

UWTSD BA Celtic Studies (Distance learning)

Module Ref: Welsh and Celtic Place-Names (HPCS5017,
HPCS6017)

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Assessment 1 (*This assessment must be submitted by 13th November 2023*) :

Write an essay characterising the Celtic place-names known from ONE of the following areas: (i) the European Continent, (ii) modern England, (iii) **modern Scotland**.

Your essay should be of no more than 1,500 words. You should consider some or all of the following topics: types of name, geographical distribution of Celtic names, the nature of the sources, the relationship of Celtic names to names in other languages. Comparisons or contrasts with the other areas you have studied will be welcome but should be kept very brief: the focus should remain on the one chosen region.

Placing the names in a historical perspective. . . Caledonia, Picti, Alba and Scotland

Some of the earliest reliable sources of Scottish place name data originates from the beginning of real historical written records from the Roman occupation and cartography copied in connection with this at a later date. An earlier reference by the Greek mariner, Pytheus, from Massalia, included in his *Periplus* includes the term 'Albiones' along with 'Pretannike' , relating to the circumnavigation of the British Isles in the 4th century BC. As far as the northern part of Britain is concerned, Albion appears as a consistent record as can be seen in Claudius Ptolemy's mapping of Britain, Ireland and the surrounding islands and oceans. Interestingly, the tribal descriptor, 'Caledonii' is placed central to the Scottish territory, shifted to the right by 45 degrees, below the Caledonian Forest 'Caledonius Silva', directly below on the seaward northern edge (north-west) the Caledonian Sea, 'Oceanus Dev Caledonius,' which later appears in the work of Latin historians, including Tacitus and Cassius Dio, referring to north of the River Forth as 'Caledonia'. Tracing a possible British origin could be made by reference to the Welsh *caled* , indicative of a tough, hard nature. Militarily, difficult to break or subdue. But as with other areas of the island, we could also be considering a pre-Celtic language, not directly to common Celtic, particularly with respect to natural features in the landscape such as rivers or wooded areas.



BRITISH ISLES, ALBION BRITANNIUM et HIBERNIAM Mercator original
antique map 1730

saint, in the 5th century refers to both Picts and Scots, referencing the division of national identity between northern Britannia and Hibernia ('Ibernia' on the earlier Ptolemy map) and its linguistic extension on the western coastal area across the short stretch of sea between Iona and north-east Ireland. The later expansion of the Gaelic Dal Riata, based in the Argyle area, self-contained communities eastwards later incorporated into a greater entity, takes on the identity of 'Alba', an echo of Pytheus' *Albiones*. Further change would eventually result in the reversal of this to an Anglicised 'Scotland'.

What's in a name? Place and purpose, typology and topography

Included as a somewhat innocuous entry beneath the Caledonii is the name *otadini* (earlier Ptolemy designation, later seen with slight differences in vowel use). By the 6th century this clan had become dominant in the border area between the Britons of the north and Emperor Hadrian's demarcation of the end of empire prior to the second wall (Antonine), a turf wall / embankment, eventually constructed at the top end of the Otadini's territory. Their significance arises historically by way of a surviving manuscript listing a sequence of heroic eulogies under the title *Gododin* written probably by the bard Aneirin shortly after their catastrophic defeat at Catterick, on campaign against the expansion of the Angles towards their lands, north of the Humber, which may have extended south of the Wall in the post-Roman era. From the aspect of this discussion, the relevance would centre on their designated tribal name where we can detect quite a common Celtic noun, 'Din', indicating a defensive base, in their case located at Edinburgh, Anglicised from a more authentic 'Dineidyn' (in the *Gododin* MS), the Acropolis-like fortress, the place where the *Gododin* army feasted and

caroused on wine, mead and other alcohol before the journey south to their demise. Technically, if the *eidin* represents the *otadini*, then in contradiction to this, we see Anglo-Germanic reversal of this, as the prefix 'Din' is deleted and an additional 'burg' tagged on as a suffix. In actual fact, it could be pointed out that with modern 'Edinburgh', we see all former components extant from that the settlement, that can be analysed as a deconstructed 'E' - 'din' - 'burgh', the 'E' representative of the 'Ei' from the Gododin era (Din-eidin).

A corresponding tribal base of British origins is also located along with others in Wales at the Anglicised Dumbarton, the 'Dum' arising out of a probable 'Dun', also notable in, for example, *Maridunum*, a Latin interpretation of the later west-Walian *Carmarthen*, representative of a defensive site located near the sea, a short distance away. In this case, *Maridunum* has been prefixed by a Welsh 'Car' better described as 'Caer', the correct wording, giving a combination of the Romano-British tribal site later Cymricised, and essentially reclaimed linguistically by the Welsh language in the sub-Roman early Middle Ages or Dark Ages, eventually 'Caerfyrddin'. In this case, we have a situation where the defensive nature of the settlement has been indicated twice, enclosing a mutated *mor*: 'Caer' . . . 'fyr' . . . 'ddin'. Again, there is a mutation on 'din' to a soft version 'dd', correct in the Welsh grammatical traditions. In fact it might be argued that in the case of the 'din' element, as a noun, then it could be as equally important as the qualification, in which case we could surmise the various combinations of earlier Edinburgh:

Din oud , outadin , Ododin (actually in the Gododin MS), DunEdin, Din eidyn, etc.

