

The Mists of Time

 nolanfamilies.org/history/the-mists-of-time

Following is an article I wrote for the Nolan Clan newsletter in 2018

Our Ancient Nolan Roots

The journey begins in the area of the Black Sea around 5,500 BC when the sea began overflowing its banks eventually doubling in size forcing many to flee.

Writing the story also has been for me a story in itself leading me to new insights about how I go about doing work.

A few months back, reviewing some of my DNA test results I discovered that, according to results, a distant relative of mine had died in Hungary at about the same time as the flooding in the Black Sea area. An interesting coincidence, but I wouldn't be able to produce an article for the next Newsletter on such little information

A short while later as I was preparing for the upcoming Newsletter, as editor and chief contributor, I re-read the account of the arrival in Ireland of the Tuatha De Dananns (supposedly our distant Nolan ancestors) trying for the nth time to make sense of it. Suddenly it came to me. I could now make sense of it. For your illustration purposes I present here a condensed, somewhat simplified version of the account:

The Tuatha De Danann came to Ireland from Four Islands in the North Atlantic, making a brief stopover in Lochlainn before moving on to their destination.

After some reflection and sleeping on it I realized that the story related to us in the Lebor Gabala Erenn (LGE) had over time been somewhat altered by biases and the retelling of the story over and over again. Nonetheless I believe I saw through all the distortions. What I now saw as the original real story goes something like this:

Craftsmen and artisans originally from the Danube river system came to Ireland from four islands at the mouth of the Rhine (Rotterdam area). After making a brief stopover in the Leighlin area (Leighlinbridge area in Co. Carlow before the bridge was built) they moved on to their final destination.

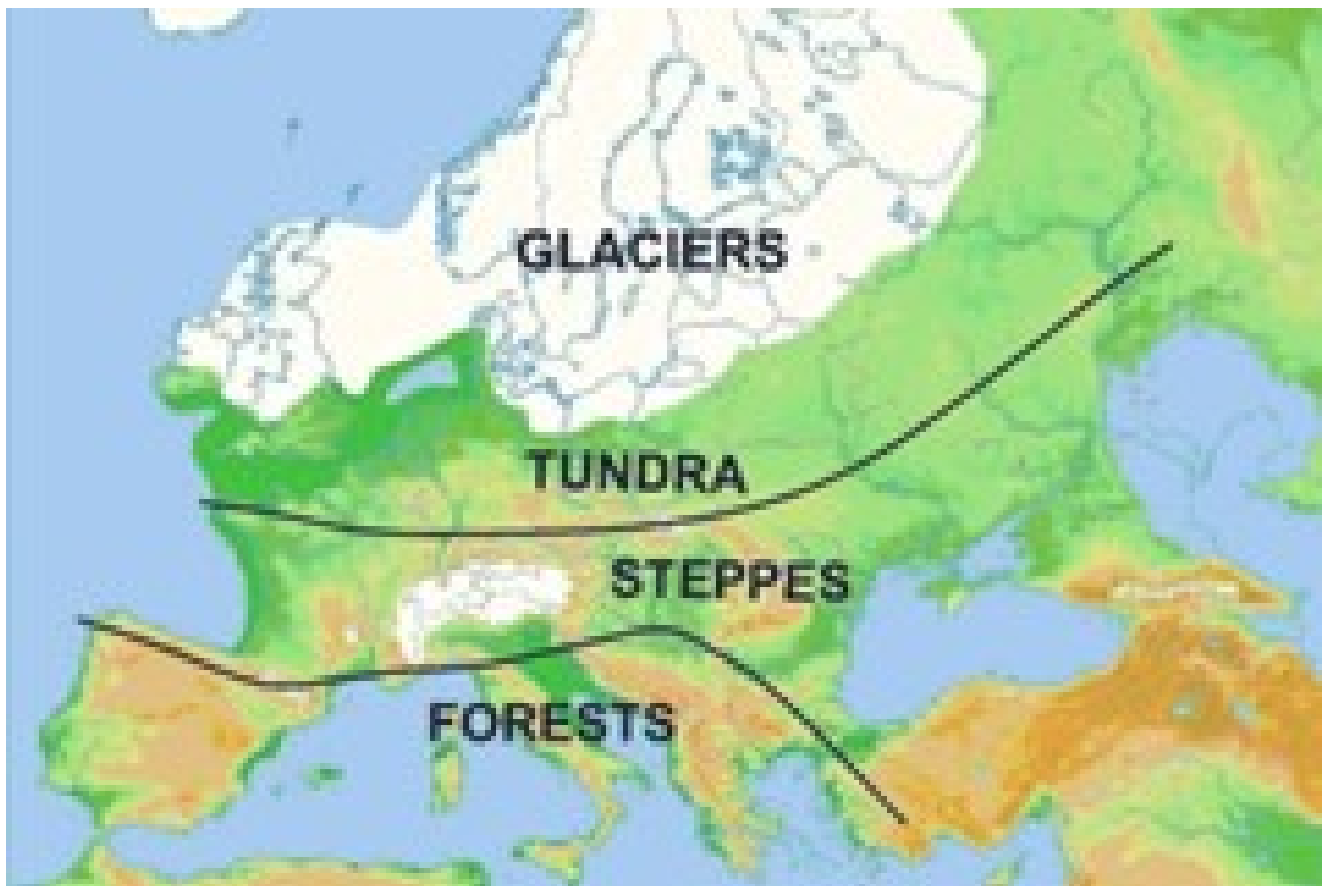
I now had a fourth point along the itinerary of our ancestors' European journey, the starting point, the end point and two in between, Hungary and the Rotterdam area). All this had happened in a matter of weeks. At that point I decided to base my article for the next

