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Gilles Boucherit

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FER BENN AND THE DEER CULT IN *BUILE SUIBHNE*

INTRODUCTION

In his introduction to the 1996 reprint of the middle-Irish romance *Buile Suibhne*, Nagy writes that Chadwick is the first to "conjure the notion of Suibne as shaman, of the *geilt* as both possessed by and possessor of supernatural inspiration and power, a practitioner of 'archaic techniques of ecstasy', to use Mircea Eliade's phrase, comparable to similar practitioners both in and well beyond the Celtic world¹."

When examining her 1942 article *Geilt*², nowhere have we found the word shaman³. It is true, however, that in her 1952 book *Poetry and prophecy*, Nora Chadwick studies different traditions throughout the world related to vision, but more globally, the origin of "the inspiration of the seer" which can be "derived from a variety of sources⁴," for instance "inspiration received in a vision during a battle" as in Irish and Welsh traditions. But, as Nagy says, she does not confine herself to the Celtic world, she also explores "the most interesting figure in Norse mantic tradition of the God Othin, whose most obvious affinities are with the Siberian shamans whom he resembles in a remarkable degree⁵". This means that shamanistic and *Geilt* traditions are parallel or comparable to Siberian, Turkish, or even Polynesian ones for instance. It would be more relevant to speak of all these people in their different traditions in terms of Seers, and Nora Chadwick wonders whether these traditions were ever derived from a single one :

"It is tempting to suppose that they may have formed a link in early times between the ancient mantic systems of the southern portion of Eurasia, as the cult of Othin and other features of Norse religion bear witness to an ancient link between Teutonic and Celtic manticism on the one hand and the shamanism of northern Asia on the other⁶."

One will have to wait for Brigit Beneš' 1961 article 'Spuren von Schamanismus in der Sage "Buile Suibhne"', to realise that in spite of everything, we cannot evidence the equation of a *geilt* with a shaman⁷. However, Nagy writes in his 1982 article "The wisdom of the *geilt*" that "the *sacerdos* Rónán creates a shaman out of the king Suibne, who is ultimately fostered and guided by another *sacerdos* Moling, a kind of shaman himself⁸". Even if this is conceivable theoretically since shamanism is not a very old phenomenon, it is utterly out of the question on the synchronical level. The common origin which Nora Chadwick is rightfully looking for, epitomized in her blanket word 'Seer', a word which would advantageously replace Mircea Eliade's encroaching 'shaman'⁹, is to be sought obviously on the diachronical level.

¹ O'KEEFFE, J.G. *Buile Suibhne* (The frenzy of Suibhne) being the adventures of Suibhne Geilt, a middle-Irish romance; with a new introduction (1996) by Joseph Falaky Nagy. London: *Irish Texts Society*, 1913/1996. p. 6

² CHADWICK, Nora. *Geilt*, in *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, vol. V, part II. Oxford: B.H. Blackwell, 1942.

³ See also Alexandra BERGHOLM : Academic and neo-pagan interpretations of shamanism in *Buile Suibhne*: a comparative approach, in *Studia Celtica Fennica II*, 2005, pp. 37-38 [scf2bergholm.pdf] and "The saintly madman : a study of the scholarly reception history of *Buile Suibhne*," 2009-11-14, pp. 103-104 [thesaint.pdf]

⁴ CHADWICK, N. Kershaw. *Poetry & prophecy*. Cambridge, 1952, p. 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ BENEŠ, Brigit. Spuren von Schamanismus in der Sage "Buile Suibhne", in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, Band 28 Heft 3/4, 1961: "Es sei gleich vorweggenommen, daß nicht exakt bewiesen werden kann, daß ein *geilt* ein wirklicher Schamane ist [...]," p. 309.

⁸ NAGY, J.F. The wisdom of the *geilt*, in *ÉIGSE*, vol. 19, 1982, p. 56.

⁹ "Le chamanisme" has been published in 1951.

THE SIBERIAN TRAIL

But in order to make our point, we have to let aside the fictitious character Suibne the geilt, and focus our attention on Fer Benn who speaks to the mother of a herd of deer, which he seems to be the guardian of when he says : "Cidh iomdha dom dhamraidh-si / Though many are my stags¹⁰", and later on :

"A mathair na groidhi-si / rolíatha do lenn, / ni fhuil damh at dheagaidh-si / gan dá fhichead benn"

"O mother of this herd, / thy coat has become grey, / there is no stag after thee / without two score antler-points"¹¹.

This situation is strikingly similar to the Siberian one, in Anisimov's 1959 article 'Cosmological concepts of the people of the north' where "the mistress of the earth has a husband—the nameless shepherd of her herd. Together with assistants, likewise nameless shepherds, he tends countless droves of all sorts of animals which the mistress of the earth has at her disposal¹²". Contrary to Siberia, Fer Benn is no husband since he speaks to a mother, and his name means "man of the peaks", that is peaks of mountains as well as peaks or tops of antler-points, as this play on words will show :

"síu nobheinn for udmhaille / ag siredh na mbenn".

"before I restlessly / wandered over the mountain-peaks¹³".

maith an t-ionadh foradhán (?) / I mullach do bhenn.

"pleasant is the place for seats / on the top of thy antler-points¹⁴".

Among the Tungus (Evenks) of Siberia, this mistress of the earth is one of the two clan's female spirits who are supposed to be living under the roots of the sacred clan tree¹⁵, namely the mistress-mother of the clan, the so-called *bugady enintyn*¹⁶, and the mistress of the clan lands, the so-called *dunne mushunin (musunin)*. The mistress of the clan lands or of the earth, was thought to be anthropomorphic by the Evenks, while the mythical mother of people and animals¹⁷, was conceived in one and the same zoomorphic image of an elk cow or the doe of a wild deer. But as a consequence of the decline of the matrilineal clan structure, the image of the zoomorphic clan mother is transformed by degrees into that of a mistress, loosing thereby its former function of motherhood¹⁸, while her zoomorphic features are gradually displaced by anthropomorphic ones.