Both elements are nouns: the tribe, and the fortress home.

In Wales, this terminology is sometimes seen with an 'as' termination, as for example in *Dinas* (North Pembrokeshire) , *Dinas Powys* (south Wales), also *Dinas Bran*, north Wales, reflecting the numerous defensive hillfort locations associated with the Iron Age communities, pre Roman conquest in first century AD/CE.

Gaelicisation and Anglicisation . . . internal and external territorial ambitions and pressure

A cursory glance at any Ordnance Survey component square might seem to conflict with some of the details suggested earlier. But this is only to be expected in consideration of the upheavals experienced really commencing with the Hadrianic period extending through to the coastal invasion by the Norsemen. The disruption of these pirates was to have a dramatic and long-lasting result on Britain, Ireland and surrounding islands. At around the same time separate linguistic evolution was emerging from the Dalriadan side of Scotland.

The kernel of language change to Gaelic emerges out of the establishment of kingship in the west as summarised following:

Aedan mac Gabhrain. , the great grandson of Fergus, was crowned overking of Dalriada in 573, by no less a person than St Columba - a huge PR triumph for Aedan, giving his reign an extra symbolism that no pretender could hope to match, and also perhaps, sending out a signal to the neighbouring kingdoms that he had God, and certainly the head of the Celtic Church, on his side. [2]

This did not end there. . .

'Aedan intended to expand the Dalriadan kingdom by force, and launched raids on surrounding territories, even as far away as the Isle of Man and the Orkney Islands territories (the primary Dalriadan relic, the Stone of Destiny, was smuggled over from Ireland just prior to this, later to become one of the most prominent symbols of Scottish identity).' [3]

A subsequent switch from Dalriadan to Pictish overlordship ensued, but essentially the death of Eoganan, a Pict, at the hands of a Viking army in 839 resulted in Kenneth Mac Alpin of mixed Dalriadan and Pictish inheritance entering the narrative:

' Kenneth had taken the throne by 844. He was not the first to rule both Picts and Scots, but whereas the Pictish kings who had exercised this power before had ruled as overlords of the Scots, Mac Alpin was the first Scot to rule both kingdoms, and the first to rule them as one.' [4]

The resulting amalgam of placename nouns and their qualifiers or descriptors can be seen by a few obvious examples. Apart from the examples given earlier referring to fortifications, an obvious indication of co-existence of Pictish (Brittonic) heritage lying alongside the imported Irish is seen in the areas where rivers outflow into wider expanses of water: Aberdeen, Inverness . . the first indicating the mouth of the River Dee to the North sea, the second, the river exiting Loch Ness and meeting the Moray Firth, merging with the North Sea. The 'Aber' prefix is seen sometimes where smaller stream merges with a main river course as at Aberkenfig in south Wales, here flowing into the major topographical feature of the area, the River Ogwr, giving rise to the seaside village of Anglicised 'Ogmore' or even more accurately 'Ogmore-by-Sea', an example where English influence in south Wales is particularly prevalent. However, this can also be noted at the other extreme in the north of Scotland in a similar geographical position

further north than the Aberdeen reference earlier, and between Inverness, the River Lossie winds its way into the sea at 'Lossiemouth', a relevantly recent coalescing of communities into the seaside township.

Scandinavian adventuring and settlement

As with other areas of the British Isles, progressing further along the north Scottish coast counter-clockwise, we can discern other possible external influences on the coast resulting from Norse adventurers. A feature of this is possibly to be noted in the settlement of 'Wick', a familiar vocabulary component also seen along the west Wales coast at Goodwick which along with the opposite Fishguard 'fiskigarðr' [fishtrap] in the bay, confirm enduring interest from the Viking expeditions and eventual settlement. Other possible indicators can be seen in the place names containing the noun 'dale', again seen in the Pembrokeshire south topographical list as an actual village name, capitalised as 'Dale'.

As far as the Scottish experience is evidenced, the historical trail of events can be summarised as a sequence of changes in hegemonistic pressures and the consequences of these reflected in enduring change or evolution of settlement toponymy, also noted of course in area such as west Wales, with similar Scandinavian and Norman / Flemish influences.

Notes

1 Anonymous, Panegyric VIII (V), 11.4, a panegyric for Constantius Caesar (written 297 or 298, possibly at Trier).

2, 3, 4 : BBC : https://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig_emig/scotland

Bibliography

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