Saxony nor through a Celtic language.

On the other hand, the variety we see in the adaptation reflects a possible dialectization of the forms (*-caster*, *-cester*, *-chester* and *-wich* or *-wick*) and points, no doubt, to a considerable antiquity and a direct copy from Latin and not necessarily through a Celtic language. The persistent presence of the copied noun as the second member of a compound, which is a very Germanic trait, should also be noted. Likewise, with regard to semantics, the cardinal reference in the type *Norwich* responds to a more Germanic model (*Essex*, *Middlesex*, *Norfolk*, *Northampton*, *Suffolk*, *Sussex*, *Wessex*...) than Celtic.

The certain epigraphic documentation of Celtic forms in Roman times (*bracis*, *ceruesa*; Schmidt 2002: 76) as opposed to the apparent absence of Germanic forms on British territory, does not necessarily constitute as *argumento e silentio* a proof of the inexistence of spoken Germanic languages in an earlier period than the 5th century A.D. It is well known today that in ancient times, writing was very often restricted to the elite class of the population, and still not in every language. According to Costa [1998: 272]: «Anche nel mondo germanico sono numerose le testimonianze che dimostrano come la scrittura fosse riservata agli iniziati e ritenuta strumento perfido e pericoloso». Taking that argument to the extreme, would imply denying the existence of Germanic languages in the western part of the Continent basically throughout the whole of the first millennium B.C.

The hypothesis of a Maglemosian origin applied to the Anglogerman *continuum* from which the English language would later emerge, is consistent with the existence of a Germanic toponymy in eastern England, especially in the southern and middle areas. This is in clear contrast with the rest of the island [Alinei 2000: 399], which was also characterized by the presence of monuments (barrows or mounds of earth, the Megalithic henges) different from the continental buildings [Alinei 2000: 405]. Another characteristic of eastern England is the absence of hillforts or defensive settlements on hills and the presence of open hamlets with evidence of the practice of agriculture, a notable contrast which, as Alinei [2000: 411] points out: «sarebbe difficilmente spiegabile se tutta l'isola fosse stata celtica».

Let us note that the existence of these small forts and scaffoldings would respond to defensive rather than aggressive needs, as is habitual in similar historic cases, that is, it would be in agreement with that «predominio germanico

<sup>1</sup> We thank and acknowledge Dr. Miguel Fuster Márquez from the University of Valencia for this view.



sui Celti, nel Neolitico, e poi un rovesciamento della loro relazione a partire dall'età dei Metalli» [Alinei 2000: 411]. There are numerous arguments in favour of this hypothesis. It is once again the prejudices of the traditional Indo-European Linguistics that impose certain facts like, for example, when they state that small forts whose names contain the Celtic ending *-briga* in a great part of the Hispanic peninsular territory, must be necessarily taken as examples of Celtic *conquistadores* instead of autochthonous communities who build to defend themselves. Supporting the theory of the defensive *-briga*, as opposed to that of aggressive invaders Untermann [2001: 196] correctly produces the testimony of the *oppida* – Alesia! – in Caesar's Gaul. More examples can be found in the numerous castles built all over Spain by the Christians in the Middle Ages as a defence from the invading Muslim hordes. In short, no one would ever think of the fortress of Montségur as responding to an invading strategy of the Cathars...

Concerning its eventual germanophony, another victim of the prejudices of the traditional Indo-European theories is the old Belgian people. It is true that initially Caesar (*Gall.* 1,1) makes the Belgians – etimologically and literally – the enemies of the Germans. It is true that many of their ethnonyms show a very Celtic aspect in general (*Ambiani, Bellouaci, Caleti, Menapii, Morini, Viromandui...*), but it is also true

that ethnonyms are very frequently given by neighbouring peoples,

that the Romans gained access to knowledge of the Belgian people through the Gauls, which may have led to an ethnonymic distortion of Celtic inclination,

that the Celts' hegemony, or, more specifically that of the Gauls in the previous period led to a celticization of linguistic and cultural aspects of the until recently subdued Germans, their neighbours, in a way that there is no doubt about a «sovrapporsi di un forte superstrato celtico su un territorio germanico» [Alinei 2000: 369],

that, even so, ethnonyms potentially Germanic such as *Eburones* (cf. Old High German *eburu* 'wild boar'; also *Neruii, Suessiones...*), are not missing among the historic Belgians, that specifically the divine Caesar (*Gall.* 1,1) declares that the tongue of the Belgians is different from the tongue of the Gauls,

that specifically later Caesar (*Gall.* 2,4) states that the Belgian tribes of the *Caemani* (or *Paemani*), *Caerosi*, *Condrusi* and *Eburones* are given the same name of *Germani* (*uno nomine Germani appellantur*); that, always according to Caesar, both the *Segni* and the *Condrusi* (*Gall.* 6,32: *ex gente et numero Germanorum*; see 5,28) would likewise be Germans along with most of the Belgians who, after having crossed the river Rhine in a very old period, settled in that territory and displaced the Gauls (*Gall.* 2,4: *plerosque Belgas esse ortos a Germanis*),

that, according to Strabo (4,194) and Tacitus (*Germ.* 28), also among the Belgians, the *Neruii* were a Germanic people.