Fer Benn is very like one of the Evenk's spirit-ancestors who dwell in the nether world and are linked with the image of the clan tree or cosmic tree: "they sit on its branches, guarding the life and well-being of the clan." This is exactly what Fer Benn does actually, guarding the

¹⁰ O'KEEFFE, p. 79.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² ANISIMOV, A.F. Cosmological concepts of the people of the North, in *Studies in Siberian shamanism*, Ed. by Henry N. Michael . Toronto, 1963, p. 176.

¹³ O'KEEFFE, p. 70-71.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 80- 81.

¹⁵ ANISIMOV, *ibid.* See also Alexandra BERGHOLM. The saintly madman, 2009, pp. 107, n. 385 et p. 108, n. 389. [<http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/47613/thesaint.pdf?sequence=2>]

¹⁶ JACOBSON, Esther. The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia. Leiden, 1993. pp. 188-197

¹⁷ ANISIMOV, p. 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181

stags of the mother of the clan or of the universe: “When necessary, the spirits change their zoomorphic form, transforming themselves into people, kinsmen, assistants of the mythical old woman, the mistress of the clan’s settlement of the spirits¹⁹”. This is probably one of the best description one can make of Fer Benn, which suits well the image he gives of himself, feathered and swift like a bird when he says in the poem :

"Fer[a]n eidhinn iomuallach / an tan eirghius duinn, / goirid bhim da ttarrachtain / o rofas mo chluimh.

When the proud turtle-dove / rises for us, / quickly do I overtake it / since my feathers have grown²⁰ .”

And elsewhere :

"A ellteóg, a luirgnechóg, / fuarauss-[s]a do ghreim, / misi ort ag marcaighecht / as gach beinn a mbeinn.

O little fawn, O little long-legged one, / I was able to catch thee / riding upon thee / from one peak to another²¹ .”

Therefore, now we can say that Fer Benn is originally a spirit turning at will from a zoomorphic to an anthropomorphic aspect, bird or guardian of the herds of the mother (mistress) of the clan. The analogy between the branches of the tree and the antlers of the elk or maral is quite obvious when we know as we said that among the Evenks the mother animal of the clan is conceived as an elk cow or the doe of a wild deer and that she is supposed to be dwelling under the roots of the sacred clan tree.

The rite *shingkelavun*²² deserves mention here because “the Evenki hunters, like the Paleolithic «sorcerers» portrayed in the Trois Frères caves, wore ritual costumes, with caps made from the skulls of reindeer or elks, imitating the heads of these animals²³.” The object was to perform ritual pantomimes “supposed to bring all the animals of the taiga to the clan's hunting grounds.” “This rite lasted many days, and was carried out by the entire clan near the rock, cliffs, and trees sacred to it—the *bugady*. In essence, this ritual corresponded to the legend of the pursuit of the sun-animal by hunters, its killing and death, and then the sacrificial meal, with the subsequent solemn burial of the bones and the miraculous resurrection of the buried animal²⁴.” The myth of the Cosmic hunt referred to here “was a form of personification of the sun cycle which corresponded to and reflected the forms of economic activities of primitive man²⁵.” And this is no epiphenomenon since “Siberian ethnographic materials show that the link of the elk-maral image with the sun is one of the most ancient elements of the cosmological concepts of the peoples of Siberia²⁶.” Therefore, since everything brings us to the conclusion that the Irish 'mother of this herd' whom Fer benn addresses is a spirit-mother of the Siberian kind, archaeology should allow us to pass from the one world to the other.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁰ O'KEEFFE, pp. 74-75

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69

²² ANISIMOV, pp. 177-178

²³ OKLADNIKOV, A.P. Yakutia before its incorporation into the Russian state . Ed. by Henry N . Michael. Montreal; London: McGill-Queen's university press, 1970, p. 97.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98/100.

²⁵ ANISIMOV, p. 163.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

ARCHAEOLOGY / CHRONOLOGY

Let us shift now to chronology and place ourselves on the scale of time. Okladnikov is probably one of the first scientists to explain that “the rudiments of this [patrilineal] form of clan can be discerned in the Cis-Baykal even at the terminal phase of the Neolithic, the Glazkovo²⁷ period of the second millenium B.C.” In other words the beginnings of the transformational period between matrilineal and patrilineal clans should have taken place before, *i.e* sometimes during the Kitoy²⁸ period, (third-early second millennium B.C.), which corresponds to the end of the Neolithic on the Lake Baikal area. Therefore, since Fer Benn is addressing an (animal-)mother, one can assume that the Irish tradition we are dealing with reflects a clan situation which goes back to a period of the process when motherhood still prevailed, that is about the third millennium B.C.

