

## Ireland and Juvenal ii 160

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### Abstract

Like any authority, A. E. Housman's edition of the Roman satirist Juvenal remains a source for research, including notes in *The Housman Society Journal* on *Rutupiae* in the fourth satire or 'Thule' in the fifteenth. The former is Richborough, Kent; the latter seems to be Iceland, for 'Thule' is apparently a corruption of Greek *Thymele* 'altar-slab'. It implies that the explorer Pytheas discovered Iceland in about 306 BCE, the island's volcanoes and block-like appearance reminding him of fire on an altar. If so, it shows how perception of landscape supports emendation.

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In this paper, we turn from Kent and Iceland to Ireland. Juvenal closes his second satire with a comment on Rome's military might and moral decadence:

arma quidem ultra  
Litora Iuvernæ promovimus et modo captas  
Orcadas ac minima contentos nocte Britannos,  
Sed quæ nunc populi fiunt victoris in urbe  
Non faciunt illi quos vicimus

-- meaning that, even though Roman troops have passed the Irish coast, seizing the Orkneys and capturing Britons accustomed to short summer nights, those defeated tribes do not practice what goes on in the capital of their conquerors. Housman thought the meaning clear. It required no comment (Housman, 1931, pp. 12-14).

Yet, if the text (like Pictish morals) is unexceptionable, *Iuvernæ* 'of Ireland' is not. Its derivation and language of origin have been obscure. In what follows we offer a new etymology for *Iuverna* or *Hibernia* or *Éire* or Ireland. We argue that the Iveri (a people of Ireland's south coast) had a Celtic name meaning 'red warbands', which was eventually applied to the island as a whole. First, however, a review of earlier discussion: a revealing exercise.

We begin with Sir John Rhŷs (1840-1915). He said this. Ptolemy (second century CE) refers to an Irish people called *Ivernii*, whose territory included the stronghold of *Ivernīs* and the river *Iernos*. While Juvenal has *Iuverna*, most Romans substituted *Hibernia*. *Iverna* in a graffito was 'to be seen till lately in the Palace of the Caesars in Rome'; Old Irish has *Ériu*, accusative *Érin*; Welsh has *Iwerddon*; Greek has *Ierne* ('disembowelled of its *v* or *w* by Greek pronunciation') (Rhŷs, 1882, p. 262). Rhŷs later derived *Ériu* from reconstructed *Iverijo*, with *Ivernii* giving Middle Irish *Ierni* or *Erni*, a people represented 'latest and strongest in Munster'. He took as providing a namesake the River Earn, Scotland (but not Lough Erne, Ulster). As for the graffiti in Rome, although they had been 'effaced by the weather', Bishop John Wordsworth (nephew of the poet) was able to supply the text: BASSUS CHERRONESIA ET TERTIUS HADRUMETINUS ET CONCESSUS IVERNA. The three would be slaves. The first, of the 'Cherronese' or Chersonese, came from Gallipoli (or else the Crimea); the second was from the Tunisian coast, where Hadrumetum is today a suburb of Sousse. As for Concessus the Irishman, his name is unusual, although (according to the seventh-century writer Muirchú) the mother of St Patrick was called Concessa (Rhŷs, 1904, pp. 268-9). She and her famous son lived near (emended) *Bannaventa Berniae* 'Bannaventa of a Hill-Pass', which is now Banwell, North Somerset (as proved by the English local historian Harry Jelley in his 1988 book *Saint Patrick's Somerset Birthplace*).

But what does *Iuverna* mean? Rhŷs made a proposal, which a few take seriously even now. Seeking an Indo-European form, and knowing that the initial *p* there is lost in Welsh and Irish, Rhŷs envisaged a Celtic cognate of Greek *piar* 'fat, tallow, suet; oil, cream, fatness' (Rhŷs, 1903-pp. 21-80). The Greek term having a general sense 'fat of the land, cream of a thing, choicest, best', he saw allusions to fertile Ivernian harvest lands or meadows. He perhaps had in mind the 'fat pasture and good' of the Old Testament's Gedor (1 Chronicles 4:40), south-west of Jerusalem. His suggestion has had a long (if intermittent) history.

