

III.

SUTHERLAND AND CAITHNESS IN ANCIENT GEOGRAPHY AND MAPS.

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CAITHNESS.

Ptolemy of Alexandria, who flourished *c.* 140 A.D., compiled a geography of the then known world in eight books, which is such an improvement upon earlier attempts of a similar kind that it continued in use until after the revival of learning in the 15th century. His longitudes were calculated from a point in the Canaries, supposed to be the westernmost part of the world; but he reckoned it as only $2\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ west of Cape St Vincent, whereas the real distance is over 9° . Partly owing to this miscalculation, some countries are thrown considerably out of place when his data are reduced to map form; and this is especially true of Scotland, which from the Clyde and Forth northward is twisted due east, making thence a right angle with England. Notwithstanding this glaring defect, however, his geography of the north of Scotland cannot fail to interest the antiquary in search of light upon the place-names and people of that part.

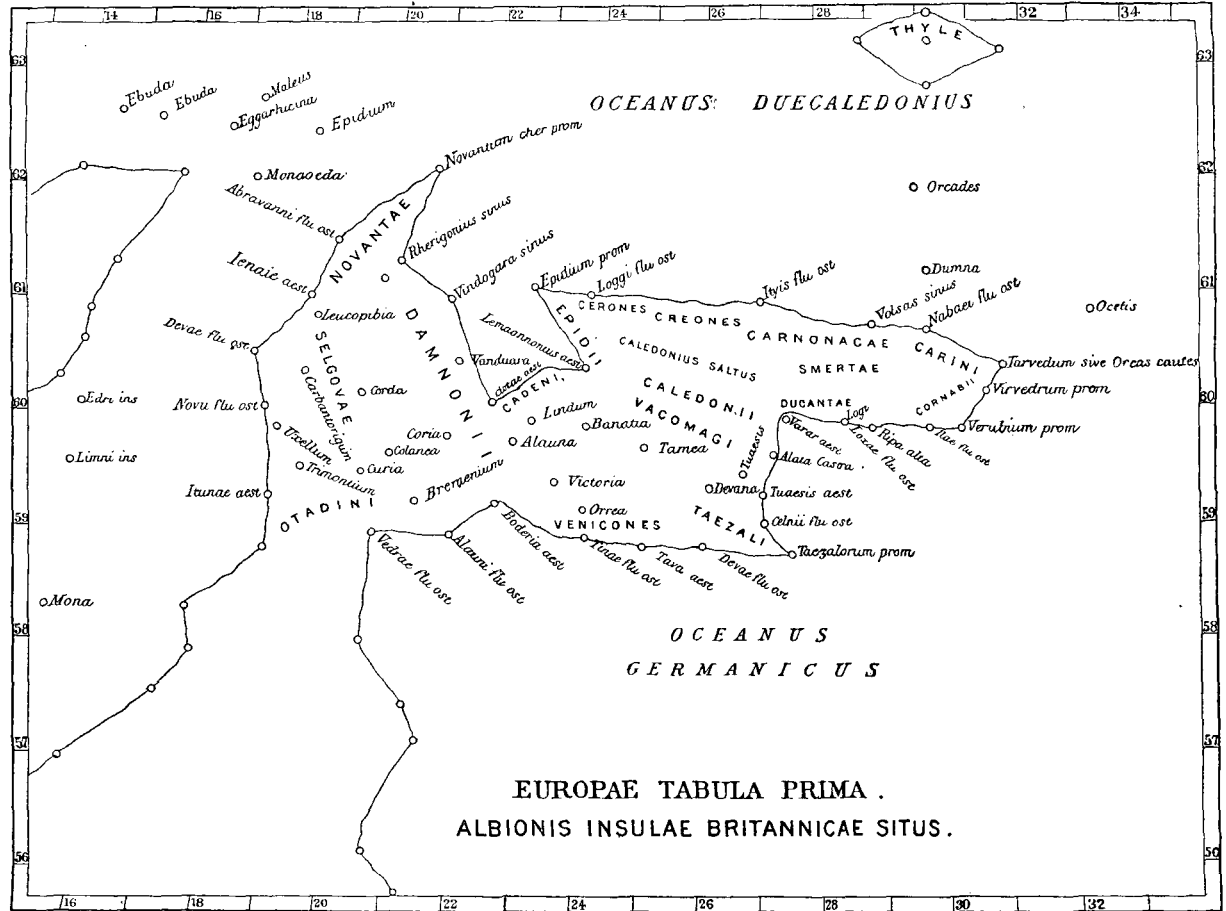
Starting from the *VOLSAS SINUS* in the W., which he sets down in long. 29° and lat. $60^{\circ} 30'$, and which scholars now generally understand to indicate Lochalsh Kyle, the names of the places given by him, working round by the north to the east side, are as follows, with Ptolemaic long. and lat. respectively. The river Nabarus, $30^{\circ} \times 60^{\circ} 30'$; the promontory Tarvedum or Cape Orkas, $31^{\circ} 20' \times 60^{\circ} 15'$; the promontory Virvedrum, $31^{\circ} \times 60^{\circ}$; the promontory Verubium, $30^{\circ} 30' \times 59^{\circ} 40'$; the river Ila, $30^{\circ} \times 59^{\circ} 40'$; and Alta Ripa, $29^{\circ} \times 59^{\circ} 40'$, the bank of the Oykell, between Ross and Sutherland. In the district now called Caithness he locates the Cornavii; the Caereni he places in the Strathnaver country, and the Lugi in South Sutherland. The above too meagre data is all that Ptolemy gives for that part; and we shall