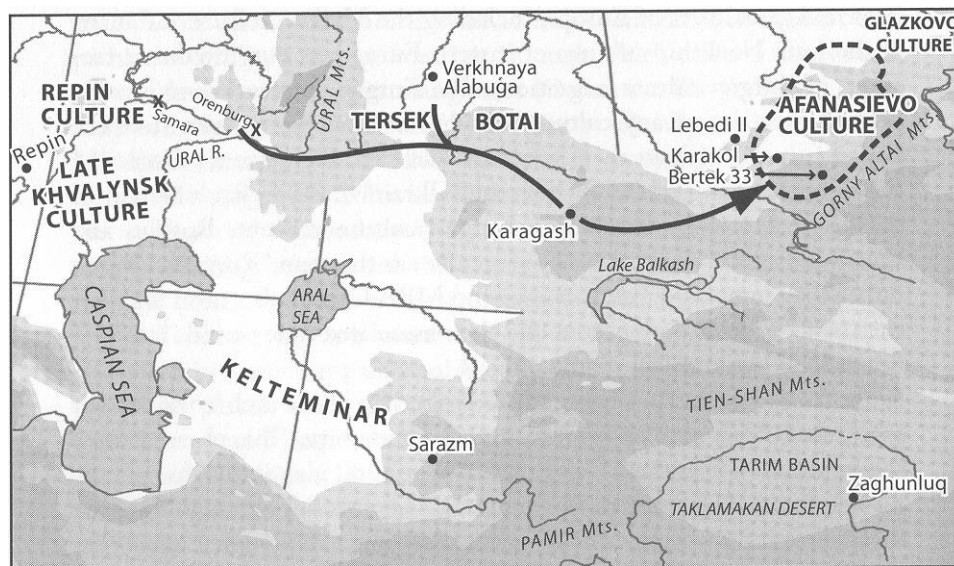


Figure 13.2 Culture areas in the steppes between the Volga and the Altai at the time of the Afanasievo migration, 3700–3300 BCE.

ANTHONY, David. *Op. cit.* n. 25, p. 308

This evolution takes place during the Lake Baikal Neolithic and is contemporaneous with the Afanasievo civilisation in the Minusinsk steppe belt, which originates in the Repin culture of the Volga-Ural region about 3.700-3.400 BCE and established itself in the western Altai²⁹. “It flourished there until about 2.400 BCE, through the Yamnaya period in the Pontic-Caspian steppes³⁰. It must be stressed that “connections with the Volga-Ural Repin-Yamnaya world were maintained by a continuing round of migrations moving in both directions.” “It is clear that populations continued to circulate between the Ural frontier and the Altai well into the Yamnaya period in the Ural steppes, or after 3.300 BCE, bringing many Yamnaya traits and

²⁷ OKLADNIKOV, p. 134 et 165.

²⁸ JACOBSON : « Okladnikov has divided the Baykal Neolithic into a number of stages : the Isakovo stage (fourth millenium) ; the Serovo stage (fourth-third millenium) ; Kitoy stage (third-early second millenium B.C.). The great petroglyphic representations of elk and in particular of female elk are dated to the Serovo stage; during the Kitoy, that image lost its impressive monumentality,» p. 91.

²⁹ ANTHONY, David W. *The horse, the wheel and language: how Bronze Age riders from the Eurasian steppes shaped the modern world.* Princeton and Oxford, 2007, p. 306.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

practices to the Altai³¹.” It is also clear that the Europoid migrants from Repin met with Mongoloid people of the forest belt and that the boundary between them was by no means permanent. For instance, "the neolithic population of the taiga west of Lake Baikal, in particular, shows a Europoid admixture. In their turn, the Mongoloid elements penetrated into the steppe regions³²."



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Altai-Sayan_map_en.png]

There has been singled out "a migration of the Serovo population of Eastern Siberia into the Kuznetsk basin [in the late fourth to early third millennium B.C.³³]. Having mastered the territory of the Kuznetsk basin and the forest-steppe Altay, the new population would have been in contact with the Afanasyevo herders inhabiting the Gornyy Altay³⁴." Furthermore, "According to many investigators, much of the ancient Siberian population changed from using stone to using metal by the middle of that [third] millennium³⁵."

This chronology enables the mixed Europoid-Mongoloid population of the Afanasievo-Serovo cultural world to have taken part "some three to five centuries later, about 3300 BC, in the rapid diffusion of the early Yamnaya horizon across the Pontic-Caspian steppes [...]" particularly "about 3100-3000 BC [to the] large migration stream [which] flowed up the Danube valley and into the Carpathian basin during the Early Bronze Age³⁶."

Therefore from these archaeological considerations we can draw the conclusion that the Siberian trail is confirmed by chronology.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 311

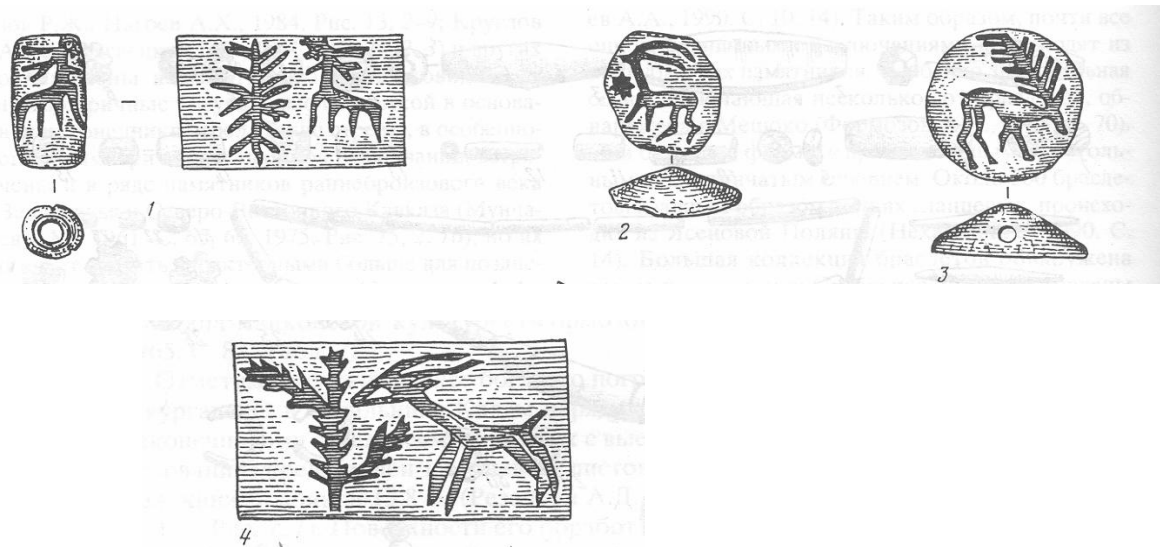
³² LEVIN, M.G. and POTAPOV, L.P. *The peoples of Siberia*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 99.