Moreover, Caesar (*Gall.* 5,12) introduces the *Belgae* coming from *Belgio*



(*ex Belgio transierunt*) settling in Britannia and also writes that they inhabit the coasts, live like farmers and keep the names of their places of origin for the new settlements. The problem is that, according to some authors [Alinei 2000: 370f with references], from other references in Caesar (*Gall.* 5,24 and 25), it could be established that *Belgio* was only a part of the territory of the Belgians, where the Gaulish language, that is, Celtic was spoken.

In any case and aside from the case of the *Belgae*, there is clear evidence of the presence of true Germans in Great Britain in times, at least, half a millennium previous to the *aduentus Saxonum*. Thus Tacitus (*Agr.* 28) tells us of beligerant troops of *Vsipi* recruited in Germania (*cohors Vsiporum per Germanias conscripta*).

The big problem of the *aduentus Saxonum* or arrival of the Saxons and other Germanic peoples from the Continent at the end of the Antiquity, could be much more easily explained by the hypothesis of the assistance among relatives, which was a very common phenomenon throughout European history. It suffices to read *De bello Gallico* by Iulius Caesar (for instance 4,22), to realize that, in the ancient world, military assistance used to take place among peoples who were related mainly linguistically and religiously. The classical exposition contained in two passages from venerable Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (1,15 y 5,23) does not explain the reason for a call for help made by an insular Celt, some Vortigern – by name or, as Chadwick [1962] suggested, by title – to Germanic people from the Continent. Why precisely them? Obviously, the hypothesis that Germans both by culture and tongue should turn to other Germans for help is much more reasonable. Thus the arrival of new contingents of germanophones in British soil, might have contributed, during a well known process, to the appearance of a *koiné* among relatives.

In general, besides, there exists, always for the old sources, the possibility of using in a metonymical way names such as *Britanni* for all the inhabitants of Old Britannia in a similar way as the term *Iberians*, for instance, was used for the inhabitants of the Old Iberian Peninsula, whether they were, strictly speaking, Iberians or not (see Domínguez 1983).

This comparison could be specially suitable since, like the Iberians in Hispania, the Celts in Britannia were at that time the hegemonic class both culturally and economically, and they, no doubt, eclipsed the other possible [Germanic] populations. Even so, it must also be noted that the formant *-on-* from the Latin texts for some British ethnonyms as in *Caledonii*, *Dicalydones* (or *Dicalidones*) and *Verturiones* (or *Vecturiones*) has numerous parallels among the Germanic ethnonyms: *Auiones* (Tac. *Germ.* 40), *Herminones* (Tac. *Germ.* 2), *Ingaeuones* (Tac. *Germ.* 2), *Istaeuones* (Tac. *Germ.* 2), *Nuitones* (Tac. *Germ.* 40), *Saxones* (Ptol. 2,11), *Vangiones* (Tac. *Germ.* 28)...

Finally, the genetic testimony points to substantial differences between the eastern and western populations of Great Britain. For Tacitus (*Agr.* 11), the fair hair and big physique of the inhabitants of Caledonia (more or less modern Scotland of linguistic celticization of Irish origin) would prove their Ger-



manic origin (*Germanicam originem adseuerant*), and the tanned aspect and curlier hair of the *Silures* (more or less in the south of modern Wales) would indicate an Iberian ancestry (*Hiberos ueteres traiecisse*), besides the similarities between the southern British people and the Gauls (*proximi Gallis et similes sunt*) and between their languages (*sermo haud multum diversus*). This genetic testimony was made popular by T.V. documentaries like the British *The Celts*, which had Bryan Sykes among its researchers. The western populations would have ties with France and Spain, and the eastern populations with the continental coast of the North Sea.

All of this could be easily explained by the postulates expounded above, but, on the contrary, could hardly be explained if the first contingents of Germans had waited until the 5th century A.D. to step on British soil and spread their genes in such a way that in a millennium and a half these genes surpassed the proportion of genes which, according to the traditional theories, belonged to the only autochthonous populations that had been there since the end of the Upper Palaeolithic.

Subsequent research will be able to determine whether the history of the Germanic languages in England and, therefore, the history of the English language, starts at the Metal Age or Neolithic or if it can even go back to the Mesolithic Period. In any case, we could conclude that the non existence of Germanic languages on British soil before the medieval journey of the Saxons is highly unlikely.

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