newsletter on these new discoveries. Was I taking on too much? Time would tell. In the end I was successful but somewhat humbled by the fact that it took me longer than I initially anticipated.

The body of the article is broken up into two pieces, “Our Story in Europe” and “Our Early Story in Ireland”. This is then followed by a few “Conclusions” and “Closing Remarks”.

Enjoy the story!

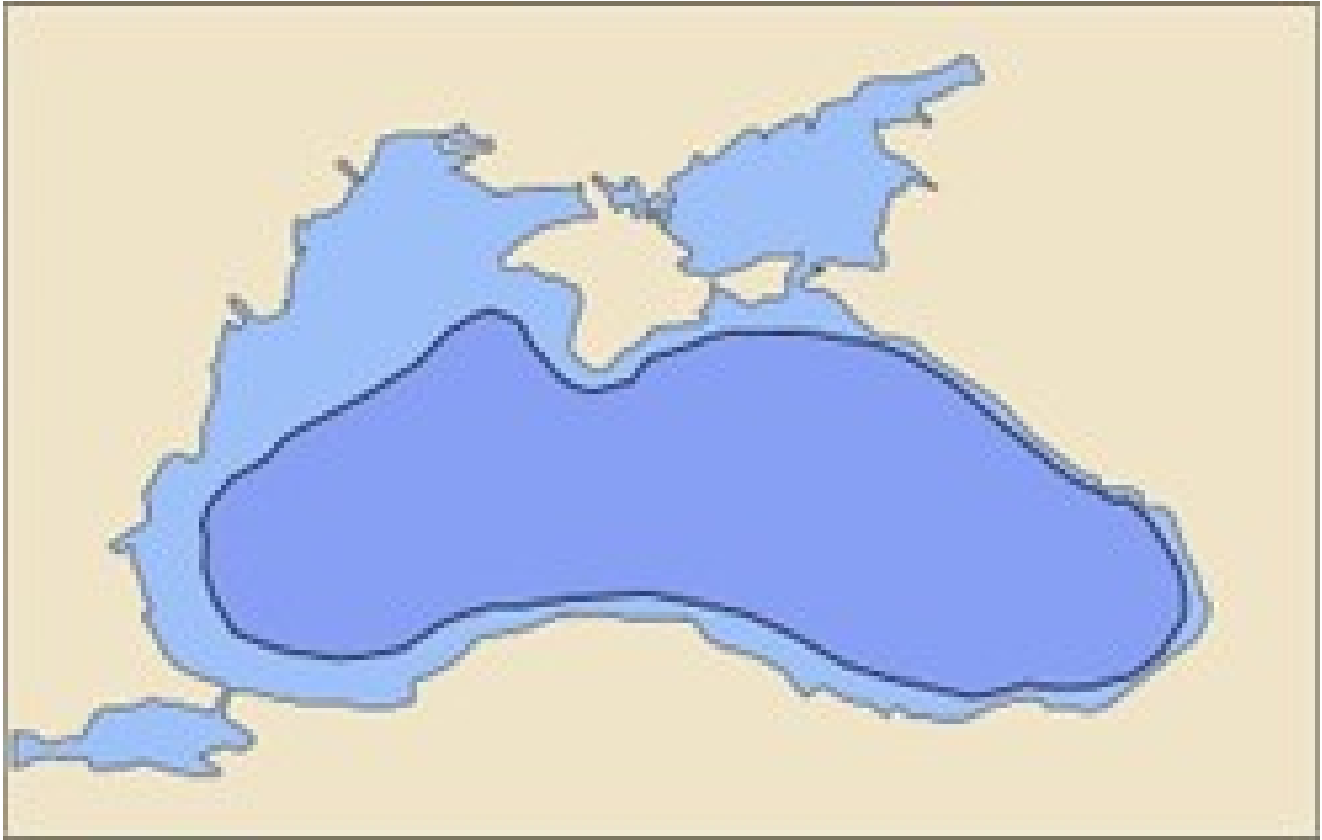
Our Story in Europe



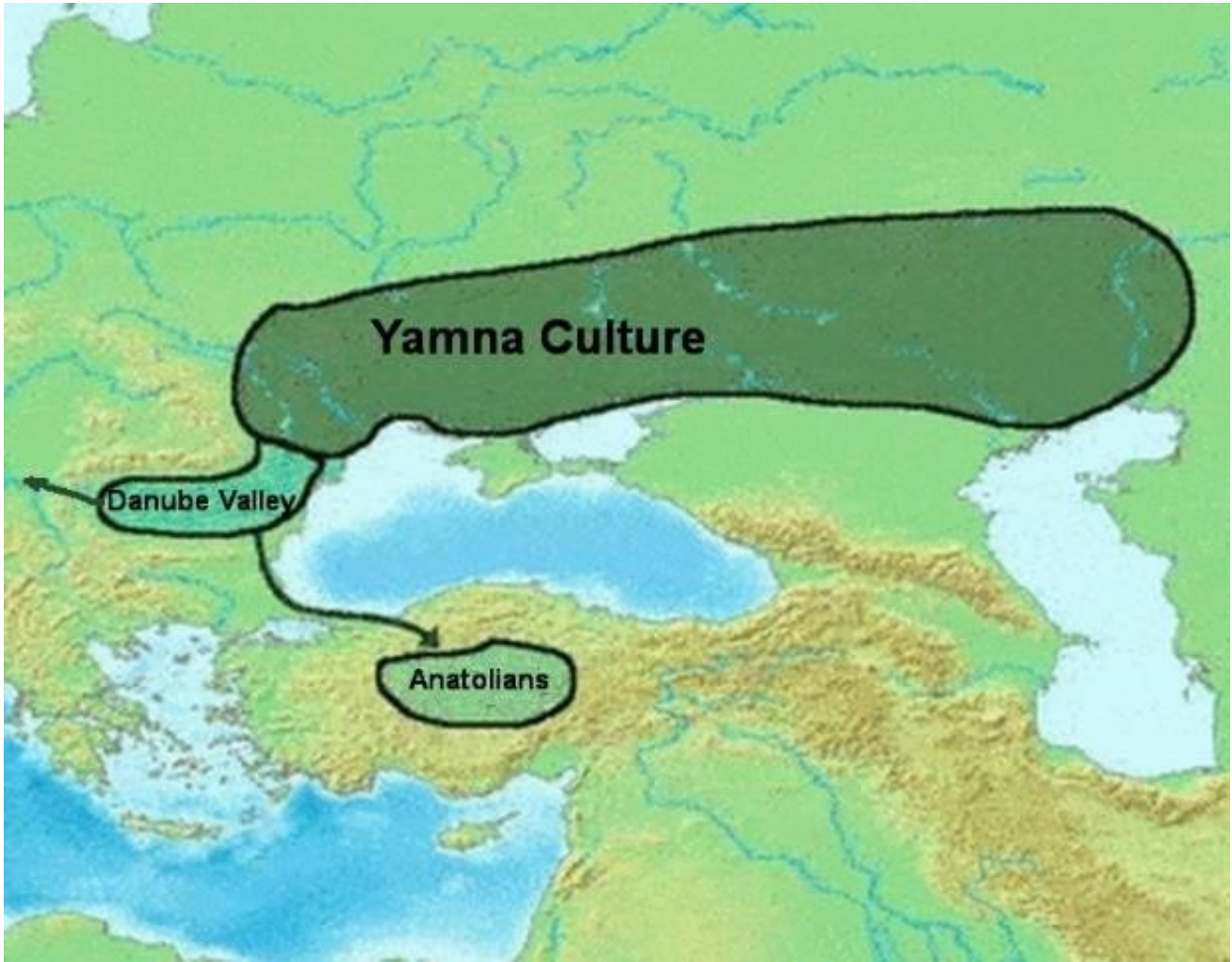
Prior to the end of the last ice age, northern Europe was covered with ice and people were mostly concentrated in localized areas where the climate and access to food sources and shelter was readily available.

