Ireland

Ireland is not the prime concern of this website, and its main author cannot claim to know its landscape and history really well. Nevertheless, Ireland does offer useful insights into the earliest geographical names of western Europe, because it was never conquered by the Roman army. Importantly, there is just one main source for its earliest names: Ptolemy's Geography names 53 of them. So all of Ireland can be tackled in this one article.

The locations of Ptolemy's Irish names have long been discussed, with recent attempts to improve the logic by Darcy and Flynn (2008), Kleineberg, Marx, and Lelgemann (2012), Warner (2013), and Counihan (2019). The present article was begun partly to help the work of Dmitri Gusev and colleagues, which is still only partly published at a conference. It takes the best Greek spellings from Stückelberger and Graßhoff (2006). Each name is transcribed once into the Latin alphabet and its position in Ptolemy's text is reported as 2,2,2 or similar.

In the words of one website: "The tribal and place-names in Ireland listed by Ptolemy were Celtic, and many survive in Old or Middle Irish forms." This is a reasonable view, but the hard work of historical linguists (notably de Bernardo Stempel, 2000,2005) to find parallels in Celtic languages for elements in early Irish names has had disappointingly little success. This led Mallory (2013) to stress how much Ptolemy's text might have been corrupted over the centuries. However, as name-to-place assignments have improved, with better geographical understanding and access to reliable texts, the linkage between Ireland's earliest names and written Celtic languages has got weaker.

In Scotland the earliest names of the Western Isles (supplied by the Ravenna Cosmography more than by Ptolemy) are almost totally disconnected from later Gaelic names at the same places, as discussed here and by Broderick (2013). Furthermore, many names in north-west Britain that are transparently Celtic may have been freshly created centuries after Ptolemy (James, 2011). So it is reasonable to think that many of Ptolemy's names in Ireland were "Old European" or "pre-Celtic".

Mallory (2013, chapter 9) discussed when Celtic speech first reached Ireland, and inclined to a view that it was well after 1000 BC, possibly with the arrival of a culture associated with hill-forts and iron weapons. I am starting to wonder if even that date is too early, so that Gaelic had not really crystallised as a language, or had not widely prevailed over earlier dialects (whether Indo-European or not), much before Ptolemy's day.

As will become clear below, Ptolemy's names in Ireland can be interpreted with much the same logic as in Britain. The key difference is that Ireland was never administered by the Roman army, with its multi-ethnic, often Germanic, personnel. Even though Latin did not arrive seriously before the Christian church, dictionaries of Latin and Greek still need to be scoured for parallels missed by previous investigators. All possibly relevant PIE roots must be checked, not just those known to have Celtic descendants. Shipborne traders supplied many of Ptolemy's names, which were mainly navigation markers or places where customers might gather, so exotic languages (Punic, Basque, Uralic) might be in play, too. Above all, geographical character of places can help decide among competing name etymologies.

In what follows, OI means Old (or mediaeval) Irish, OE means Old English, and PIE means proto-Indo-European. PIE roots are mostly cited in the style of Watkins (2011), and accents on Greek letters are avoided. References without hyperlinks can be found in this website's main reflist. Note that the consonant generally written and pronounced W in English was OY (ου) in Ptolemy's Greek, V in Latin, and became F in Irish.

Let's start at the northern tip of Ireland and tour clockwise around the coast, listing (and trying to locate) all the promontories, river mouths, and islands mentioned by Ptolemy.

Βορειον ακρον (*Boreion* 2,2,2) was ancient Greek for 'northern point', probably Malin Head.

Ουεννικνιον ακρον (*Wenniknion* 2,2,2), was probably Inishowen Head, the eastern tip of Donegal, by the entrance to Lough Foyle. It was presumably named from people called *Ουεννικνιοι, compounded from two elements found right across ancient Europe: See under *Venta* how a name referring to a river basin now seems preferable that a link to *wen-* 'friends, our people'; *–ikno* (and similar forms) was patronymic, not implying close relationship 'son of' so much as 'descendant',

rather like Mac-, or like –son in British surnames. This name may perhaps survive in [Dunfanaghy](#) and [Fanad](#).

