

## On some connections of Celtic and Baltic peoples

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### Abstract

In ancient times both Celtic and Baltic languages were spread in the vast areas of central and northern Europe. It's possible that Celtic and Baltic tribes met on the trade route Amber Road which took place from the North Sea and the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean Sea since the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC. In this paper I want to consider a grammatical feature that is common to Celtic and Baltic languages: nominative singular case marker *-as* that is seen best in Scottish Gaelic (and also traced in Old Irish, Irish, Cornish, and Welsh) and Lithuanian, and also about some common place names and a common god.

**Keywords:** Celtic, Baltic, Gaulish, Scottish Gaelic, Old Irish, Irish, Cornish, Welsh, Lithuanian, Old Prussian

### 1. Introduction to the problem

The main problem and our subject in this article is singular nominative case (masculine) marker *-as*. The ending occurs both in Lithuanian and Scottish Gaelic. It's not an accident because *-as* endings also appear in Old Irish and in some other Celtic languages (Welsh, Cornish, Irish, very rarely Manx, but not in Breton). A similar variant *-is* also appears in Proto-Celtic, for example: *\*knamis* "leg". Cornish has *tavas* "language; sheep", Welsh has *barddas* "poetry", Primitive Irish has *rigas* "king", Irish has *Oireachtas* "Parliament" etc.

In other Baltic languages than Lithuanian, - Samogitian, Latvian, Latgalian and Old Prussian - *-as* is usually shortened to *-(s)s*. For example, *vaikas* "child" (Lithuanian) is *vaiks* in Samogitian, *bērns* in Latvian, *bārns* in Latgalian, and *malnīks* in Old Prussian.

Let's look at some of many examples with *-as* in Scottish Gaelic.

- 1) *bunadas* "foundation", "origin" – Lithuanian *kilimas*,
- 2) *barrachdas* "predominance", "preponderance" – Lithuanian *pirmavimas*,
- 3) *banas* "wifehood" – Lithuanian *moteriškumas*,
- 4) *giuthas* "pine" – Lithuanian *pušis*,
- 5) *gnothachas* "business" – Lithuanian *verslas*,
- 6) *subhachas* "celebration", "festivity"; "cheerfulness", "joyfulness", "mirth" – Lithuanian *šventimas*, *džiaugsmas*
- 7) *seachadas* "tradition" – Lithuanian *paprotys*,
- 8) *dualchas* "heritage, tradition" – Lithuanian *palikimas*, *paprotys*,
- 9) *fàidheantas* "mysticism" – Lithuanian *misticizmas*,
- 10) *eòlas* "knowledge"; "science"; "spell", "incantation" – Lithuanian *žinojimas*, *žinija*, *žinios*; *mokslas*; *burtas*.

As we can see from some of the many examples, the meanings of these words are very important to any culture as they encompass tradition, lore, spells, mysticism, literature, cures, progress, manliness, success, goods, etc. We think that there could have been a “lost language of Northern Europe”, which had connections to both Celts and Balts, and which included the main meanings. It may have been used on the Amber Road as a lingua franca, as well.

Singular nominative case marker *-as* is the feature which is much older than Scottish Gaelic and can be traced back to Old Irish *-as* (from Proto-Celtic *\*-assus*, from Proto-Indo-European *\*-ad-tus*). Here are some examples:

1. *adaltras* “adultery” – Lithuanian *svetimavimas*;
2. *Bretnas* “the Welsh language” – Lithuanian *valų, velsiečių, kimrų kalba*;
3. *brithemnas* “judgment”, “adjudication”, “jurisdiction” – Lithuanian *teisingumas; jurisdikcija*;
4. *flaithemnas* “rule”, “sovereignty” – Lithuanian *valdymas, suverenumas*;
5. *óclachas* “the age of manhood”, “manly vigor”, “valor”, “quality of a warrior”; “service”, “vassalage” – Lithuanian *vyriškumas, karingumas, patarnavimas*;
6. *testas* “testimony” – Lithuanian *liudijimas*.

Singular nominative case marker *-as* could be found not only in Gaelic Celtic languages, but also in Brythonic Celtic languages (mainly Welsh and Cornish). In Welsh, *-as*, as in Lithuanian, forms abstract nouns:

1. *teyrn* (“monarch, king”) + *-as* → *teyrnas* (“kingdom”),
2. *bardd* (“poet”) + *-as* → *barddas* (“poetry”),
3. *urdd* (“order, honour”) + *-as* → *urddas* (“honour, dignity”).