The better known refugia were in central France, the Balkans, the area above the Black Sea and the Russian steppes but lesser known ones of Celtic interest were in the area of Lusitania on the Iberian Peninsula (where later the Celtic and Iberian languages mixed yielding the Celtiberian dialect) and possibly a few others in the areas of Ballydavis, Co. Kerry, and County Sligo.

As temperatures rose dramatically towards the end of the Ice Age (circa 10,200 BC), nomadic hunter-gatherers, until then confined to the more southerly regions of Europe and Asia, began to explore farther afield. Following herds of large animals, some moving to the east towards America, some moving westward towards Europe. Our ancestors were part of the latter group, the branch of the human family known as the **R1b haplogroup** moving from the Russian steppes to the Pontic steppes, the area to the north and east of the Black Sea.

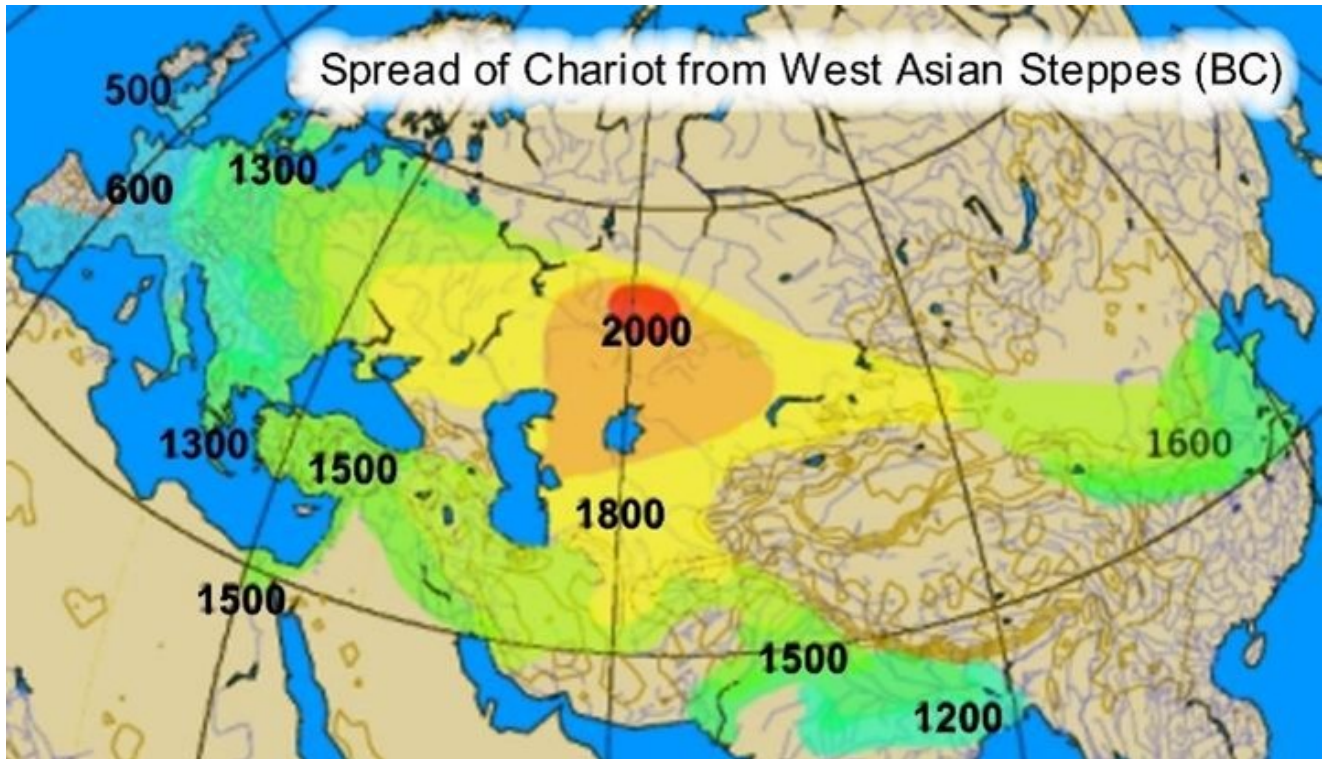


This is where lived a culture known to archaeologists as the Yamna culture being among the first peoples to domesticate wild horses and aurochs (wild cattle).



At some point the Yamna culture also invented the wheel and chariot and began wandering farther afield becoming involved in early trade with other peoples, reaching as far away as northern China.

Over time, as trade increased, the Scythians, the dominant member tribe of the Yamna culture, became rich and built large memorials to their dead known as Kurgans (*similar in construction to the Newgrange monument in Ireland*). One of their chief trading partners were the Greeks who established trading posts and communities all around the Black Sea.