now look at the various names in detail, endeavouring to extract from them their story.¹

CORNAVII.—This was the name of the tribe occupying Caithness, and means “people of the Horn,” from a Celtic root appearing in Gaelic *corn*, Cymric *corn*, Breton *korn*, all cognate with Latin *cornu*, a horn. The people occupying the peninsula between the Dee and the Mersey in England were also designated Cornavii by Ptolemy; while to this day we have Cornwall with its Cornish, and also Cornouaillais, a large district in Brittany to the south of Cape Finisterre, running out into a sharp point. Thus the Cornavii of Caithness got their name from the hornshaped territory which they occupied, as did the others above mentioned. But when the Norseman made his appearance in the north, instead of giving a brand-new name to the land, he translated the old Gaelic *corn* into his own *ness*, a snout or nose, by which he often designates this part, although his most common form was *Kataness*, the Ness of Kata, the name that is still used, and this latter to distinguish it from *Catuv*, Catland, which in his hands became *Sudrland*, now Sutherland, meaning “Southland.”

CÆBRENĪ.—These dwelt in the Strathnaver country and away west towards Assynt. The word is understood to be a Latinised form of the Gaelic *caora*, sheep, as Dr Alexander Macbain and other well-known authorities acknowledge, and means “the sheep people.” The root is also to be found in the Cymric *caeriwrech*, roebuck, and seems to be common to the Celtic languages. About one thousand years after the time of Ptolemy such a name well suited the people of these rugged parts, for this is how Matthew of Paris describes them in his quaint map of c. 1250, “Regio, montuosa et nemorosa, gentem incultam generans et pastorem, propter mariscum et harundinetum” (A mountainous and woody region, producing a people rude and pastoral, by

¹ The map here given is that prepared by Captain Thomas for his paper on “The Ptolemaic Geography of Scotland,” in the *Proceedings*, vol. xi. (1875). It does not show the *Lugi* tribe as it should be shown, but as a place-name *Logi*; and *Nabasi*, at the mouth of the Naver, should be *Nabaei*.



EUROPAE TABULA PRIMA.
ALBIONIS INSULAE BRITANNICAE SITUS.

reason of marshes and fens). This country, so full of straths and so suited for his favourite sheep, the Norseman dubbed *Dalir*, the Dales. In the *Nial Suga*, translated by Dasent, we are told that Earl Sigurd of Orkney held, besides Caithness, the following lands in Scotland, viz. "Ross and Moray, Sutherland and the Dales." Dr Skene, however, in his *Celtic Scotland*, without giving any reason whatever, jumps to the conclusion that *Dalir* is to be found on the west of Scotland; and that it is to be identified with the Dalriada of the Irish annalists. From a plain reading of the saga we should naturally expect to find the "Dales" in question not on the west coast, but in the immediate neighbourhood of Sutherland, and, further, the plural form *dalir* indicates not a single dale but many.