³³ SHER, Yakov A. et FRANCFORT, Henri-Paul. Répertoire des pétroglyphes d'Asie Centrale. fascicule n° 4, Sibérie du sud 4 : Cheremushny Log, Ust'-Kulog. Stèles de Khakassie. in (*Mémoires de la mission archéologique française en Asie Centrale*, V, 4). Paris : De Boccard, 1999, pp. 5-6: "L.P. Ziablin (1973, 65-73) found out a neolithic site dated from the end of the fourth to the beginning of the third millenium B.C". See also BOBROV, Vladimir. On the problem of interethnic relations in south Siberia in the third and early second millenia B.C., in *Arctic anthropology*, vol. 25, n°2. Padison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, p. 40.

³⁴ BOBROV, p. 42.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32

³⁶ ANTHONY, pp. 305-306.



1—Krasnogvardeisk, mound 4; 2, 3—Tepe-Gawra (after A. Tobler); 4—Egypt (after P. Amiet).

Sielloù Krasnogvardeisk, Tepe-Gawra, hag Ejipt [Seals]

Epokha Bronzy Kavkaza I Srednei Azii, ed. Kushnareva, Markovin, 1994:

The next step that archaeology enables us to follow is this jet cylindrical seal found in Krasnogvardeisk near Maikop Northern Caucasus, in the tomb of a man near his skull, with engraved images of a deer and, [...], the tree of life³⁷. “The most likely date for grave 4 is evidently the beginning of the third millennium B.C.” explains to us Nekhaev³⁸ because of the technology of the seal from Mesopotamia which cannot be older than that. David Anthony speaks of radiocarbon post-Maikop dates, 3000-2800 BCE³⁹. This chronology brings us back to the pre-transformational period in Siberia before the middle of the third millenium BC, when matrilineal tribal life still prevailed, and on the Middle Don to “the spread of the Repin culture (in its second phase) [...]” at the final Eneolithic of the Black Sea steppe⁴⁰; north, to the Upper Don; southwest, into the Dnepr region; and south, to the Lower Don and the Lower Volga⁴¹,” the North Caucasus and Novosvobodnaya⁴², *i.e.* post-Maikop.

The association in a tomb of these two symbols Tree and Deer recall the mother animal dwelling under the roots of the sacred clan tree, with yet no shepherd. Besides, since we know that “the ranges of the red deer and European fallow deer do not extend into the Mesopotamian lowlands, and Mesopotamian fallow deer are not found in Anatolia⁴³”, we can but being convinced that the origin of the *Cervus elaphus* on the jet seal with its well

³⁷ NEKHAEV, A.A. A burial of the Maikop Culture from the Krasnogvardeisk Village Mound, in *Soviet anthropology and archaeology*, 30, 3. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1991, p. 32 ; and BOUCHERIT, G. L’esprit-mère dans Buile Suibhne : romance en moyen-irlandais, du XIIe siècle. Lille : ANRT, 2010, pp. 306-318.

³⁸ NEKHAEV, p. 33.

³⁹ ANTHONY, p. 290.

⁴⁰ 3500/3400 BC – c. 3000/2900 (?) BC. RASSAMAKIN, Yuri. The Eneolithic of the Black Sea Steppe: Dynamics of Cultural and Economic Development 4500-2300 BC; in LEVIN, Marsha. *Late Prehistoric Exploitation of the Eurasian Steppe*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute Monographs, 1999, p. 122.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Figure 3.49, p. 124.

⁴³ COLLINS, Billie Jean. On the trail of the deer: Hittite kūrāla-, in *Hittite studies in Honor of Harry A. Hoffner Jr.* Ed. by BECKMAN, G. BEAL, G. McMAHON, G. Winoma lake (Ind.): Eisenbrauns, 2003, p. 77.

developed antlers is different from that of the technique of the seal. All the more so as the early Hittites who will appear a few centuries later in Anatolia will undoubtedly bring with them their totemic deer cult. For historians, before their identification as Indo-Europeans, “The Hittites were an “ugly” people “with yellow skins and ‘Mongoloid’ features,” with “receding foreheads, oblique eyes, and protruding upper jaws⁴⁴.”