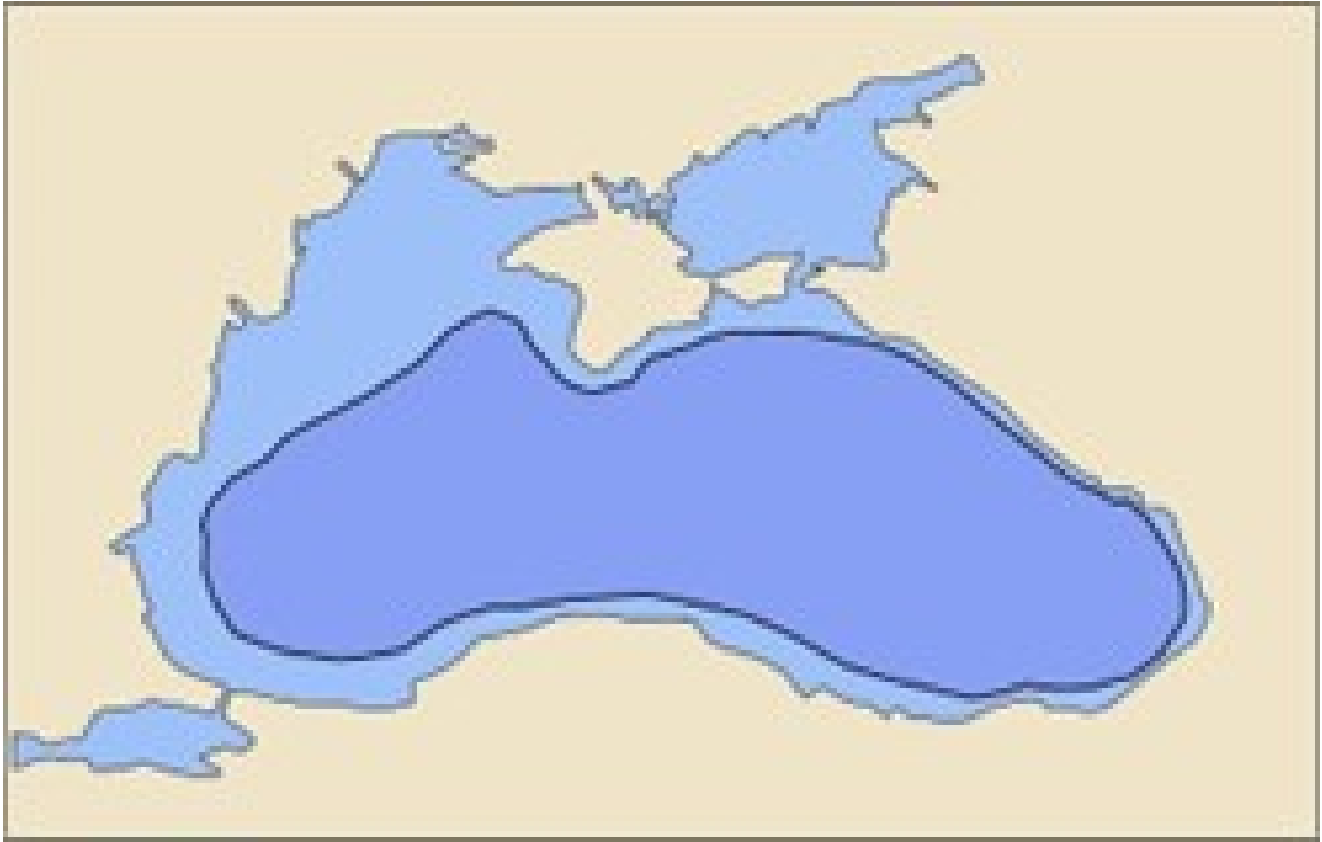
Over time the Greeks with the help of their Scythian allies extended their trade into the Mediterranean and into the northern frontiers of Europe.

Known for their horsemanship and ability to quickly attack and retreat in battle, some Scythians also became sought-after warriors in military campaigns. Becoming famous they soon became the ruling class for the Scythians, most of which were farmers, but very good ones.

By the time of Alexander the Great, Scythia was producing grain for the whole of the ancient Greek empire. They had become the breadbasket of the Ancient world.

Needless to say, at this point, that the Scythians and Greeks worked well together, a partnership which would endure over time involving our Nolan ancestors.

Now before we go any further, I must alert you to the fact that those supplying the grain to the Ancient Greek empire did not include your ancestor but were distant cousins. Our ancestor had already left the scene having been forced from his home by rising water levels in the Black Sea.



Our ancestor, belonging to the R1b1a2a haplogroup (*see top of the page at right*), had fled up the Danube river (*as revealed by my own DNA test results, a distant relative having died in Hungary around the time of the flooding*).

Some of his relatives, i.e. other members of the R1b1a2a haplogroup, went into northern Greece.

Despite having left the area of the Black Sea our ancestor and his descendants returned to visit their relatives who by now had re-settled in northern Greece assimilating much of what the ancient Greek culture had to offer, possibly volunteering to help them with establishing trade routes to the northern frontiers of Europe.

As trade grew up and down the Danube a descendant of our distant ancestor in the area of the Black Sea would eventually settle in Heuneburg, a hill fort and trade complex in southern Germany, possibly being its chief trader (*given what we know about his descendants in Ireland i.e. king, Ard Ri, etc*).



This large Celtic hillfort complex built around 700 BC supported long-distance trade and provided employment and shelter for 5,000 to 10,000 people.

The Celtic tribesmen, women and children at the hillfort were no doubt descendants of refugees who had fled the Black Sea area, and surely longed to find a homeland they could call their own.