Besides, in the *Orcades* of Torfaeus, as translated by Pope, we hear again of the "Dales," but this time they are associated with Caithness. Evidently by the *Dalir* of the Norsemen we are to understand the collection of straths extending from the borders of Caithness and along the north of Sutherland to Assynt in the west, known at a later period as Strathnaver. To a collection of valleys suited for the pasturage of sheep the Norsemen were prone to give such a name, as, for example, Dalir on the shores of Hvamsfirth in Iceland, and Dalir in the west of Norway—of the latter Rumsdale and Gudbrandsdal form a part. Strathnaver, that was the sheep-rearing country of the Caereni about the beginning of the Christian era, and that was said to be devoted to the pasture of flocks in the 13th century, was depopulated to a large extent and turned into sheep-walks in the early years of the 19th century. It may well be called the country of the Caereni at the present day, for too much of it is under sheep and deer.

LUGI.—This tribe inhabited the coast side of Sutherland from about the river Ila at Helmsdale to the neighbourhood of Strathflete in the south, in other words, what is still known as the *Machair*, lowland by the sea, from Gaelic *magh*, a plain, the most fertile part of the county. An echo of this old name Lugi is still to be found in the parish name Loth,¹ as also

¹ By Gaelic speakers Loth is pronounced *Logh*, with an emphatic *g* sound—*Second Stat. Account, Loth*, p. 188.

in Lothbeg and Lothmore, flat swampy places that had to be drained about a century ago. The low, fertile stretch of maritime land now known as Louth, in Ireland, was in ancient times called *Lug-mag*,¹ Lug-field, showing a change from Lug to Louth not unlike that presented by the forms Lug and Loth in Sutherland.

But Lug was the name of a well-known Irish pagan divinity, whose dwelling was underground, and whose festal day was *Lugnasad*, now *Lunasdainn*, on the 1st of August,² corresponding with the Saxon *Lammas*, originally also a pagan feast. As votive offerings of the first-fruits of the harvest were rendered at Lugnasad, the god Lug was in some way connected with tillage; and the probability is that he was a personification of the humble worm, from Gaelic *lug*, mud-worm, showing in Sutherland the adjective form *lugaideach*, long-necked like a worm. Even so the Celtic divinity Ogma,³ the patron of letters, whence comes ogham writing, derives his name from Gaelic, *og*, later *eag*, a notch.

With Lugi compare Lugu-baliam, the ancient name of Carlisle, as seen in the *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, p. 298, and also the Gaulish Lug-dunum, now Lyons. Both these towns stand at the confluence of rivers, and in a fertile neighbourhood. But to follow up: two thousand years ago the highlanders of Strathnaver were sheepmen and the lowlanders of the Machair were earth-tillers or given to agriculture, a distinction which still holds true.

NABARUS.—This river is undoubtedly the Naver in a Latin dress, showing an older form Nabar or Navar. In various charters of the 13th century it is written Nauir, Navir, and Navyr. And at the present day the word is pronounced by the Gaelic inhabitants Nauer. It has thus undergone very little change during close upon 2000 years. When the river has run about three-quarters of its course to the sea the sacred Loch Mo-Naire, or Loch Mo-Na(u)ir, as it is sometimes pronounced,

¹ De Jubainville's *Irish Mythological Cycle*, p. 172.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 172.

³ Professor Anwyl's *Celtic Religion*, p. 39.

dedicated to some one Nair or Naur, lies within a few hundred feet of its right bank and empties itself into the stream. The name of the loch and river have come from the same root, and as the loch is the sacred object, it probably gave its name to the river, as is not seldom the case in Celtic Gaul.

Indeed, we think it likely that the now common form *Naire*, instead of *Naur*, is due to folk-etymology dating back to about the middle of the 17th century, when the house of Sutherland planted an aggrandising colony of Gordons in Strathnaver in the teeth of vehement opposition on the part of the native people. Hence the traditional saying that there is no virtue in the waters of this loch for a Gordon; but based upon another tradition equally general that the loch owes its virtue to a charmed stone flung in by a woman, who kept crying *mo naire, mo naire* (shame, shame), as she fled with her treasure before a Gordon on robbery bent, and who at the same time invoked a blessing on these waters for the ailing of every name save that of her pursuer. This folk-story, born of the long-cherished hatred of the Strathnaver people towards the Gordons, accounts for the long-drawn-out form Mo-Naire.