Early references to the *Erni* or *Ernai* ('one of the three free peoples of Ireland'), of whom some lived near Limerick, others near Kinsale (south-west of Cork), were collected by Edmund Hogan (1831-1917) (Hogan, 1910, pp. 400-1). So they were a community numerous in Desmond (= south Munster). On the form, Sir John Morris-Jones (1864-1929) derived Welsh *Iwerddon* 'Ireland' and Irish *Éirenn* 'of Ireland' from hypothetical Common Celtic *Iuerion-* (Morris-Jones, 1913p. 77). Eoin Mac Neill (1867-1945) went further. In an important analysis, he cast a mocking eye on Rhÿs. For him, the interpretation of ancient *Iverio* as 'fat country' (and so 'fertile country') failed, because *Iverio* means 'country of the Iveri'; unless (he added) 'we suppose the name *Iveri* to be Celtic and to mean "the fat people"!'. In the light of *Iwerddon* and *Éire* (both lacking *n*), Mac Neill took *Iveri* as the original expression, *Iverni* being its adjectival form (the two relating to each other as 'Angles' does to 'English' or 'Scots' to 'Scotch'). Regarding this Irish nation as pre-Celtic, he described a quest for Indo-European etymologies as futile, and instead related *Iveri* to *Iberi* or the Iberians of Spain and Portugal (Mac Neill, 1919, p. 68). Mac Neill did not consider the following eventuality. Welsh-speakers call their land *Cymru*, not 'Wales', which is English; Finns call their country *Suomi*, not 'Finland', which is Germanic; Innuits ('the people') dislike the word 'Eskimos', which is Algonquian for 'eaters of raw meat'. Like Welshmen, Finns, or Innuits, the Iveri or Iverni were perhaps known to others by a name not their own. It accords with *Iveri* > *Iverni*, noun giving adjective in the best Indo-European manner. That said, the boastful interpretation 'red warbands' proposed here is typical of what a Celtic people might call itself. The Iver(n)i may have been as Celtic as anyone else in Ireland.

William Watson (1865-1948) cited Ptolemy's *Ivernia*, but was silent on its meaning. On Strathearn, west of Perth, he understood it as 'Ireland's Strath' and not 'Strath of the River Earn' (although noting objections by Julius Pokorny) (Watson, 1926, p. 228). For Gaelic-speaking migrants in North Britain, it had the implications that 'New England' has for England. Down in Wales, Sir Ifor Williams (1881-1965) took *Iwerydd* in a Welsh elegy of the pre-Norman period as a personal name. It would not allude to Ireland (despite parallels in the text with *Baile Átha Cliath* 'Settlement at the Ford of Hurdles' or Dublin). Lewis and Pedersen gave *Ériu* and *Iwerddon* as exact cognates and (if with no word on 'fatness') namesakes of *Piería*, used of the southernmost province of ancient Macedonia, north of Thessaly and having Pydna as its capital (Williams, 1935, p. 183).

The form then gained the combative attention of Thomas O'Rahilly (1883-1953). He was curt. Ptolemy's Iverni were a people living around Cork; early Irish *Érainn* came from an unattested variant form *Éverni*. Pokorny's 'assertions' on *Iverni* and *Érainn* as unrelated 'are quite baseless' (O'Rahilly, 1946, pp. 41-2). O'Rahilly was cited by Kenneth Jackson (1909-91) for the *Érainn* as 'settled widely across southern and south-western Ireland' from Waterford to Kerry (Jackson, 1950, pp. 197-213). Jackson later derived Welsh *Iwerydd* and *Iwerddon* from reconstructed British *Iuerijū* and (genitive) *Iuerjónos*, with the first vowel long and *u* a semi-vowel (Jackson, 1953, p. 385). Welsh *Iwerydd* (plus variants) occurs as a woman's name elsewhere (Bartrum, 1966, p. 150).