It also should be noted that *-ās* (*-ās*) as in proper name Κώστας (Kóstas) is common in Greek. The nominative singular ending of masculine first-declension nouns *-ās* exists in most dialects of Greek. It’s a metanalysis of *\*-sants*, a combination of the typical suffix of the first aorist active stem *\*-sa* and *\*-nts* (from Proto-Indo-European *\*-onts*). Several other participial formations also descend from a form in *\*-nts*: the present active *-ων* (*-ōn*), the second aorist active in *-ών* (*-ōn*), the contracted present active and contracted future active in *-ών* (*-ōn*), the aorist passive in *-είς* (*-eís*), and several present active and aorist active athematic forms like *ιστάς* (*histás*) and *στάς* (*stás*).

## 2. Common god of Balts and Celts

More than this, Balts and Celts had at least one important common god and its name has similar meanings in Celtic and Baltic languages.

Baltic god *Diviriksas* (*Diveriksas*) is a euphemistic name of Perkūnas (known as *Perun* in the Slavic world, and *Perkele* in the Finnic world). It’s mentioned in Hypatian Codex (13th century) as *Dievo rikis* or *Dievo rykštė* (*God’s bishop*, *God’s whip*) as one of the main gods worshiped by king Mindaugas. Marija Gimbutas and Algirdas Julius Greimas thought that *Diviriksas* is the highest god of the Balts, and Vladimir Toporov and Gintaras Beresnevičius considered him as *Perkūnas*.

Mythologist G. Beresnevičius (Beresnevičius 2004) wrote that *Diviriksas* is the same as Celtic god *Teutates / Toutatis*, also known as *Toutiorix* „ruler of the nation“. Gaulish god *Toutatis* is related to a very old European substrate word reconstructed as PIE *\*tewtéh<sub>2</sub>* „people“, „tribe“. But clear cognates of the word are found only in Italo-Celtic, Baltic and Germanic languages. In Proto-Celtic, it's *\*toutā* (its descendants - Gaulish names *Toutātis*, *Toutorīxs* and *Toutowalos*, Gaulish *touta*, *teuta*, Breton and Welsh *tud*, Cornish *tus*, Old Irish *túath*, Irish and Scottish Gaelic *tuath*, all meaning the same – „people“, „folk“; in Scottish Gaelic it also has meaning „North“, „northern“, which is important here as shows the location of the folk). In Proto-Baltic, it's *\*t(j)autā?* (Latvian, Latgalian, Samogitian *tāuta*, Lithuanian: *tautà* „nation“, „people“, „folk“; Old Prussian: *tauto*, *tāutā* „country“).

As we see, one of the main concepts – nation, people, tribe, folk, country – is common to both Celtic and Baltic languages. That may show their common past.

The other word which is important here is the second sand of *Diviriksas* – Lithuanian *rikis*, or Proto-Celtic *\*rextus* „rule, law“ (Middle Breton *rez*, *reiz*, Cornish *ryth*, Middle Welsh *reyth*, Welsh *rhaith*, Old Irish *recht*, *rect*, Irish *reacht*, Scottish Gaelic *reachd*, Manx *reiltys*) (Matasović 2009). So, basically, *Toutiorix / Toutatis / Teutates / Diviriksas / Diveriksas* is „People's law“ or „God's law“. According to P.-M. Duval (Duval 1993), he was a tribal protector and one of three Celtic gods mentioned by the Roman poet Lucan in the 1st century AD, the other two being Esus ("lord") and Taranis ("thunderer").