Some of the Celtic inhabitants of the hillfort worked in the fields around the hillfort, some looked after defense, others occupied themselves as craftsmen making various goods which could be traded, others went out on trading expeditions to sell the goods made in the hillfort and to search for new trading opportunities.

For whatever reason, this well-organized self-contained community abandoned the hillfort after only a few centuries. By 400 BC the large Heuneburg complex had been completely abandoned. Some say that the inhabitants of the hillfort were driven away by local hostile forces but perhaps they had found a better home elsewhere, a new homeland. I would rather think the latter, choosing at this point to move closer to their ultimate destination, their dream of a new homeland.



Where did these 5 to 10 thousand people go. My best guess at this point is that they resettled to the area of Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz just south of Nuremberg where, around 450 BC, a new hillfort and long-distance trade complex was built.

It was certainly a better trade location providing access not only to the Black Sea market via the Danube river but also to the North Sea market via the Rhine-Main river system. Speaking from the present, I would say that they were simply moving closer to their ultimate destination and sustaining themselves through trade as they went.

From amongst the inhabitants of the hillfort, I believe that our ancestor was a long-distance trader possibly as I suggested earlier, the chief trader, called the “prince” as was already the practice in Celtic Gaul (France) at the time. As a Scythian, with a long history of trade to places as far-away as China, our ancestor would not have shied away from exploring the areas further to the north, following the Main to the Rhine and then on from there to the North Sea.

This is likely how, on one of his voyages of exploration, our ancestor or one of his descendants discovered Ireland, reporting back to his fellow tribesmen the wonderful land he had discovered, lush with vegetation and relatively uninhabited.

From their Buchberg base of operations the Celtic Menapii tribesmen likely planned their re-settlement to Ireland in detail.

Some would go directly to Ireland (*the Menapii who first settled in Leinster*) to prepare the land for others who would follow, others would settle at the mouth of the Rhine (*the Menapii who settled in the Flanders area of Belgium*) and support a few chosen ones (*the Tuatha De*

Danann) living on the nearby Four Islands at the mouth of the Rhine river (*a long-time trading centre catering to the needs of the North Sea market*) who would master the most advanced arts and sciences that the ancient world had to offer before moving on to Ireland.



On the four islands at the mouth of the North Sea, the chosen few had access to all the available knowledge of the ancient world and applied themselves to mastering all the arts and sciences.

Eventually these chosen few of the Menapii tribe or their subsequent generations, having come to full mastery of all known arts and sciences decided to push forward to Ireland to join their fellow tribesmen already settled there.

Our Early Years in Ireland

Coming from the Four Islands (the chosen few, the educated ones) and neighbouring Flanders (the farmers supporting the chosen few), the new arrivals of the Menapii settled in the area of present-day Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow (locate **Menapii** on map below).



Their arrival and presumption of authority because of superior knowledge was not readily accepted by the other Belgae tribes (i.e. other than the Menapii) and soon the new arrivals were challenged in battle.

Eventually both sides came to an agreement. The Belgae tribes who had settled on the western side of the island would continue ruling over that side but the newcomers would rule over the eastern side of the island where their tribe, the Menapii, had earlier settled.

A couple of centuries later, a descendant of our first Tuatha De Danann ancestor in Ireland, Ugaine Mor, owner of a fleet of merchant ships and married to a daughter of the king of Gaul, was chosen as the new Ard Ri (330-300 BC) being tasked with settling disputes amongst the tribes and countering any hostile take-overs.

Heavily involved in foreign trade, Ugaine Mor, like his forefathers, had maintained good relations with the Greek merchants everywhere in the known world and, in ancient texts, he (Hugonius Maximus) is recorded as having come to the aid of those Greek merchants when

they began establishing themselves in the western Mediterranean. This evident from an ancient text which records that “Hugonius Maximus” came to the aid of the Greeks when they set up a new trading post on the isle of Sicily.

According to tradition, Ugaine held court at Dinn Righ (near Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow) and had his family seat at Dun Aillinne (Co. Kildare), named after his grandson Aillill Aine, son of Laoghaire Lorc.