Dr Henderson, Lecturer in Celtic, Glasgow University, maintains that Mo-Nair was a Celtic demi-goddess¹ to be frequently met in Irish mediæval literature. If this is correct, in Nabarus we have concealed the name of a Celtic pagan divinity, to which the people of Strathnaver paid their devotion, such as it was, at Loch Mo-Nair on the first Monday of the quarter in the old style, and that down to within the memory of the present writer. The same rites, and at the same times of the year, were observed at St John's Loch, Dunnet, and at St Tredwell's Loch, Papa-Westray. Perhaps at the two latter places the pagan cultus of Nair was grafted on Christian superstition, a very common practice.

TARVEDUM.—This promontory lies some distance to the east of the Naver, according to the data with which Ptolemy supplies us. George Buchanan surmised that it indicates one of the headlands of Strathnaver, for this is what he says in his *History*:—"In ea fronte tria attolluntur

¹ Since writing the above we find it confirmed by other acknowledged authorities.

promontoria; altissimum in Navernia, quod Ptolemæo est Orcas sive Tarvedum" (On that face three promontories jut out; the highest is in the Naver country, which is the Orcas or Tarvedum of Ptolemy). Captain Thomas, in a very important paper on the "Ptolemaic Geography of Scotland," which appeared in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, dated 12th April 1875, is evidently so impressed by the outstanding character of Cape Wrath that he identifies it with Tarvedum, and concludes that Ptolemy made a mistake in locating it to the east instead of to the west of the Naver.

But there is no cause to lay such violent hands upon the geographer's facts in this case, for the alternative name Orcas indicates that it must be looked for to the east, and on that part of the mainland facing Orkney. And it is very probable that Tarvedum is now represented by Holborn Head, on the left side of the bay into which the Thurso river discharges itself. The Thurso, indeed, is the Norse *Thiorsa*,¹ Bull River, a well-known river name in Iceland. But Tarvedum comes from a Celtic root meaning "bull," as seen in Gaelic *tarv*, Cymric *tarw*, and Cornish *tarow*, cognates of Latin *taurus*, and may be compared with the Gaulish Tarve-dunum of Marcian, which means "Bull-fort." The probability is that the old name of the river was Gaelic *Tarva*, that the Norsemen translated this into the Norse equivalent *Thiorsa*, for this seems to be the key which Ptolemy gives in Tarvedum. Even as they turned the Gaelic *corn* into the Norse *ness*, so did they change the Gaelic *tarv* into the Norse *thiorr*. And probably they practised this system of translating the native place-names of Scotland into their own language more frequently than is generally supposed. This is a point on which we would lay special emphasis, for we do not think that its importance is yet sufficiently realised.²

¹ The town of Thurso is Inver-*hiorsa* in Gaelic, showing the Norse form more purely.

² A good illustration of this process may be seen in Loch Long, which means "Ship Loch," from Gaelic *long*, a ship. Ptolemy evidently indicates this inland arm of the sea by his *Longi fluvii ostea*, giving the Celtic name as he found it, but the Norsemen translated it into their own *Skipa Fjorder*, Ship Firth.—Johnstone's *Norwegian Account of Haco's Expedition*, p. 76.

ORKAS.—Ptolemy gives this as an alternative name to Tarvedum Head, which we have just discussed. Diodorus Siculus, who flourished c. 50 B.C., says that Britain is triangular in form, like Sicily, terminating in three promontories, viz. Kantion (Kent) and Belerion (Land's End) in the south, and Cape Orkas¹ in the north. Pinkerton, in his *Inquiry*, suggests that Cape Orkas may be "Dunnet Head in Caithness-shire, the most northern point of Britain, fronting the Orcades." Dr Alexander Macbain² suggests further that Tarvedum and Orkas indicate Holborn and Dunnet, the promontories on either side of the bay into which the Thurso flows. These two views are rather supplementary than contradictory, but we believe that Pinkerton has hit the truth in equating Orkas with Dunnet Head, for it is quite likely that Ptolemy stumbled with his facts when he gave the two names to one promontory.