Ουιδουα (or Ουδια) river mouth (*Widua* 2,2,2) was the Foyle, evidently named from PIE [*widhu-](#) 'tree', whose descendants include OE [*widu*](#) and OI [*fid*](#). This might refer to the mouth of Lough Foyle out towards the open sea, but more likely to further inland where the later name Derry referred to "extensive [woodland](#) that once covered much of the east bank of the River Foyle".

Αργιτα river mouth (*Argita* 2,2,2) was the river Bann through Coleraine, a name based on PIE [*arg-](#) 'white', hence Greek αργης 'bright, shining' or words for 'silver' such as Irish [*argat*](#) or Latin [*argentum*](#). Celticists have suggested the river's waters were considered 'shining' by local people, but it seems more likely that mariners would have noticed the extensive white sands in an estuary extending well inland in Ptolemy's day, and now represented by [Portstewart Strand](#) and sand dunes.

Ροβογδιον ακρον (*Robogdion* 2,2,2) was probably Fair Head, the north-north-eastern tip of Ireland opposite Rathlin Island (Ptolemy's [Ρικινα](#)), though one cannot totally rule out other extremities, including Benbane Head (near the Giants Causeway) or Runabay Head. The name probably meant something like 'front curve', referring to the general shape of the coastline, where –bogd- (seen also in [*Medibogdo*](#) and compare OE [*boga*](#) 'bow') probably came from *bheug- 'to bend' plus a D/T ending that turns a verb into an abstract noun (compare Dutch [*bocht*](#) 'bend' and English bight). [*Ro-*](#) is often described as a Celtic intensive prefix (Delamarre 2003:260-1), meaning 'very', but it descends from [*pro-*](#) so here the sense is 'before, in front of'. However, the loss of P, from *Pro-* to yield *Ro-*, is a distinctively Celtic trait.

Λογια river mouth (*Logia* 2,2,8) was probably the river Lagan into Belfast Lough. PIE [*loig-](#) 'to jump' led to OI [*loeg*](#) 'calf', hence debatable [claims](#) about 'sea inlet of the calf'. A more likely leaping animal is the salmon (PIE [*laks-*](#), with descendants in most north-European languages, including lax or [lox](#) in English). Efforts are now under way to make the Lagan run with salmon again, as it must have done in Ptolemy's day and as its namesake [Lagan](#) in Sweden still does.

Ουινδεριος (or Ιουινδεριος) river mouth (*Winderios* 2,2,8) probably meant something like 'pleasant river', which does not much help in deciding between possible candidates that would fit Ptolemy's coordinates: Strangford Lough, suggested by Warner (2013); or the small river Fane well to the south, suggested by Gusev et al; or Dundalk Harbour, which is fed by at least four rivers. This name starts like [*Vindo-*](#), seen in place names in Britain and elsewhere, which is commonly claimed to be Celtic for 'white' but is much more likely to mean 'pleasant, happy, fair', from the PIE root [*wen-*](#), whose descendants include OI [*fine*](#) 'clan, family', English winsome, Latin *Venus*, etc. The –rios part probably came from PIE [*reiə-*](#) (or *er-*) 'to flow (fast)', as in the river Rhine or OE [*ryne*](#) 'water channel'.

Ισαμνιον ακρον (*Isamnion* 2,2,8) brings to mind many early river names across Europe that began with *Is-* (discussed under [*Isca*](#)), which probably came from PIE [*ei-*](#) 'to go'. For the –amnion part, Celticists favour a meaning like 'under' or 'standing below', though Latin [*amnis*](#) 'river' looks very similar. Either way, Ισαμνιον would make sense as derived from *Ισαμνιοι people living in a river valley under the very visible Mountains of Mourne. Identifying their ακρον would then depend upon the identity of Ουινδεριος: if it was Carlingford Lough or Dundalk Harbour the headland leading to Ballagan Point and Cooley Point is most likely, whereas, if it was the river Fane, Dunany Head or Clogher Point are better.