THE HITTITES

A brief study of the early Hittites (2.300-1.900 B.C.), precisely between the middle of the third and the beginning of the second millennium B.C., will strengthen our analysis : « The richness and grave type of the Maikop royal tomb is comparable to that of Alaca Höyük in northern central Anatolia, which itself probably belonged to an Indo-European (pre- or early Hittite) ruler⁴⁵.» It appears quite clearly that if the 9 figurations of deer at Alaca Höyük are associated with sun discs, this is not the case for the bull. This means that the symbolic function of the two animals is different :

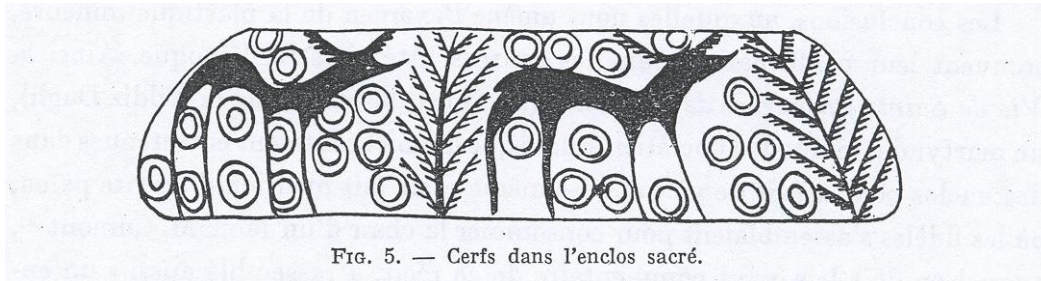


FIG. 5. — Cerfs dans l'enclos sacré.

Kirvi er c'hloziad nevet [Deer in the sacred enclosure⁴⁶]

[As a hunted animal, the deer is paramount, as well as symbolizing a deity. These two aspects for us seem to be the two faces of a unique function where the sacred animal is killed and sacrificed, and the hunted animal is deified]⁴⁷.

The author goes on saying that there are numerous other similar cases in different cultures, for instance the bear among the Ainu, but he could also have mentioned the maral-red deer among the Tungus.

Moreover the hinds are milked within the Hittites sacred enclosures as attested on Puşatly altar of the fifth century A.D. reminding of Pedachtoe enclosures for sacred animals⁴⁸ of the third century A.D. being themselves a very old heritage going back at least to the middle of the third millennium B.C. as testified on numerous painted pottery found at Alishar Höyük,

⁴⁴ COLLINS, Billie Jean. *The Hittites and their world*. Atlanta : Society of Biblical Literature, 2007

⁴⁵ GIMBUTAS, Marija. *The Kurgan culture and the Indo-Europeanization of Europe: a collection of papers*, ed. by Miriam Robbins Dexter and Karlene Jones-Bley. In *Journal of Indo-European Studies Monographs*. Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man., 1997, pp. 89-90. See also MACQUEEN, J.G. *The Hittites and their contemporaries in Asia Minor*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, p. 18.

⁴⁶ PRZEWORSKI, Stefan. *Le culte du cerf en Anatolie*, in *Syria: revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie*, vol. 21 / Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient. Paris: P. Geuthner, 1940, p. 68

⁴⁷ CREPON, P. « Le cerf est en effet l'animal chassé par excellence et il est aussi l'animal symbolisant une divinité. Ces deux rôles nous semblent cependant être les deux pôles d'une même fonction où l'animal sacré est tué et sacrifié, et l'animal chassé est déifié » in *Le thème du cerf dans l'iconographie anatolienne des origines à l'époque Hittite*, in *BCILL, 21: Hethitica, IV*. Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 2002, p. 149

⁴⁸ THIERRY, Nicole. *Le culte du cerf en Anatolie et la vision de saint-Eustathe*, in *Dossiers Histoire et Archéologie*, n° 121. [S.l.]: [s.n.], 1987, p. 76.

Boghazkeuï and elsewhere⁴⁹. Therefore we can safely say that the deer among the ancient Hittites is a sacred animal, that is their totem animal or ancestor (mistress-)mother of the clan or tribe.



Goro un heizez nevet⁵⁰ [milking a sacred hind]
(Thierry, 1987, p. 76).

As for the bull now, later on as we know, it will be associated with thunder,”but may be at this phase of symbolism the manlike storm-god picturing the male principle did not still exist in Anatolia⁵¹.” In a first step this male principle will appear associated with the male deer :

[A Hittite bas-relief from Malatia in Cappadocia, today in Constantinople museum, pictures the god Teshoub, holding the bow and the thunderbolt (the direct ancestor of Zeus Dolichenos) staying on a deer it keeps on the leash [...]. At this remote epoch, the hart would be dedicated to the male god, the hind to its female companion⁵².]

Later on, the hart has been replaced by the bull :

⁴⁹ PRZEWORSKI, p. 68.

⁵⁰ « Autel de Puşath (Ve siècle). Musée archéologique de Kayseri. Scène de traite d'une biche sacrée évoquant les enclos des bêtes sacrificielles à Pédachtoé. »

⁵¹ GONNET-BAĞANA, Hatice. Le disque solaire Hittite d'après les documents archéologiques, in *Anadolu*, 11. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, 1967, p. 173.

⁵² CUMONT, Franz. « Un bas-relief hittite de Malatia en Cappadoce, aujourd'hui au Musée de Constantinople, figure le dieu Teshoub, tenant l'arc et le foudre (l'ancêtre direct du Zeus Dolichénos) debout sur un cerf qu'il conduit au moyen d'une laisse [see CONTENAU, G. Manuel d'archéologie orientale, II. Paris : A. Picard, 1931, p. 1002, Fig. 697]. Il semble qu'à cette époque reculée le cerf fût consacré au dieu mâle, la biche à sa parèdre féminine.» in *L'archevêché de Pédachtoé et le sacrifice du faon*, in *Byzantion*, vol. VI, n° 2. Bruxelles: secrétariat de la revue, 1931, p. 528 et 529.

[Finally at Doliche in Commagene, in the Hittite cult which originates in Anatolia, Hadad, the thunderbolt god, pictured staying on a bull, is accompanied by a goddess, staying often on a hind⁵³.]