There is a general agreement that Orkas shows Old Gaelic *orc*, a pig, hence sea-pig or whale, cognate with Latin *porcus*, English *pork*, etc. It is a characteristic of the Celtic languages to drop a radical Indo-European *p*, as, for example, Sanskrit *pitar*, father, while it remains *pater* in Latin, becomes *athair* in Gaelic, and undergoes a similar change with regard to *p* in all the other members of the Celtic group. An exception to this rule, however, the Latin *porcus* remains *porch* in Welsh, while it becomes *orc* in Gaelic according to rule; and to this extent the form Orkas shows greater affinity to Gaelic than to Welsh, although it may be objected without any proof that Welsh *porch* is a loan-word. But Orkas is closely connected in meaning with the place-name Orkney, lying

¹ As Diodorus was only a compiler and not a traveller, where did he get these facts? Mr Charles Elton tells us that Pytheas, an explorer of the 4th century B.C., described Britain as "of a three-cornered shape, something like the head of a battle-axe" (*Origins of English History*, p. 30); and Dr Robert Munro says that Pytheas was the first to make these three promontories known (*Prehistoric Scotland*, p. 3). Owing to distance from a reference library, we have no means of verifying these statements by an examination of the literary fragments of Pytheas; but if they are correct, then the place-name Orkas, which is a Gaelic form, as we shall show in the text above, indicates that a Gaelic-speaking branch of the Celtic race was settled in the north of Scotland in the 4th century B.C.

² *Transactions of Inverness Gaelic Society*, vol. xviii.

directly to the north and not far away. The Irish annalists invariably refer to Orkney as *Innis Orc*, Islands of Orc, or simply *Orc*; while at the present moment the Gaelic-speaking people of Caithness and Sutherland designate Orkney *Arcu*, and the Pentland Firth they know as the *Caol Arcach*, Narrows of Arcu. Evidently the Norsemen accepted the Gaelic name for the islands and called them *Orkn-ey*, Ork islands, for *ey* in Norse means "island"; but the old *Caol Arcach* they altered into *Petsland Fiordr*, because they found Caithness inhabited by the Picts; and yet the older name still survives in the language of the people, although it does not find a place upon our English maps. As Dunnet Head thrusts out farthest into the waters of the channel between Caithness and Orkney, which is still called *Caol Arcach*, it may have for that reason got its name Orkas.

In the map of 1572 given in Bishop Leslie's *History*, Dunnet Head is marked as to-day, but in Mercator's map of 1592 it is marked Quinicnap. The terminal is Gaelic *enap*, a lump or mass, which is very descriptive of the lofty bluff headland now bearing a lighthouse on its cold brow. And the initial *Quini* probably shows Gaelic *cumhann*, narrow, for the headland has a somewhat contracted neck. With this compare Cuinighoe, Narrow Creek, on the east side of Ardneskich, Farr, where the creek is true to its name.

VIRVEDRUM.—This promontory, the next in order after Cape Orkas, indicates Duncansby, the snout or nose of Caithness. Although broad and stretching far out to sea, it is low compared to the other leading northern headlands, especially on the side facing the Pentland Firth, and completely dominated by the neighbouring Warth Hill, 400 feet above sea-level, whence the ground slopes down for a considerable distance to the naze. While Dunnet Head lifts its commanding crown about 500 feet above the sea, even the eastern or loftiest side of Duncansby never rises above 200 feet, and then lies under the Warth Hill. Stripped of its Latin dress, the old name Virvedrum presents the form *For-* or *Far-fothair*, for the *v* here is a digamma with the force of *f*. The initial *For* or *Far* is a well-known old Gaelic word meaning

“high” or “projecting,” and the terminal is the Gaelic compound *fo*, under, and *tire*, land, meaning “underland.” Fother in this sense is quite a common place-name, as in Foderty contrasted to Achterneed (which latter overlooks it and shows Gaelic *uachdar*, over), Strath-*fother*, Inver-*fother* (Dingwall), *Fetter*-cairn, etc. Fother is compounded after the same fashion as Letter, which consists of Gaelic *Leth* and *tire*, meaning “half-slope,” as applied to the side of a glen. Thus Virvedrum means “the projecting underland,” and should be compared with the lofty tongue of land called Faraid in Durness, a softened form of *Far-aird*, “the projecting height.”