Βουουινδα (or Βουβινδα) river mouth (*Bouwinda* 2,2,8) has long been identified with the river Boyne, explained as meaning 'white cow', but claims that *Bouwinda* was a river goddess who evolved into [*Boann*](#) mentioned in [mediaeval Irish texts](#) have fallen out of fashion.

Εβλανα πολις (*Eblana* 2,2,8) was a coastal place where people gathered, most likely the promontory fort and harbour at [Drumanagh](#), near Loughshinny, where archaeologists have found traces of a possible Roman trading post. This would perfectly fit Εβλανα being a compound of *eb- 'off', much like Latin or German [*ab*](#), from PIE [*apo-*](#), (as seen in [Εβουδαι](#)), and *lana 'piece of land', as in [*Vindolanda*](#), from PIE [*lendh-*](#), from which Welsh [*llan*](#) came to mean 'enclosure' then 'churchyard' then 'village'.

Εδρου (or Αδρου) νισος (*Edru* 2,2,12) was Lambay island, near the large headland fort at Drumanagh, north of Dublin, which together may have traded with Roman Britain, especially

Dobunni from the Severn Estuary. PIE *sed-* 'to sit, settle' had descendants in many languages, including Greek ἑδρα (*hedra*) 'sitting place' whose many specific uses included 'base for ships'.

Οβοκα river mouth (*Oboca* 2,2,8) was almost certainly the river Liffey through Dublin, not the Avoca. This name looks very like a compound of **oba* 'river (bank)' discussed here plus the pan-European adjectival ending that led to Latin –*acus*, English –*ic*, etc. The clear implication is that Dublin people were engaged in trade at the water's edge centuries before the Vikings arrived.

Λιμνου νισος (*Limnu* 2,2,12) was an island south of Εδρου and close to Dublin. It has been identified with Dalkey island, which is tiny, as is Ireland's Eye, but it is probably better to guess that the Nose of Houth peninsula was at least a tidal island in Ptolemy's day. The name is much more likely to derive from Greek λιμην 'harbour' than from Celtic words for 'smooth' or 'elm'.

Μαναπια πολις (*Manapia* 2,2,8) was a settlement south of Dublin, of the Μαναπιοι, who were probably not part of a travelling **Menapii* tribe, as explained under *Manavi*. Whereas in Belgium *Man-* makes best sense as 'man', in Ireland 'outstanding, prominent, high' (James, 2014:2,268), from PIE *men-* 'to project', may be better. That might refer to mounds like those in the Boyne complex, but if –*apia* referred to water that might refer to the Wicklow Mountains, as a sort of Irish Lake District. For the actual πολις a reasonable guess might be Rathgall hill fort

Μοδονου (or Μοδουννου) river mouth (*Modonu* 2,2,8) was the river Slaney into the harbour at Wexford, whose name originated as Old Norse for its mudflats. Words such as Dutch *modder* 'mud' probably descend from PIE *meu-*, also the apparent source of OI *muad*, a word with many meanings including 'damp', which named the river Moy (at the other end of Ireland).

Ιερον ακρον (*Hieron* 2,2,6) was ancient Greek for 'sacred promontory' at Carnsore Point, the south-east extremity of Ireland. Near there is the "Lane of Stones" and the wider area has a fair sprinkling of megalithic monuments. If the spelling Ουοδιαι for people there can be relied upon, it might refer to seers.