Still later on during the Empire, the male principle will overcome and it is probably the previous goddess Hatti, namely the sun-goddess of Arinna, turned into Juno Dolichenos whom the Hittite tutelary deity of the field standing on his sacred deer may have replaced⁵⁴. Anyway this evolution of the male principle associated with the male deer and later on with the bull will strengthen our forthcoming hypothesis about Fer benn as Dagda's first name in Cath Magh Tuired.

THE DEER TRAIL

But contrary to the Hittites who reached southward the Caucasus Mountains, some other Indo-European groups went westward, and one of them in eastern Hungary could have spawned both pre-Italic and pre-Celtic: « Bell Beaker sites [...], west of the Yamnaya settlement region, are dated about 2800-2600 BCE. They could have been a bridge between Yamnaya on their east and Austria/Southern Germany to their west, through which Yamnaya dialects spread from Hungary into Austria and Bavaria, where they later developed into Proto-Celtic⁵⁵.»

Therefore from now on, following the deer trail means following the Indo-Europeans to the Atlantic, to begin with the catacomb-grave tradition, as in the Usatovo tumuli: “The bull and stag were the chief animals in burial rites [...] in the Crimea and the district of Odessa⁵⁶ (...)» Even more important “the general character of the symbolism is reminiscent of Val Camonica and south Scandinavian rock engravings⁵⁷.” In Polonia there has been found a deer in a burial at Pikutkowo⁵⁸ brought there by the Corded pottery (or Battle Axe) people before the complex reached Scandinavia. There, in the Bronze Age “the stag was involved in the general complex of ideas which surrounded the ship⁵⁹ [...], and sometimes [it] replaces the horse as the sun animal, so the appearance of antlers on a ship need cause no surprise⁶⁰.»

In the Val Camonica, the relationship between the deer and the sun will prove fundamental although mysterious, as shown by a figure carved in Paspardo whereon the symbolized beams of a sun take the shape of antler-tines⁶¹. This carving corresponds to « The Third Wave : The Advent of the Yamna People, c. 3000-2800 BC⁶² ». Nevertheless, only from the end of the Bronze Age did the deer appear on the rocks: “The religion of the deer-god developed therefore during the first millenium B.C.⁶³.”

⁵³ *Ibid.*, « Enfin à Doliché en Gomagène, dont le culte se rattache par ses origines hittites à [celui] d'Anatolie, Hadad, le dieu de la foudre, figuré debout sur le taureau, a pour parèdre une déesse, qui souvent est supportée par une biche.” p. 528.

⁵⁴ THIERRY, p. 66 et CRÉPON, p. 147.

⁵⁵ ANTHONY, p. 367.

⁵⁶ GIMBUTAS, Marija. Bronze Age cultures in Central and Eastern Europe. The Hague : Mouton, 1965, p. 468

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 494-495.

⁵⁸ GIMBUTAS, Marija. The civilization of the goddess. San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, p. 369

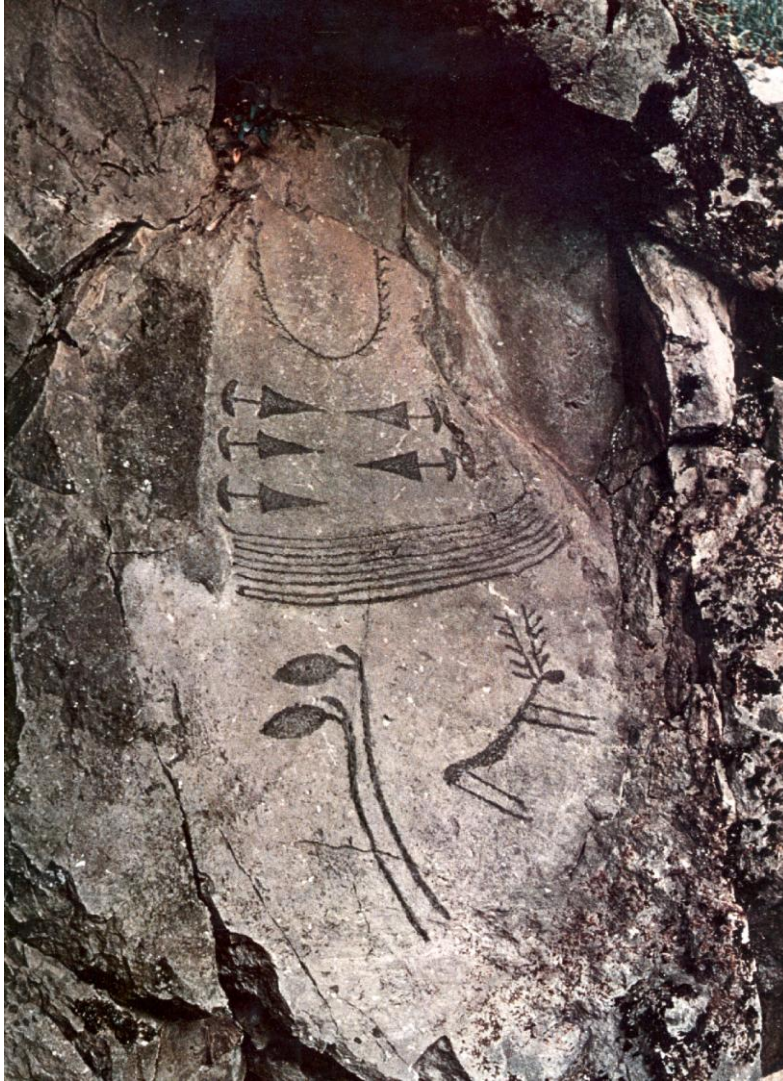
⁵⁹ GELLING, Peter and DAVIDSON, Hilda Ellis. The chariot of the sun: and other rites and symbols of the Northern Bronze Age. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1969, p. 94.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶² GIMBUTAS, 1997, p. 256.