Ugaine and Ceassair, a daughter of the King of Gaul, supposedly had altogether 25 children, his two oldest sons being Cobhthach Caol Breagh and Laogaire Lorc.

Upon Ugaine’s death all his children were allotted parts of his kingdom.

Cobhthach (Ard Ri, 284-267 BC) received the area around the Hill of Tara and Laogaire Lorc (300-284 BC) received the area around the river Liffey.

This concludes my story of our ancient Nolan roots but I am sure that you are anxious to know how all this relates to you who has some sort of Nolan family connection today.

The answer you seek lies in a better understanding of St Brigid of Kildare’s ancestry. As many may know, according to popular belief, St Brigid was “related to the Nolans”.

On the surface this is quite an innocent statement but if you dig deeper (*I did using an online database given in the References!*) you will find that her father was a direct male descendant of Caol Breagh, son of Ugaine Mor, the family’s famous ancestor, hence the “Nuallain” (famous one) who was Ard Ri of Ireland and beyond towards the end of the 4th century BC.

What the foregoing suggests is that, towards the end of the Middle Ages, when the use of English surnames became obligatory in order to have your land grant approved by the king, “related to the Nolans” meant that you were descended from the “famous one”, namely Ugaine Mor.

Thus, when in 1584 Tomhas O hUllachain, later of Ballinrobe, gave Nolan as an English rendering of his Irish surname he wanted to ensure that his descent from the “famous” Ugaine Mor would not be forgotten. In his case, his line of descent was through a parallel line, that Caol Breagh’s younger brother Laogaire Lorc.

The O hUllachains as was Thomas Nolan of Ballinrobe were indeed descendants of Ugaine Mor. It was widely known that their 2nd century ancestor Cathair Mor, king of Leinster and Ard Ri (174-177 AD) but less known was the fact that further up the tree they were descended from Laoghaire Lorc, a younger brother of Caol Breagh and hence descendants of Ugaine Mor.

Another interesting piece of information linking the Carlow Nolans to the Ballinrobe Nolans is the fact that, according to local tradition, Cathair Mor, ancestor to the Ballinrobe Nolans, was reputedly buried atop Ballon Hill, at the very heart of current-day Carlow Nolan country.

Cathair Mor's burial atop Ballon Hill would also suggest that his seat was in the area, perhaps even on the Ballykealey townland. One must remember that, before the arrival of the Normans, the Carlow Nolan seat was in Tullow so it is quite possible that Ballykealey was once the seat of Cathair Mor.

There are also other branches of Nolans like the O Niallains (O Neylan) and O hUltachains (Holohan) who, for the very same reason as used by Tomhas O hUllachain, in the course of their history, chose the Nolan surname no doubt to enshrine in their family name the fact that they were descended from the "famous" Ard Ri, Ugainne Mor.

Conclusions

Having successfully peered through the mists of time, I now know that I am:

- a Carlow Nolan descendant
- a descendant of Feidlimidh Reachtmar, a 2nd century AD Ard Ri of Ireland, married to a **Danish** princess.
- a descendant of Ugainne Mor, a 4th century BC Ard Ri of Ireland, married to a daughter of the king of Gaul/**France**.
- a descendant from a pre-Scythian farmer/trader of the 6th millennium BC

By now as a Nolan you must be feeling that you are related to pretty much everybody else in the world and you are.

DNA results confirm that, as members of the R1b haplogroup, most Nolans are related to 80% of males in Ireland and to 70% of males in Europe. That's a lot of relatives.

Closing Remarks

Although the reconstructed story I have presented to you is essentially an "educated guess" I believe that it does hold value in that it provides a somewhat clearer picture of our distant Nolan past as opposed to the one presented in the Lebor Gabala Erenn, especially as it relates to our ancestors, the Tuatha De Dananns. I also hope that it will serve as a stepping stone for others to follow in my footsteps.

For those wishing to further explore the ancient world of their Nolan ancestor, I invite them to read the references given at the end of the article.

NOTE: You are welcome to volunteer to help writing an article related to Nolan Family Ancient History.

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