As regards Ireland's ancient non-Irish-speaking populations, David Greene (1916-81) was negative. He rejected O'Rahilly's strongly-held opinions on peoples in Ireland who spoke a tongue resembling not Irish but British or Gaulish, in part because O'Rahilly maintained that Ptolemy's place-names for Ireland derived from Pytheas in the fourth century BCE, a hypothesis which Greene thought unaccepted 'by any competent scholar'. On 'Ivernic', O'Rahilly's term for the

Brittonic speech of the Iverni or Érainn (which he regarded as spoken 'up to at least the seventh century'), all evidence is 'against it', Ivernic peoples having 'brought Goidelic and Oghams to Wales and Scotland long before that' (Greene, 1966, pp. 123-36). It is claimed elsewhere that Ireland was by the Iron Age 'thoroughly Celtic', so that Ptolemy's map of it 'gives Celtic names for the tribes who lived near the southern and eastern coasts' (Norman & St Joseph, 1969, pp. 34-5). Commenting on early Irish history, Binchy observed that all agree on how 'the Érainn were once dominant throughout Munster'; even if many reject O'Rahilly's belief that they were a 'pre-Goedelic' people later subdued by Irish-speakers to the north of them (Binchy, 1970, p. 38).

There are lucid remarks from Sir Ifor Williams. *Iwerydd* in Welsh is an old British nominative; *Iwerddon* an old genitive. When the case system of British broke down in post-Roman times (as it did for Latin, giving modern French or Spanish or Italian), people forgot that *Iwerddon* meant 'of Ireland', so the form 'ousted the old nominative *Iwerydd*' to become standard Welsh for 'Ireland' (Williams, 1972, p. 6). Commenting as a historian (not a linguist), Francis John Byrne spoke of the Érainn or Iverni as an ancient racial group, who were yet completely Irish in language and social structure, despite retaining their identity in Christian times. There are further curiosities. Stones inscribed with ogham, the earliest Irish alphabet, are 'clustered thickest' in south-west Ireland, even though O'Rahilly thought Irish a language imposed on the Érainn (Byrne, 1973, pp. 8-10.). Those commemorated by these monuments have Irish names. In historic times, the Érainn were as Irish as their neighbours. That weakens the case for *Iveri* or *Iuerna* as non-Celtic expressions.

Juvenal's *Iuerna* and Ptolemy's *Ivernia* figure without comment in Rivet and Smith's great book on toponyms (Byrne, 1973, pp. 8-10). Also comment-free on ultimate meaning is an entry on 'Ireland' (Field, 1980, p.91). Pokorny's view (fiercely contested by O'Rahilly) that *Érainn* and *Iverni* have different origins was criticized by Osborn Bergin (1873-1950), who thought them 'neither Celtic nor Indo-European' (Ó Corráin, 1981, pp. 183-97). *Iwerydd*, understood by Ifor Williams as both a toponym and personal name, figures in an edition of the thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen (Jarman, 1982, pp. 65-72). If the form is non-Celtic, its use in Welsh poetry appears strange. Even stranger is the statement in a popular handbook that *Éire* may be from Irish *iar* 'west' and so 'western country' (Room, 1988, p. 185). This is the scholarship of the kind found on tea towels.

The poem on the 'Ford of Iwerydd' at which a warband is urged not to flee has a modern translation (Rowland, 1990, p. 503). Further dismissal of O'Rahilly then came from Karl Horst Schmidt. He quoted Nora Chadwick and Myles Dillon on the case for a Brittonic language in ancient Ireland as 'not convincing', with Pokorny and Greene in agreement (Schmidt, 1991, pp. 64-98). Ancient accounts of Ireland figure in a useful handbook, including ones by Diodorus of Sicily (d. 21 BCE?) and Strabo (d. 21 CE?), who each called the place *Ierne* (Ireland, 1996, pp. 15-16).