Βιργου river mouth (*Birgu* 2,2,6) was the river Barrow at Waterford Harbour. Βιργου would make excellent sense derived from PIE *bhergh-* 'to hide, to protect', a root related to (or confused with) another PIE *bhergh-* 'high, hill', which led to the English word barrow. There is an interesting parallel in Birgu, the historic capital of Malta, inside Grand Harbour, and also in Pergamon from Greek πυργος 'tower', but no Irish relative appears to be widely cited.

Δαβρωνα river mouth (*Dabrona* 2,2,6) was the river Lee past Cork and Cobh. A scribal error may have changed Λ into Δ, so that the river was originally called **Labrona*. As explained here, early river names containing *Lav-* (or similar) do not fit the usual Gaelic explanation of 'talkative' nearly as well as a pan-European or Latin-influenced 'likely to rise'. Cork is extremely vulnerable to flooding because it lies in the middle of a large and complex river catchment.

Νοτιον ακρον (*Notion* 2,2,4) was ancient Greek for 'southern promontory' at Brow Head. Early mariners would surely have noticed the rocks there, in what became a copper-mining area, analogous with Cornwall, because they would have had coloured outcrops.

Ιερνου river mouth (*Iernu* 2,2,4) should perhaps be emended into Ιουερνου (*Hywernu*) or Ιερον (*Hieron*) to fit other names in Ireland. The modern Iveragh peninsula is explained in Irish as *Uibh Rathach* 'descendants of *Rathach*', but that might just be reinterpretation. This river could be either the Maine into Castlemaine Harbour or the Roughty into Kenmare Bay. The latter seems marginally more likely, because it has more evidence of early habitation and is fractionally warmer (according to online climate data), as also discussed below under Ιουερνις.

Δουρ river mouth (*Dur* 2,2,4) was the river Lee through Tralee. Several rivers elsewhere in Europe had similar ancient names, possibly like a Celtic word for 'water' (Ekwall, 1928:128), but also like Greek δουρα 'tree, timber for ships', from PIE *doru-* 'hard'. Interestingly, Ptolemy's Δουρ and his Τουεροβιος in Wales share a significant geographical feature with the Douro in Iberia and the Dora Baltea in northern Italy – extensive sandbanks clogging their mouths – which is tempting to relate to PIE *dhwer-* 'door'. On the Lee estuary Hickson (1894) spotted an interesting survival in the Irish name *Bun-abhainn-dur* 'end of the river *Dur*'.

Σηνου (Σινου) river mouth (*Senu* or *Sinu* 2,2,4) is usually identified with the modern river Shannon. This name probably came from PIE *sai-/sei-* 'to bind', the root of English sinew and Irish *sin* 'collar', referring to the long and sinuous estuary leading up to Limerick. This analysis

rejects the common idea that the name meant 'old', from PIE *sen-, and also a possible link with PIE *senə- 'apart'.

Αυσοβα river mouth (*Ausoba* 2,2,4) was Galway Bay, into which the main inflowing river was the Corrib. This name looks like a compound of PIE *aus- 'to shine' (hence words for 'east') and *oba 'water, river(bank)' discussed here, presumably describing how the coastline inside the bay is so far east from the Atlantic. Ptolemy's coordinates (as they have survived) actually place Αυσοβα due east of Σηνου, which has contributed to some debate about name locations in the west. *Ausona*, an unlocated city near the east coast of Italy north of Naples is a good parallel.

Λιβνιου river mouth (*Libniu* 2,2,4) was probably the river Moy through Ballina. The name may derive from PIE *lei- 'to flow' via words such as λειβω/λιβω or *libo* 'to pour'. Or else it might come (like Libya) from λιψ/λιβος '(south)west', in contrast with the previous name's sense of 'east'. Or it might come from PIE *leubh- 'to love', the root of words such as libido, perhaps suggesting that mariners would get a friendly welcome in contrast with the next name.