VERUBIUM.—This headland is most probably what the Gaelic-speaking people of the north call the *Ceann Dearg*, Red Head, of Stroma; and it is referred to in the *Orkneyinga Saga* as Raudabiorg (Red-cliff) in the Pentland, off which the Earls Thorfin and Rognvald had a fierce sea-fight about the year 1040. Sailing eastward along the north coast of Caithness the voyager beholds its lofty red head from afar, and for shaping a course through the treacherous narrows of the Pentland it is an indispensable landmark. Such a prominent feature was sure to impress the early foreign mariners, who, greatly daring, ventured through these northern seas, and they were almost certain to make a note of it for future reference. The Gaelic *rub*, red, akin to Latin *ruber* and *rufus*, is the root of Verubium; and the initial limb may be Gaelic *Far*, although Ptolemy does not show the double *r*. If our reading is correct, then it means “the projecting red,” a name which exactly describes the *Ceann Dearg*. The Gaelic form of the principal root may be seen in the Irish saint name *Mael-Rubha*, the Tonsured Red, which became Latinised into St Rufus, and even takes the form Rice. Of course, the colour of the rocks suggested the name Red Head. And though Stroma is an island, yet it lies so close to the shore as to be practically a part of Caithness, which parochially it indeed is.

It is but right to state, however, that Captain Thomas identifies Verubium with Noss Head, near Wick, and that he bases his opinion upon the given Ptolemaic position. But too much importance should

not be attached to this, for evidently the geographer is paying particular attention to the features in the immediate neighbourhood of the dangerous Pentland, while from the Kyle of Lochalsh to the Naver he ignores everything, even Cape Wrath.

ILA.—This river is the Helmsdale, in Gaelic Ili; and Helmsdale itself is Bun-ili. Ili is pronounced Ęle, for the Gaelic *i* has always the *e* sound, and in this case the initial *i* is as short as a mere breath. In this respect the word differs from *Ile* (the Gaelic form of the river Isla in Perthshire and of the island of Islay), which has the initial vowel long and seems to come from a different root, although some scholars, ignoring this difference, persist in deriving the two forms from the same source. Various derivations have been suggested for Ila, from Iberian to German and Greek, but at best they seem to us but learned guesses. We venture to suggest that Ęli may be connected with Gaelic *li*, a flood, and that the initial *I* shows the article *in*, whose *u* got swallowed up in the following lingual according to a well-known rule. Thus read it means “the flood.” Compare with this the river Fleet, Gaelic *Floid*, which falls into Loch Fleet, about twenty miles to the south of the Ili. Like the London Fleet River and Fleet Street, the Sutherland Floid is derived from Norse *fljot*, flood, the name of an important stream in Iceland. And so it happens that two neighbour river-names on the east side of Sutherland may be exactly similar in meaning, but the one proclaims itself in the Gaelic *Ili* and the other in the Norse *Fljot*.

ALTA RIPA.—In the 1478 Latin version of Ptolemy these two words are a literal translation of the original two Greek words used by the author, and mean the “High Bank” of some river or firth. From the data given High Bank lies one-third of the distance between Ila and Varar (Beaully Firth), and is evidently the Ekkialsbakki, Ekkial-Bank, of the Norse saga, which is now known as Oykel, between Sutherland and Ross. The place-names Oykel; Ochill Hills; Glen Ogil; Ucal, near Loch Eriboll; Loch Oich, the highest of the chain of lochs forming the Caledonian Canal, etc., are all derived from the same source, a cognate of Gaulish *uxellos*, high, Welsh *uchel*, high, whence some maintain that

these forms show such a pronounced affinity to Gallo-Cymric as to indicate that Pictish belonged rather to the Cymric than to the Gaelic side of Celtic. But the radicals of the above given five forms are Oyk, Och, Og, Uc, Oich, and are related to Gaelic *uchd*, breast, whence *uchdach*, height, and *uchdal*, pertaining to a height; and also to *ug*, top of breast, with Genitive *uige* as in *cnaimh-uige*, collar-bone, showing a stem sufficiently close to Oyk or Oich. Thus Oykell shows every whit as much affinity to Gaelic as it does to Gaulish or Cymric. And while Ptolemy in this case took the Pictish Oykell and translated it back into his own Greek, the Norseman took it as he found it, and stuck *bakki* (bank) to it, so that in the latter's hands it became High Bank or High Height.