At the turn of the century appeared two analyses of present forms. Gregory Toner showed restraint. He followed critics of O'Rahilly for Ptolemy as getting information from sea-traders of his time, and not ancient sources after Pytheas. Toner's emphasis was not on etymology but location, where he noted the mysterious River Iernos as perhaps the misplaced River Erne of north-west Ulster (Toner, 2000, pp. 73-82). Another writer echoes Rhŷs on an Indo-European root meaning 'fat', related to Old Irish *íriu* 'soil, land, earth', from which were 'subsequently derived the name of the country/island' (de Bernardo Stempel, 2000, pp. 83-112). Hence modern 'Ireland'. Difficulties of relating 'fat' to 'soil' are not mentioned.

Up in Scotland, Strathearn and Loch Earn west of Perth found themselves referred not to Ireland (after Watson), but to 'Old European' equivalents for the Oare Water of Exmoor (in west Somerset) or River Ahr (flowing into the Rhine, Germany) (Nicolaisen, 2001, p. 241). There is a problem here. If little is known of ancient Celtic, less is known of pre-Celtic 'Old European', making the subject difficult to talk about. A supplement on Ptolemy and Ireland has a map showing *Ivernioi* in the far south-west (de Bernardo Stempel, 2005, pp. 104-6). A sense 'fat or fertile country' is repeated by John Koch, who thinks that the Iverni, their name formerly meaning 'the "Irish" in general', had by the time of Ptolomy become 'confined to the south-west' Koch (2007, p. 13). He did not reflect that a local name might have been extended to an entire country, just as 'Holland' is used for the Netherlands as a whole, Holland (on the coast) being the Dutch province most familiar to travellers. So, perhaps, for the Iveri on Ireland's south coast. They were the ethnic group first encountered by Greek and Roman traders, who might use their name for everyone in Ireland.

A recent account of the question has much interest. One learns that Rhÿs cited a root meaning 'fat' as early as 1873-5, but then played it down. Suggestions by others are rejected, including one on *Iuerna* or *Éire* meaning 'place known for rain' (its proposer offering no parallel for it, and ignoring the fact that Britain also sees heavy rain). A final derivation is arresting. Professor Theo Vennemann is quoted for the forms as archaic, being Hamito-Semitic and meaning 'place where copper is won', just as Britain was 'place where tin is won' (Broderick, 2009, pp. 151-72). Hamito-Semitic likewise (allegedly) accounts for the names of Scilly, Solent, and (Isle of) Wight (Broderick, 2009, pp. 151-72). Although Latin and Greek dictionaries reveal ancient *Sulina* for the first as Greek for 'Place of Plunder', from the wrecks there (compare *sylao* 'I despoil, pillage'); *Solent* as Latin *Soluentes* '(ships) weighing anchor', the channel being a natural harbour; and *Wight* as Latin *Vectis* 'lever, doorbar', because the island blocked access for Roman navigators to Southampton Water.

Ireland's pre-Goedelic languages have been surveyed again (Mac Eoin, 2009, pp. 159-66). There is a discussion of Watson and Nicolaisen on Strathearn, Scotland, with a preference for Watson (Clancy, 2010, pp. 79-102). Theo Vennemann's wondrous Hamito-Semitic etymologies for the name of Ireland, as also Scilly and the Solent (both alluding to rocks, the latter being those of the Needles), are reproduced in a Norwegian Festschrift (Broderick, 2013, pp. 282-314). But simpler explanations for these have been offered above.

With that, our review of previous work reaches a conclusion, where nothing is concluded. The meaning of *Iuerna* remains elusive. Rhÿs's notion of 'fat' stumbles along, despite Mac Neill's jibe of 1919 on how (if it were true) *Iveri* should mean 'fat people'. All the same, the forms are clear. Rhÿs derived *Ériu* from hypothetical *Iverijo*, with *Ivernii* giving Middle Irish *Ierni* or *Erni*; Jackson derived Welsh *Iwerydd/Iwerddon* from unrecorded British *Iuerfjū/Iuerjónos*. They permit a new solution, on this principle.