Ναγνατα (or Μαγνατα) πολις (*Nagnata* 2,2,4) was a settlement at Sligo, of the Ναγνατοι (or Μαγνατοι) people. An element -*gnata* naturally means either or both of 'known' and 'born, descended from' (Delamarre, 2003:180-181) in a range of ancient languages, as also discussed here. So, if *Na-* meant 'not', the Ναγνατοι might have been 'unknown' or 'unrelated' people, implying that that region on the west of Ireland was ethnically or linguistically different from further east.

Ραουιου river mouth (*Rawiu* 2,2,4) was Donegal Bay. *Rav-* is a difficult name element, which Italian scholars explain with "pre-Latin" *rava-* 'cliff landslide' in Ravello, and possibly Ravenna. For the early names in Britain *Ardua ravenatone*, *Ravatonium*, and *Αβραουαννου* we also discuss words for 'river', 'grey-yellow', and 'raven (sea bird)'. All these explanations tend to point towards the high sea cliffs of Slieve League near the mouth of the Bay, rather than the river Erne flowing through Ballyshannon into the Bay.

Further inland, Ptolemy provided seven town names. His word πολις meant 'city' around the Mediterranean, but in Ireland it probably just meant a central place, the base of a chieftain and/or where people could gather for ceremonies, feasts, and markets. The outline of early Irish history by MacNeill (1920) has been built on by later historians and archaeologists to yield plausible candidates for these seven names. Let's take another clockwise tour, of the πολις names.

Ρηγια πολις (*Regia* or *Rigia* 2,2,10) was probably Navan Fort (*Emain Macha* in Irish) near modern Armagh. This name probably refers to a king or ruler, from PIE *reg- 'to move in a straight line, to direct' (but other possibilities include some based on PIE *reig- 'to reach, stretch out').

Ραιβα (or Ρεβα) πολις (*Raiba* 2,2,10) is the feminine or plural of Greek ραιβος 'crooked, bent', which is a meaning often attributed to place names, but does not help to identify this site. It was identified with Castle Rheban, south west of Dublin, by Camden around 1600, but somewhere nearer the centre of Ireland, such as Rathcrogan (the *Ráth* of *Cruachan*, the ancient capital of Connacht) and/or Carnfree seems more likely.

Λαβηρος πολις (*Laberos* 2,2,10) may be the Hill of Tara. The name probably meant 'talking place', because there was a pan-European word (possibly from PIE *lab- 'to lick') exemplified by Irish *labar* 'talkative, boastful' and its Celtic cognates, but also by German *labern* 'to talk at length', Dutch *labben* 'to chatter', English blabber, Latin *labrum* 'lip', and Greek λαβρος 'furious'. Ireland is famous for its great writers and talkers, but also for its ring-forts (called *ráths*) reviewed by Fitzpatrick (2009). "*There is great use among the Irish to make great assemblies together upon a Rath or hill, there to parley*" (Edmund Spenser, 1596, vol 6, p 628). The cultural tradition for such gatherings, across many countries and from the Stone Ages into modern times, was investigated by Allcroft (1927, 1930).

Μακολικον πολις (*Macolicon* 2,2,10) was probably near Limerick, where a strong candidate is Ireland's largest hillfort at Mooghaun, source of a famous gold hoard. In Greek the name would mean something like 'destroys in battle', from μαχη 'battle' and ολεκω 'to destroy, to kill', with spelling changes X to K and E to I perhaps due to a Latin intermediate. In Celtic it could mean something like 'stony fields', from Irish *macha* 'milking yard' (hence *machair* 'fertile plain') and *lecc* 'stone'.

ἕτερα **Ρηγια** πολις ('the other *Regia* or *Rigia*' 2,2,10) may be the Rath of [Feerwore](#), source of the [Turoe Stone](#), east of Galway.

Δουνον πολις (*Dunon* 2,2,10) is a [word](#) for 'fort' widely used across the north-western Roman Empire. This one is usually identified with *Dinn Riogh* ('fort of the kings'), the base of rulers of Leinster, probably on the river Barrow just south of Leighlinbridge. A substantial structure there called Ballyknockan Moat was reported in the 1800s but seems to attract little interest now.