From this cursory examination of the ten names with which the old geographer provides us, it may be concluded that in the days of Ptolemy Caithness and Sutherland were inhabited by a people speaking a dialect in close relation to the Gaelic language; and so intimately connected were they with Ireland at this date that the Irish Mo-Nair was invoked in Strathnaver, while the people of the east of Sutherland surnamed themselves by Lug,¹ a name still preserved in our Highland *Lunasdainn* festival, and perhaps also in Ben *Lughal* (Ben Loyal on the map), near Tongue. Not long after Ptolemy's time the inhabitants of the north were known to ancient writers as Picts, and Picts they continued to be when the Norsemen turned up, as witness the form *Pentlands Firth*, a name given by the newcomers to the channel between Orkney and Caithness. To Irish writers they were also known as Cruithne, of which form there still exist traces in the far north. At the south end of the township of Farr, and close by the east side of the road, there stands a circular structure, the remains of a broch perhaps, called *An rath Chruithneach*, the circle of the Cruithne. The name is also found in Assynt

¹ The immediate neighbours of the Lugi to the south are called Smertae by Ptolemy; and Smert was a Celtic goddess, whose name is often met on Gaulish votive tablets. See Prof. Anwyl's paper on "Ancient Celtic Goddesses" in *The Celtic Review*, iii. pp. 26 seq.

attached to some similar object, and probably in not a few other corners unknown to the present writer. In a number of tracts, etc., collected in the *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots* by Dr Skene, the Picts are said to have settled in Caithness at an early date, to have intermarried with Irish women and not with British, and to have spoken the language of their wives. This is how the matter is put in Layamon's *Brut* :—

A certain king "gave them [the Picts] in hand a great deal of land, all about Caithness, where they made homes. . . . They took their messengers and sent to Ireland to the king of the land" for wives, whom he gave to them. "Through the same women, who there dwelt long, the folk began to use Ireland's speech ; and ever since the usages they do in the land"—this last clause is obscure in translation.

The document from which we quote is supposed to have been compiled c. 1200 A.D., but at that date evidently, and far away back in the then hoary past, the language of the Pictish natives of Caithness, the most Pictish part of Scotland, because the most remote, was Gaelic or Ireland's speech. And this is just what we would expect to find if the general opinion of scholars be correct, that the Gaelic branch of the Celts reached Britain first, and that the Brythons, when they came afterwards, pushed the Gaels before them northwards. Though Gaelic is not now spoken by many in Caithness, it should be borne in mind that at the Revolution Settlement of 1689 Gaelic had to be preached in all the pulpits of that presbytery except Dunnet and Canisby, as the ecclesiastical records show. It is not because Caithness was more Norse than Sutherland that it is now more an English-speaking part, but because the Sinclairs, Oliphants, etc., who settled in Caithness during the 15th century, brought along with them south country followers who helped to spread the English tongue in the neighbourhood of their feudal superiors' seats. The Norsemen subdued the people of Caithness, but their language was not destroyed, and as soon as the foreigner took his departure the old language ruled it again in all these borders, nor is it dead yet.

Another fact worthy of notice is that of the six Ptolemaic stations, on the coast line between the Kyle of Lochalsh and the Dornoch Firth,

four are headlands in the surging Pentland Firth—to wit, Tarvedum, Orkas, Virvedrum, and Verubium, with the rivers Nabarus and Ila to the west and south respectively. Evidently the men who provided the geographer with his facts had a wholesome sense of the need of minutely charting these wild waters, so as to make them navigable to the sailors who came thither to trade. Dilettante explorers would roughly record outstanding features, but these men are so practical in what they note that it looks as if there were some trading connection between the north of Scotland and the Mediterranean in the time of Ptolemy. The popular conception of the Northern Picts of the 2nd century is that they were but rude savages, naked save for a coat of paint. But this is utterly false, as the remains found in their fortified brochs or duns abundantly testify. They had querns and spindles, the former to grind their corn and the latter to spin the wool of their flocks. They were quite in a position to export wool, skins, tallow, hides, etc., and we believe they did so, for in the 4th century B.C. the merchants of Marseilles thought it worth while to dispatch the astronomer Pytheas on an exploring expedition to Britain with a view to promote trade with these parts, and the explorer came as far north as Shetland.¹

It is singular that Ptolemy takes no knowledge of the Catti, whence came *Catuv* (Sutherland) and *Kataness*² (Caithness). According to mediæval Gaelic legend Pictish Scotland was divided into seven provinces, of which the most northern was governed by Cat, son of Cruithne, who is said to have given his name to the tribe and territory over which he ruled. In the Bodleian map of c. 1250, however, the Strathnaver and Assynt country is drawn very mountainous, and

¹ Elton's *Origins of English History*, pp. 13-40.