The best way to explain toponyms in early Britain or Ireland is not by reaching for lexicons of Sanskrit Arabic or Berber, but ones of Welsh or Irish. As soon as we do that, difficulties melt away. Greek *Prettanoi* 'Britons' allows a link with Welsh *pryd* 'aspect; form' and *prydydd* 'shaper; poet' (also Irish *cruth* 'shape') to indicate a sense of 'well-shaped ones, handsome people'. (No link with tattoos, as some imagine.) British-Latin *Londinium* similarly relates to Welsh *llun* 'figure; appearance' to give an interpretation 'dwelling of Londinos "he who is handsome"'. Londinos (otherwise unknown) presumably had a farm at Cornhill, around which the Romans built London (Breeze, 2014, pp. 311-23). The same technique allows new derivations



elsewhere, whether from Celtic (Devon, Don, Eden, Kent, Leeds, Manchester, Neath, Nidd, Quantock, Salisbury, Severn, Trent, Ure, Wear, Wharfe, Worcester, Wroxeter, York), Greek (Scilly), or Latin (Humber, Solent, Wight).

What, then, do reconstructed Common Goedelic *Iverijo* and British *Iueríjū* imply? An answer is supplied by Welsh *gwerin* 'ordinary folk, peasantry' (also formerly 'host, warband') and *yw* 'yew-trees'. A 'warband' sounds promising for the *Iverni* (of fighting prowess); 'fat' does not. As for 'yew-trees' (sacred to the Celts), the concept is better taken as that of 'red', these evergreens being named from their red-brown bark (not their toxic scarlet berries). So there is a case for the *Iveri* or *Iverni* as 'red warbands'.

The details are these. Welsh *gwerin* is the exact cognate of the Irish *foireann* 'band, troop'. Modern *foireann laoch* is 'band of warriors'; *foireann oifige* is 'office staff'. Both have been derived from unattested Common Celtic *uarina* (Lloyd-Jones, 1931, p. 63). *Gwerin* and *foireann* also (one notes) mean 'chessmen', chess being a game of battle, a war-game (Williams, 1938, p. 205).

The first element of *gwerin* and *foireann* goes back to Indo-European *uer-* (with *u* a semi-vowel). This *uer-* is one of several, which (confusingly) are the same in form but have different origins and meanings. The present *uer-* has the senses 'bind, hang; rope. string; row, list; swarm, company, host, troop, warband'; it gives Old English *worn* 'multitude' and Russian *verenitsa* 'row, file, line, string'. It differs from the other roots *uer-* behind Welsh *gweryn* 'warble-fly' and *gweryn* 'river' (on which see below). As for *yw* 'yew trees', it is the cognate of Gaulish *Ivo-* (attested in toponyms) and Irish *eo*, both meaning 'yew'. These in turn (like English *yew*) are referred to Indo-European forms containing the root *ei* 'red' prefaced by a glided neutral vowel, and themselves giving Latin *uva* 'grape' (a reddish fruit) and Greek *oa* 'wild service-tree' (which has reddish-brown berries and is related to the mountain ash) (*Geiriadur*, 2002, p. 3872).

Now, the use of colour in denoting persons is easily shown. Compare Gaulish *albo-* 'white' or *donno-* 'dark, brown' or *vindo-* 'white'; also relevant (?) to *Iveri* is the personal name *Verinus* in an inscription at Alzey (south of Mainz, in the Rhineland) (Evans, 1967, p. 295). As for *gwerin*, early Welsh or Cumbric bards demonstrate its force. In the late sixth century, Taliesin wrote *a gwerin a grysswys*, 'and the men charged'; in or after 603, Aneirin spoke of a *gwerin fraeth fysgyolyn*, 'ready and speedy war-band', *gwerin* here being distinguished from archaic Welsh *gweryn* 'river' (or *gweryn* 'warble-fly') (Williams, 1968, pp. 77-103). As for the element 'red' in Welsh *ywen* and Irish *eo* 'yewtree', although unattested as a separate word, it is yet seen as present in *Mayo* if meaning 'red plain' (not 'plain of yew trees') and other Irish toponyms (O'Connell, 1979, p. 62).