Ιουερνις (or Ιοερνις) πολις (*Iwernis* 2,2,10) is obviously related to Ιερνου river mouth above and the Ἰουερνοι people below, as a possible overwintering place like [*Ibernio*](#) in England. Its past identification with *Teamhair' Erann* at Ballahantouragh in County Kerry is not convincing. South-west Ireland is full of stone circles and other megalithic monuments (mapped [here](#)), but they are particularly thick on the ground around Kenmare. Even where the megalithic stonework visible today is quite late (Christian era), it inherited a farming tradition stretching back to the Bronze Age. To find a fort that might qualify as Ptolemy's πολις one needs to look further out towards the ocean on the Iveragh peninsula, for example at [Caherdaniel](#).

Ptolemy mentioned 16 peoples, or "tribes", in Ireland. He stated their general locations, but did not assign particular towns to them as he did elsewhere in his Geography. Irish archaeologists and historians, building on [MacNeill](#) (1920), have tried to link Ptolemy's peoples with tribal names in later mediaeval Irish texts, while De Bernardo Stempel (2000) analysed what Ptolemy's names might mean if they were created in a Celtic language. Let's take another clockwise tour.

Ουεννικνιοι (*Wennicnioi* 2,2,3) lived in the north-west. See Ουεννικνιον ακρον above.

Ροβογδιοι (*Robogdioi* 2,2,3 and 2,2,9) lived in the north-east, near Ροβογδιον ακρον discussed above. The theory that Ροβογδιοι people were 'mighty fighters' is probably nonsense.

Δαρινοι (*Darinoi* 2,2,9) lived in the north-east, modern Antrim and Down facing Britain. Many Celtic words might possibly explain Δαρινοι, notably OI [*dairid*](#) 'bulls', which would presumably make them analogous with the [*Taurini*](#) of northern Italy. Much better is OI [*dair*](#) 'oak', and modern Derry, which may make the Δαρινοι analogous with the [*Iceni*](#). PIE [*deru-*](#) 'hard, tree' had many descendants (not just Druids and oaks) all over Europe, of which possibly most relevant in Ireland is tar, hugely important for caulking skin-boats to sail to Scotland.

Ουολουντιοι (*Woluntioi* 2,2,9) lived further south, around the modern Northern Irish border. The name probably survived into the later [*Ulaid*](#) people and the modern name Ulster. A link has been argued with Gaelic [*ulcha*](#) 'beard', considered an important symbol of warrior manhood in many societies, and with a possible parallel in the Langobards/Lombards in northern Germany, but *ulcha* lacks a convincing deeper etymology. As written, *Woluntioi* looks like a cross between Latin [*voluntas*](#) and [*volentia*](#) 'will, choice'*,* perhaps implying that these people were happy to see Roman traders, sending slaves (or even army volunteers?) across to Britain.

Εβλανιοι (or Εβδανιοι) (*Eblanioi* 2,2,9). See under Εβλανα above.

Καυκοι (*Caucoi* 2,2,9) lived further south still, towards Dublin. An obvious parallel is the [*Chauci*](#) people, who lived along the Frisian coastline in the area from which Saxons were later said to come. *Chauci* has long been explained as from Germanic **hauhaz* 'high', from PIE [*keuə-*](#) 'to swell', making it cognate with Gothic [*hauhs*](#), Norse [*haugr*](#), Russian куча, the English place-name element *hoh*, etc, with further links to church, Welsh [*crug*](#), etc, all having a sense of 'small hill, mound', called [*terpen*](#) in Frisia. The Καυκοι lived in an area famous for [Newgrange](#) and its sister mounds at Dowth and Knowth, in the [Boyne](#) bend, plus an extensive and very ancient ritual landscape. It is extremely unlikely that Germanic *Chauci* people migrated there *en masse*.