⁶³ ANATI, Emmanuel. La civilisation du Val Camonica. Paris: Arthaud, 1960. "la religion du dieu-cerf s'est donc développée dans le courant du Ier millénaire," pp. 171-172.



Roc'h Capitello dei Due Pini, Paspardo⁶⁴

(Anati, 1982, fig. 228)

Now Cernunnos, whose etymology is the same as Hittite Kurunta and Runt(iy)a, from PIE **ker*⁶⁵, is by far the most famous deer related deity in Gaul, for instance “on a monument dedicated by Parisian sailors [Nautes pillar] in the reign of Tiberius⁶⁶”, or on the Gundestrup cauldron.

Nevertheless, deer rock drawings had appeared in the Iberian peninsula as early as 2000 B.C. in Galicia⁶⁷, and consequently, the deer cult became widespread in the whole of the pre-roman peninsula where “the deer was considered the mythic ancestor of the Celts and Germans, since it is one of the most popular symbols of fecundity, as the funeral animal, and the guide of the dead⁶⁸.”

⁶⁴ Le rocher aux cinq poignards, au Capitello dei Due Pini, près de Paspardo. Composition monumentale de la période III-A (Calcholithique : 3200-2500 av. J.-C.).

⁶⁵ COLLINS, *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁶⁶ GREEN, Miranda J. Exploring the world of the Druids. London: Thames and Hudson, 1997, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁷ BUHÍGAS, Ramón Sobrino. Corpus petrogliphorum Gallaciae. A Coruña: Seminario de estudos Galecos, 2000, Fig. 122/126.

⁶⁸ MAIA-BESSA, Katia. Recherches sur les différents aspects du syncrétisme religieux dans la Lusitanie romaine. Thèse sous la dir. de Jean-Pierre Martin. [S.l.] : [s.n.], 1999, p. 110. “Enfin, pour convaincre de



Carvings of Galician type representing deer at Ford, Mid Argyll

Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot. Vol. XCVIII PLate XLIII. Feather : Deer carvings

From Galicia the rock drawings will sail to Ireland and Scotland : « But the vast majority of non-megalithic scribings in Ireland belong to what is here termed the "Galician" series, often termed "cup and ring" carvings⁶⁹ ». Whereas in Scotland there are deer carvings at Ford, and they are linked with the Food-vessels like in Galicia⁷⁰.

FER BENN / DAGDA

This being said, we cannot fail to mention the other Fer Benn, namely the Dagda in Cath Maige Tuired: in both situations Suibne and the Dagda have a problem with their real name which actually is Fer Benn, or should I say which begins with Fer Benn concerning the Dagda, since his written full name is two lines long⁷¹, the words of which have not all been deciphered satisfactorily. Let us focus on the first name of the list which therefore has to do with a hunter deer cult. We have just seen that the Hittite Teshoub is the direct ancestor of

l'importance du cerf, il suffit de nous rappeler la lutte très dure et prolongée de l'église contre les rituels de déguisement du cerf (*cervulo facere*)" pp. 111-112.

⁶⁹ MACWHITE, Eoin. A new view on Irish Bronze Age Rock-scribings, in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquarian of Ireland*, vol. LXXVI, Part II, July, 1946, p. 59.

⁷⁰ There are 2 or 3 other possible sites on Great Britain for a deer cult coming from the continent in the first millennium B.C.: Scotland about 800 BC and Yorkshire about 500/400 BC. See CUNLIFFE, Barry. *Iron Age communities in Britain*. Routledge, 2010, pp. 83-84.

⁷¹ GRAY, Elizabeth A. ed. [and transl.] by. *Cath Maige Tuired : the Second Battle of Mag Tuired*. Dublin : Irish texts society, 1982. " Fer benn Brúach Brogaill Broumide Cerbad Caic Rolaig Builc Labair Cerce Di Brig Oldathair Boith Athgen mBethai Brightere Tri Carboid Roth Rimaire Riog Scotbe Obthe Olaithbe", p. 49.

Zeus or Jupiter Dolichenos the god father, or should I say the Daghdha Ollathair. Interestingly we have also mentioned that the so called Teshoub (or Tarhunt) will appear riding a male deer previous to the roaring bull, which is quite coherent with the ancient Hittite deer cult. So that the name Fer Benn stuck to the Dagda, does not look that unexpected after all. We may have here the remnants of a tradition different from the written one with its canonic epithets Eochaidh Ollathair, Ruad Rófheasach and Aodh Abaidh⁷². The popular mythology indeed could well be a testimony of that period when those Mongoloid-Europoid hunters will meet with the pastoralist Kurgans. “Fer benn” could well have been used as a graft for this new syncretism all the more easily so as in a first stage after having appeared, Teshoub comes second in the hierarchy to his wife the sun-goddess of Arinna, in the same way as *Dunne mushunin*, the Tungus mistress of the earth, whose husband is no more than the nameless shepherd of her herd:

“In the religious hierarchy of the Hittites, the Mother Goddess came before her spouse, the Storm God. Whether this situation reflects a matriarchal system has not yet been settled, but certain scholars accept this idea⁷³.”

Let us now turn on etymology. The very name of the Dagda, Celtic **Dago-dēwos* means good god, but also good day since *día* god and *día* day come from the same **deiwo-s*, “the Celtic name of the day is obviously linked to the Indo-European name of the blue sky and the day god⁷⁴.” This way the link of the Dagda with the sun becomes obvious, “the sky god, storm god, earth god, and the sun⁷⁵,” rising sun but also setting sun wherefrom he would get his association with death and regeneration.