Particular information on colours and nations is provided by the Vindelici, whose territory lay around modern Augsburg (in south-west Bavaria). The first element of their name means 'white', the second perhaps 'flat rock', as with Welsh *llech* 'slab, slate' (Sims-Williams, 2006, p. 123-4). The name of this people is certain thanks to eulogies (4, 14) in book four of Horace's *Odes*, the poet in the latter congratulating Augustus on conquering them:

quem legis expertes Latinae

Vindelici didicere nuper

quid Marte posses

-- the Vindelici, 'ignorant of Roman law', having just learnt what the Emperor (with aid from the god of war) is capable of.

Let us sum up. What do Gaulish *Ivo-* and the hypothetical root *uer-* imply for *Iver(n)i* and *Iuerna*, as also Welsh *Iwerddon* 'Ireland'? There are four possibilities. Three can be rejected at

once, as follows. Welsh *gwernyn* 'river' and *gwernyn* 'warble-fly' are related to other roots *uer-*. Welsh dictionaries cited above suggest, for the first, an origin in *uer-* 'water' (also seen in *gwêr* 'fat'); for the second, *uer-* 'coil, twist' or *uer-* 'protuberance'. None of the three provides good sense for Iveri, unlike the fourth root *uer-* 'company, host, warband' of *gwerin* and *foireann*. It is yet curious that *gwerin* is derived via a hypothetical *uarina* not proposed for either *gwernyn*. If a stage with *-uar-* can be eliminated, it facilitates an etymology for *Iveri* in the root *uer-* 'warband'.

If so, *Iveri* may be taken as 'red hosts' (not 'hosts of yew-trees', which would be 'Ivoveri'). It could be reconstructed from Common Celtic *ei-ver-*, with the first element prefixed by a glided neutral vowel. If the Vindelici were people of the white stone, the Iver(n)i were those of red warbands. There are two implications for this.

The etymology weakens the case for pre-Goedelic nations in Ireland. Celtic in their ogham inscriptions, nomenclature, social structure, the Iver(n)i or Érainn were Celtic in their name. Second, they were a people given to war, resembling other aggressive polities: the Catuvellauni 'ones strong in battle' around St Albans; the Coriosolitae ('war-band of (the royal) hall' in north-east Brittany; the Demetae 'good cutters-down (of foes)' in Dyfed, West Wales (compare Welsh *medi* 'reap, cut down'); the Ordovicians 'hammer-fighters' of Gwynedd, North Wales (Falileyev, 2010, p. 14). The military classes of all these announced themselves as menacing warriors.

So the Iveri or Iverni of Munster were the 'red warbands' who gave forms set out by Juvenal and Ptolemy, as also modern *Éire* or Ireland. It brings us back to Housman the poet, for whom fighting and differences between Celt and Saxon were obsessive themes, with Shrewsbury town their combined or compressed symbol:

The flag of morn in conqueror's state  
Enters at the English gate:  
The vanquished eve, as night prevails,  
Bleeds upon the road to Wales.

A sensibility on such things goes, then, with the interpretation of *Ierne* or *Iverni* or *Iuverna* or Ireland as '(land of the) red warbands', and nothing to do with 'rain' or 'fat' or 'copper'.

NOTE. After this paper was first submitted to its editor, there came to hand Alexandra Madela, 'The Sacred Island', *Classics Ireland*, 26 (2019), 25-9, citing a paper of 2009 by G. R. Isaac on Ireland's name, which reaches conclusions quite different from those offered above.

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