Μαναπιοι (*Manapioi* 2,2,9) were people living around Μαναπια, tentatively suggested above to be Rathgall hillfort. It is extremely unlikely that Belgic [*Menapii*](#) people migrated there *en masse*, not least because the Μαναπιοι homeland probably included the Wicklow Mountains and was significantly higher than the Flanders homeland of the *Menapii*. Nevertheless the two areas are similar in that people lived on local high ground surrounded by wet bogs. It is conceivable that *Cill Mhantáin* (in Wicklow) preserves a folkloric memory of this name.

Κοριονδοι (*Coriondoi* 2,2,9) has been analysed as derived from PIE [*koro-*](#) 'war', whose descendants include OI [*cuire*](#) 'troop, muster', German [*Heer*](#) 'army', Greek κοιρανος 'king, commander', etc. It is more likely, in the light of the last two names, that words for an assembly,

such as Greek χωριον 'place, town' and Latin *curia* 'court, temple, senate', link with the words for burial mounds and ring enclosures ancestral to Welsh *crug*, English church, and Russian/Turkish курган, which Allcroft (1927, 1930) traced back deep into prehistory as tribal gathering places.

Βριγαντες (or Βριγαντας) (*Brigantes* 2,2,7 and 2,2,9) were 'hill people', presumably living in the Wicklow mountains, with a name that occurred across Europe in various forms. In Iberia *-briga* in early place names is a marker for the zone of Indo-European speech.

Ουοδιαι (or Ουσδιαι) (*Wodiai* or *Usdiai* 2,2,7) lived in the south-east. Their name might come from PIE *wat-* 'insane, passionate', whose descendants include OE *wod* 'crazy', OI *faith* and Latin *vates* 'seer', the Norse god *Wotan/Odin*, etc. Maybe they had energetic Druids. On the other hand, maybe Ουσδιαι is to be preferred, on the grounds that this area later became the kingdom of Ossory, irrigated by the Three Sisters rivers. Then Ουσ- may have a parallel in the English river name Ouse (derived in some way from a PIE word for water), while the –διαι (ultimately from a root meaning 'two') may have a parallel in the Επιδιοι people of Kintyre.

Ἰουερνοι (Ἰουβερνοι) (*Huwernoi* or *Hubernoi* 2,2,7) lived in the south, around Cork. This name resembles Latin *hibernus* 'belonging to winter', possibly from PIE *ghei-* 'snow, winter'. On the other hand, this area's mild climate, due to the Gulf Stream, might have made it suitable for early traders from the Mediterranean to over-winter, just as Latin *hiberno* 'to occupy winter quarters' may explain *Ibernio*, at Iwerne in Dorset. On balance it seems marginally more likely that Romans were prejudiced into considering Ireland had winter all year round! By world standards, the south's rainfall is not spectacularly high, but the west has some of highest winds in Europe. Orosius mentioned people called *Luceni*, which sounds suspiciously like a mis-copied *Iuverni*.

The classical name *Hibernia* has been much discussed. Isaac (2009) suggested that PIE *auer-* 'to flow' led to early Celtic *eiweryon* 'upon the water' (hence 'at the edge of the world'), from which Greek-style loss of W led to Irish forms such as modern Eire, whereas Latin *viridis* 'green' (of uncertain deep etymology) led to Welsh *gwyrdd* which allowed reinterpretation into *Ywerdon* 'the greenery'. A better explanation, offered by Watkins (2011: *xxxii*) is that PIE *peiə-* 'fat, milk', known from the Greek Pierian Spring, lost its p in Celtic to yield *Iwerion* as the original name for Ireland. Among spellings recorded by classical writers, *Ierne* (Ιερνη)was earlier than *Hibernia*, *Ibernia*, *Ivernia*, etc, and presumably derived from the voyage of Pytheas.