This possible part played by Fer Benn as a graft with the pastoral kurgan mythology is given more potency by the name of the (mistress-)mother of the clan *Bugady Enintyn* and the mistress of the clan lands *Dunne mushunin* since “the synonym for *buga* is *dunne (dunda)*,” and moreover since:

“The stem *dun* || *don* is apparently of very ancient origin, and existed before the crystallization of the linguistic stocks [which form the basis of] modern language families. In Sanskrit the word *dhuni* meant “river.” A. Afanasyev points out that [the] word *dhuni* was introduced into the Slavic languages from the east (“Don,” “Danube,” and, in general, “river” in the songs of the Poles and Galicians)⁷⁶.”

The name of the river Danube is said to come from the older form **Dānouio-*, “The Welsh river-name *Donwy* reflects this same original form *Dānouio-*, which is thus shown to have existed in Proto-Celtic⁷⁷.”

⁷² STERCKX, Claude. Les dieux protéens des celtes et des indo-européens. Bruxelles : Ollodagos, 1994, p. 115.

⁷³ KARASU, Kem. Why did the Hittites have a thousands deities? *In Hittite studies in Honor of Harry A. Hoffner Jr. Ibid.*, p. 227

⁷⁴ LAMBERT, P.-Y. Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien de J. Vendryès, 1996, p. D-65.

⁷⁵ SIMMONS, Victoria. SJÖBLOM, Tom, *in Celtic culture: a historical encyclopedia*. Ed. John T. Koch: Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2006, p. 553-554.

⁷⁶ VASILEVICH, G.M. Early concepts about the universe among the Evenks (materials), in *Studies in Siberian shamanism. Ibid.* : “As it developed further, its original meaning, “surrounding nature” (mountains, rivers, forests) was restricted differently in the different linguistic stocks: in some to “land” (mountains, forest), in others to “river.” p. 49 et 77, n. 6.

⁷⁷ PEB, CW, *in KOCH*, p. 569.

“The Slavic river-names *Don*, *Dniepr*, and *Dniestr* are borrowings from Scythian **dānu*, **dānu apara* ‘upper river’, **dānu nazdya* ‘lower river’. Although these three river names are loans from Scythian [...], Welsh *Donwy* leaves no doubt that Celtic and Iranian had the same inherited river-name [...]”⁷⁸.”

If this common inherited word as it seems was the Tungus “*dunne*,” it would appear therefore that there is a linguistic link between Tungus “*dunne*,” Proto-Celtic *Dānouio-*, and Welsh *Donwy*”. This of course would be quite a strong case for a deer cult in the Celtic countries coming from Siberia.

CONCLUSION

All this brings us back to Nora Chadwick's analysis of the mythological situation in North Western Medieval Europe where connections between Celtic and Norse mantic traditions for example can clearly be evidenced. We have shown from the Celtic point of view that in order to explain these connections, one does not need the help of a shaman⁷⁹, a Siberian personage who cannot be older than the Bronze Age⁸⁰, and whose name is not attested before the second part of the first millenium B.C.⁸¹. We have also shown that beyond the pastoralist tradition originating in the Kurgan civilisations from the steppes as shown by Marija Gimbutas, there is also connected to it a hunting tradition very much apparent among the ancient Hittites, going back as far as the end of the fourth millenium B.C. in Western Siberia, and involving Europoid and Mongoloid people as well. It is true however that if the pre-Christian Celts are not concerned with shamanism, they are concerned with totemism and ancestors cults, the deer cult being one of them.

In the same time, we feel very much concerned with Nora Chadwick’s theme of research ‘the inspiration of the seer’, neutral and universal as it is because it takes into account a wide range of completely different traditions throughout the world. After all, seeking vision is the accomplishment of a Seer⁸², whether he’d be a shaman, a *file* or whatever. And if we are to deal with this theme of research, there is another cultural world originating also in Siberia as early as the 14th millenium B.C., the Native Northern American civilisations, in which visions⁸³, dreams and magical songs⁸⁴ are central in the relation with the spirits and as in the Celtic countries never involved a shaman.

E koun PER DENEZ (1921-2011), tad ar c’helenn brezhoneg

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* See DEXTER, Miriam Robbins. Reflections on the goddess *Donu. In *The mankind quarterly*, vol. XXXI, N° 1&2, Fall/Winter 1990

⁷⁹ MEILLET, Antoine. Le Tokharien, in *Indogermanisches Jahrbuch: im Auftrag der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft*. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1914. See also MALLORY, J.P. ADAMS, D.Q. The Oxford introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indian-European world. OUP, 2006, pp. 134-137 and 356, 357.

⁸⁰ DIÓSZEGI, Vilmos. Tracing shamans in Sibiria. Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications, 1960, pp. 194-199.

⁸¹ MIRONOV, Nikolaï D. et SHIROKOGOROFF, S.M., “Śramaṇa-Shaman : etymology of the word “Shaman”, in *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Vol. LV. Shangai: Royal Asiatic Society, 1924, pp. 105-130.

⁸² VAJDA, Edward J. *Ibid.* : “The Ket are broadly similar to other early hunter-gatherers across the globe, where certain members of the tribe are regarded as being endowed with special powers to heal the sick through spiritual intervention, normally accomplished through magical singing,” p.145.

⁸³ TURNER, Geoffrey. Les Indiens d’Amérique du Nord. A. Colin, 1985, pp. 63-65, 168, 177-178.

⁸⁴ Le grand livre des Indiens d’Amérique ; trad. Anne Sladovic.209 Paris : Atlas, 1996 ; London : Salamander Books, 1995, p. 209.