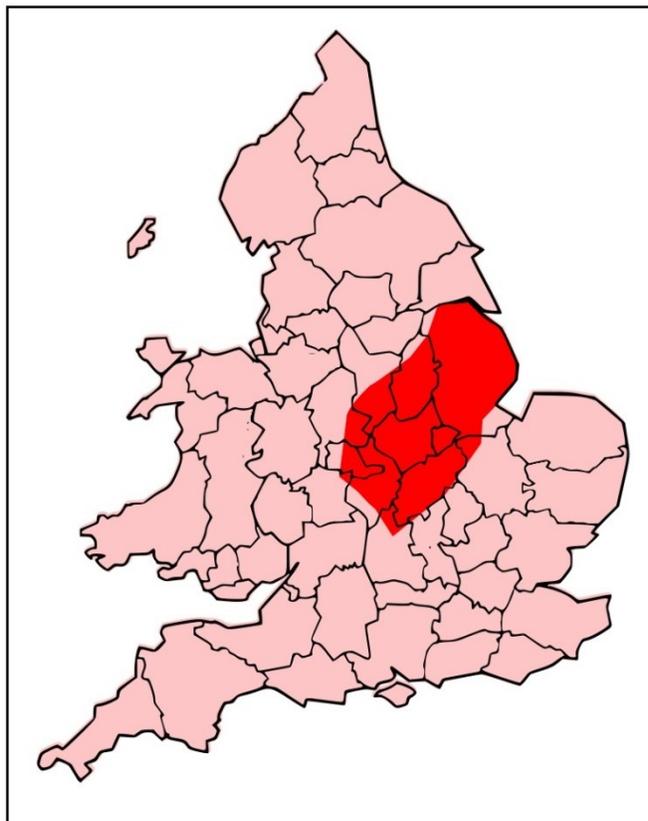


Fig. 1. The scheme showing the territory of the Corieltauvi tribe overlaid in red in the context of the modern county boundaries of England and Wales (image source – Corieltauvi)

Many inscriptions and Romano-British finger rings inscribed with the name „TOT“, thought to refer to Toutatis, were found in the United Kingdom. Paul-Marie Duval argues that each tribe had its own toutatis („father of a tribe“); he further considers the Gaulish Mars as the product of syncretism with the Celtic toutates, noting the great number of indigenous epithets under which Mars was worshipped. The distribution of these rings closely matches the territory of the Corieltauvi tribe (see fig. 1) (for more details see Toutatis).

### 3. Similar place names in Celtic and Baltic countries

The native name of Cornwall is Kernow. It reminds me of one of the capitals of old Lithuania - Kernavė, that was named after legendary knight Kernius (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Map showing locations of Kernow (Cornwall) and Kernavė (map has been made after Google maps screenshot)

The common folk etymology of the name of Lithuania (Lietuva) says it's from rain (*lietus*). But it most probably is related to Welsh *Llydaw* which means "Brittany" and comes from Old Welsh *Litau* "continent", "country".

Baltic peoples never called themselves Baltic. The term was coined by linguist Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann (1811-1881), who in his book "Die Sprache der alten Preußen" (*The language of the Old Prussians*, 1845), suggested the term "Baltic languages".

Lithuania and Latvia (and Old Prussia, *Prūsa*, which now is Kaliningradskaya oblast, Russia, and Poland) are near Baltic sea – Lithuanian *Baltijos jūra*, most probably from Lithuanian word *baltas* "white", which is derived from Proto-Indo-European *\*b<sup>h</sup>el-*; Latvian and Samogitian *balts*, Latgalian *bolts*, Old Prussian *gāils*. The other version of etymology of *baltas* is related to Celtic (Gaulish)

healing / sun god Belenos “bright one, shining one”. This version doesn’t contradict to Lithuanian “white” one.

The earlier term of Baltic peoples / Lithuanians was the Aesti (also Aestii, Astui, or Aests), who were an ancient people first described by the Roman historian Tacitus in his treatise *Germania* (circa 98 AD). As Wiki puts it, “according to Tacitus, the territory of Aesti was located somewhere east of the Suiones (Swedes). The Aesti had the same customs and attire as the Germanic Suevi. It has been suggested that the Aesti worshipped the mother of the gods, similar to the Nerthus cult among northern Germanic peoples. Tacitus wrote that the Aesti were “the only people who collect amber – *glæsum* is their own word for it – in the shallows or even on the beach”. *Glæsum*, an apparently Latinised word for amber, is the only surviving example of the Aestian language; it resembles the later Latvian equivalent: *glīsis* or *glēsa*. The word is possibly of Germanic origin, given its similarity to the Gothic word *glas*. Tacitus, however, describes their language as closer to that spoken in Britain (*sic*) than that spoken by other neighboring tribes. The Old Prussian and modern Lithuanian names for the Vistula Lagoon, Aīstinmari and Aistmarēs, respectively, appear to derive from *Aesti* and *mari*, *marios* (“lagoon” or “fresh-water bay”), which suggests that the area around the lagoon had links with the Aesti.”

E. Jovaiša (Jovaiša 2020) suggests that the Western Balts (first of all, Prussians) were the Aestii.

#### 4. Conclusion

Celtic and Baltic peoples and languages have many things in common, first of all, the nominative case marker *-as*. The similar place names in the Celtic and Baltic countries (Kernow and Kernavė, Litau and Lietuva), and similar names of an important god (Toutiorix / Toutatis and Diviriksas) lead us to the same thinking pattern.

We want to propose that the Aestii (Balts) could have been one of many disappeared Celtic tribes. Perhaps, trying deeper to investigate this, we could go into the subject which Schrijver (2007) calls “lost languages in Northern Europe”.

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