Ουελλαβοροι (or Ουτελαβροι) (*Wellaboroi* 2,2,5) were in the very south of Ireland. 300 years later Orosius spelled the name *Velabri*, which has a very exact parallel in Latin *velabrum* 'awning stretched above the theatre' and in *Velabrum*, a low swampy area in ancient Rome, but that may have been mere re-interpretation, otherwise known as folk etymology. Anyway, the best efforts of many writers, ancient and modern, have failed to explain *velabrum*. De Vaan (2008:660) considers it a derivative of *velum* 'sail', but then cannot decide whether that came from PIE *weg-* 'to weave' or *wegh-* 'to convey'. It seems best to focus on Ptolemy's spelling Ουελλαβοροι, and reckon that the best way (of several) to segment it is *wella-boroi*. Then should the first element be likened to Latin *vela* 'wallflower', *velum* 'sail', or *vellus* 'fleece'? And the second element to Βορεας 'north wind', βορα 'food', Dutch *Boer* 'farmer', Gaelic *borr* 'swollen, haughty', or English bower/byre? Pursuing those roots further into Celtic does not greatly help, and no single interpretation of this name (or indeed most Irish tribal names) comes anywhere near certainty. On balance, the best guess seems to be that these people were cattle farmers.

Γαγγανοι (*Ganganoi* 2,2,5) lived in the south-west, probably around the mouth of the Shannon. See the discussion of Γαγγανων ακρον in Wales, and the possible interpretation like 'gone away'.

Αυτεινοι (Αυτινοι) (*Auteinoi* 2,2,5) lived in the west, modern county Galway, and were probably ancestors of the *Uaithni*. PIE *au-* 'off, away' developed in many ways, including to OI *úath* 'fear, terror', from which a bad name translation as 'the terrible ones' has arisen. Discussion of a name *Autagis* on a Gaulish plate, notably by Delamarre (2003: 62), lays out some better possibilities. The –*teinoi* might be a banal adjectival ending '-tine' often applied to peoples or it might come from PIE *ten-* 'to stretch', seen for example in *Pretannia*, making these the outer people. Maybe Greek αὐτη 'battle cry' means these people were fierce. More likely, these people were aboriginal inhabitants of in the west, with a name built from αὐτος 'self' that prefigured Sinn Fein 'ourselves'.

Ναγνατοι (Μαγνατοι) (*Nagnatoi* 2,2,5) see above about Ναγνατα.

Ερδινοι (or Ερπεδιτανοι) (*Erdinoi* 2,2,5) seem to have lived in the north-west, in Donegal, which is fairly mountainous. The name came from PIE *erədh-* 'high', whose descendants include OI *ard* 'high'. The variant spelling Ερπεδιτανοι was presumably influenced by Latin *pedito* 'to go on foot' or πεδητης 'one who fetters, a hinderer', but also possibly by πεδιας 'flat, of the plain'.

The latest revision of this article has benefitted from discussions with Martin Counihan, who has clarified how some clan names in Irish tradition may preserve a memory of Ptolemy's tribal names. However, he has not yet made a convincing case that many elements in these names came from an ancient Irish language that was well on its way to becoming the Gaelic that was written after AD 800. Mediaeval Irish supplies descendants to many of the relevant PIE roots, but they are often no better than descendants in English or other languages. It remains true that Ptolemy's names tend to make best geographical sense if they are interpreted in Greek or in "pre-Celtic" Indo-European.

To take the story further than this article really needs a skilled linguist who knows Gaelic and the archaeology of Ireland's proto-towns. A lot of romantic nonsense circulates about life in Iron-Age Ireland, just as in Wales or England. To cut through it, one needs to recognise that post-Roman writers knew very little about life in Ptolemy's time, and used their imagination to fill the gaps in their knowledge. Just four modern river names (Shannon, Boyne, Lagan, Barrow) seem to preserve a shadow of Ptolemy's names. Never forget that many resourceful, intelligent people lived in Ireland for at least 3000 years before traders started to arrive from inside the Roman Empire.