² Cleasby, of Norse dictionary fame, derives Kataness from Norse *kati*, a small ship, and *ness*; but the Norse derivation of the first limb is most improbable in view of the frequent reference in mediæval Gaelic writings to the land of Cait. In the *Felire* (Calendar) of Angus the Culdee (9th century), St Donnan is said to have been commemorated "ii Cattaib," in Catland; and in the Irish additions to the *Historia Britonum* the extremities of Pictland are described as "O chrich Chat co Foirciu," i.e. from the bounds of Cat to Forchu. Like Ore, evidently this part of the country was known as Cat before the advent of the Norsemen, c. 780 A.D.

standing among the hills a cat-like figure is shown, with the legend "Hic habundabant lupi" (Here wolves abound). Gordon of Gordonstoun tells us that the country was infested with wild cats in early times, whence the modern place-name *Catur*, with the name *Cattich* (cats) for the inhabitants.¹ But the probability is that there was a tribe of Catti, which included the Cornavii, Caereni, and Lugi, dwelling in a part of the country where the wolf and wild-cat found abundant cover; for as late as 1427 the barons of Scotland were called upon by an Act of Parliament to extirpate all wolves found upon their lands. And besides this, not without reason did the Norsemen call the north-west shoulder of the country Durness, "Wild-beast ness," from Norse *dȳr* and *ness*.

In the Bodleian map the only town shown in all the northern province is Wyke (Wick), and it has a spired building (a castle or church); but in that of Mathew of Paris no town at all is shown. In Mercator's map a castle is shown on the west side of the Kyle of Tongue, which very probably represents Castle Varrich, and which was then likely inhabited, for in this map no reference is made to Borve Castle, destroyed in 1554. As the map was printed in 1592, the castle must have been occupied up to that date at least. Bishop Leslie shows but one island off the Kyle of Tongue in the map which he gives, and this island he calls Ylen Martyn; but Mercator shows the three, and in this order from the west, Ilen Martin, Shyp Iland, Hyp Iland.

¹ It should be pointed out that Old Gaelic *cat*, Modern Gaelic *cath*, Welsh *cael*, and Old Gaulish *catu-s*, all mean "war"; hence the Catti (warriors), a tribe of Britons in the neighbourhood of Gloucestershire, and the *Catu-riges* (battle-kings), a tribe-name of ancient Gaul. *Vide* Prof. Rhys' *Celtic Britain*. Also from the same root comes *Sucat*, the original or boy name of St Patric the Briton, patron saint of Ireland, a compound of *Su*, good, and *cat*, which may be freely translated into the Scots vernacular "bonnie fechter." *Vide* Prof. Zimmer's *Celtic Church*, p. 38.

If our northern name, however, had been originally derived from Old Gaelic *cat*, war, the present form would rather be the softened *Cathaich*, but instead of that it is the hard form *Cattaich*, meaning "pertaining to cats"; and the Duke of Sutherland is always designated in Gaelic *Diuc Cat*, Duke of Cats. Perhaps the totem of the tribe was the wild-cat.

This is a curious mixture of names, not one of which is ever given to these islands in the Reay papers or in the conversation of the people—no, nor yet in any document that we have seen. The charter and still used names of the three islands given in the same order are *Island nan Gail* (of strangers), *Rona*, and *Island nan Naomh* (of saints) or *Colme* (Columba). Evidently Martin is misquoted for Columba, who had a dedication on Colme; but St Martin also had a dedication on the strath of the Naver, as the well-known holy well, *Tobair Claish Mhartain*, between Ceancoille and Cnubeg, clearly shows. Bread specially prepared, according to the following Gaelic recipe, promoted health when taken along with the water of this well:—

“*Aran air fhuine le connadh,
Is burn a Tobair Claish Mhartain.*”
Bread baked on brushwood,
And water from the well of Martin in the Dell.