

EARLY NOLAN HISTORY

- *what defines and unites us as a people*

Ancient Roots

Like most European males today Nolan descendants belong to that part of the human family tree known as the R1b haplogroup whose common ancestor lived south of the Caspian Sea in Persia circa 22,000-17,000 BC.

From there some descendants (*L278 subclade of R1b haplogroup*) migrated west to the Tigris River valley where they took refuge during the last Ice Age.

By the end of the Ice Age, circa 10,000 BC they had managed to domesticate the aurochs (ancestor of all modern-day cows) and had also learnt to farm to supplement their food supply.

With the warmer weather and newer pastures becoming exposed further north, some of the descendants living in the Tigris river valley (*L388 subclade*) began to migrate northward towards the Caucasus Mtns.

By circa 4,900 BC some of their descendants (*M269 subclade*) had crossed over the Caucasus mountains and reached the Pontic-Caspian Steppe north of the Black Sea (aka Scythia).

They also began migrating westward along the northern edge of the Black Sea towards Europe and by 4,200-2,800 BC some descendants (*L23 subclade*) had reached the Danube river valley as far inland as the Hungarian Plain. By circa 2,500 BC some of them (*L51 subclade*) had reached the headwaters of the Danube River in southern Germany where, it is believed, they first became involved in long-distance trading.

By 2,300 BC, no doubt drawn by the growing trade in precious metals with northwestern Europe (gold from Ireland and Wales, tin from Cornwall, etc.) many descendants (*P312 subclade*) resettled to the mouth of the Rhine in the area of modern-day Flanders. These were as we shall later show, the Manapii/Menapii, a river tribe which worshipped the sea god Manaan and which originally came from the Danube river system, a tribe of the Tuatha De Danaan.

Another Celtic tribe which worshipped the sea god Manaan and also likely settled along the North Sea were the Fomorians which we shall encounter later in our story.



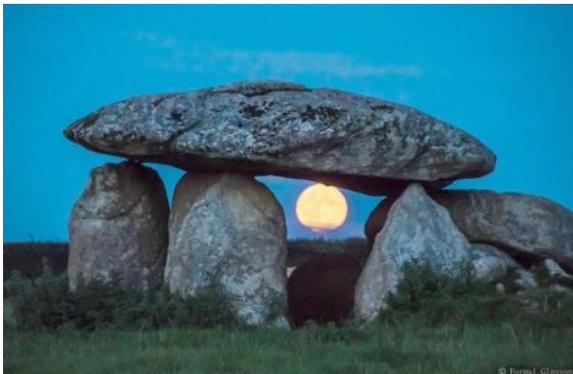
Portion of Ptolemy's Map of Gaul (circa 150 AD) showing Menapian settlement in Flanders



Early Menapian Farmstead in Flanders, Belgium

By 2,200 BC many descendants (*the bulk of the L21 haplogroup, Belgae tribesmen*), had reached Armorica (Lower Normandy and Brittany), then Cornwall by 2,100 BC and Leinster by 2,000 BC.

As we shall show later, our Nolan ancestor was amongst this group. In fact, given that the early Annalists referred to the Nolans as descended from the “Ancient Ones of Leinster” he may have arrived in Leinster even earlier, shortly after the abandonment of the Newgrange farming settlement (built c.3,200 BC). The presence of many Scythian-type burial mounds of great antiquity in counties Wexford and Carlow certainly support such an early arrival date.



Not all of our distant Nolan relatives (*others in the L21 haplogroup*) migrated towards Ireland.

Some migrated westward into central Gaul and, by 1,800 BC, going through southwestern Gaul (Gascony), they had reached Spain where they settled with other Celts in Galicia.

Following are five basic observations which together suggest that our distant Nolan ancestor was descended from the Menapii settled in ancient times in Belgica (see previous map) and earlier from the Danube river system, a tribe of the Tuatha De Danaan.

- In the 2nd century, Eochaidh Fionn, a prince of Ireland, was exiled from Tara to lands in the Barony of Forth (Co. Carlow) which had been granted to him and his descendants in perpetuity; in the 12th century, the O Nuallains (O Nolans) were the chief Gaelic family of this territory.
- The early Irish Annals tell us that Eochaidh Fionn Fuathairt was descended from Ugaine Mór, an early Ard Ri of Ireland
- Circa 150 AD, the Menapii, a tribe of the Tuatha De Danaan, worshipping the sea god Manann, were settled in both Belgium (Belgica) and Ireland (in Leinster); they were settled upriver from Waterford and Wexford harbours and had a hill fort at “Dunum” up the river “Birgus” in the area of Dinn Righ (see map on next page).
- Dinn Righ, near Leighlinbridge, is where Ugaine Mór, as Ard Rí c.331-310 BC settled disputes between the tribes of Ireland.
- Circa 300 BC Ugaine Mór had his royal (Ard Ri) seat at Dinn Righ in Menapian territory (at “Dunum”) suggesting that he was a Menapian, hence of Tuatha De Danaan descent.



Map of Southeastern Ireland (Ptolemy, c 150 AD)

As we have seen, in their wanderings, the Menapians (*part of L21 haplogroup*) had reached Ireland by 2,000 BC and Spain by 1,800 BC. From the field of archaeology, we also know that the Celts settled there, the so-called Milesians (including Menapian descendants), relocated as a group to Ireland sometime after 1,000 BC. At this point, we must therefore ask ourselves: Was Ugaire Mór's father a descendant of an early Menapian from nearby or a later one coming from Spain with the Milesians?

The answer comes to us from the DNA results (**M269 > L23 > P312 > L21 > DF23 > M222**) of modern-day descendants of Eochaidh Fionn Fuathairt (Shangarry Nolans of Co. Carlow) which clearly show that their most distant Irish ancestor and hence also Ugaire Mór's reached Ireland via Armorica (Brittany and Lower Normandy) and Dumnonia (Devon), not via Spain with the Milesians.

Irish Roots

According to archaeologists Ireland was first inhabited by hunter-gatherers who crossed over from Britain and possibly also from the Continent soon after the end of the last Ice Age (c 10,000 BC) when the sea level was much lower and Britain and Ireland

were still joined to the continent. Over the course of the next few Millennia, as ocean levels kept rising, the land bridges disappeared. It was only towards the end of the 4th millennium BC that any serious attempt at colonization was made.

Based upon the **Lebor Gabála Éirenn** (*a mediaeval record of early Irish Legends*), these were the Parthelonians. Bringing with them plough and oxen their community prospered for a time but, at length, afflicted by drought conditions and dying in numbers of the plague, they abandoned the colony.

The large portal tomb complex at Newgrange (c3200 BC), near Dublin, is a testament to their early presence in Ireland.

Here it is interesting to note that the Newgrange settlement attempt coincides with early mining activity in the Isles, most notably in Cornwall (tin) and in County Wicklow (gold).

According to the Lebor Gabála the next wave of settlers were the Nemedians. However, encountering resistance from hostile seafarers, the Fomorians, this community soon dispersed to other parts of Europe.

Next came the first true settlers, those who, for the first time, successfully established themselves as pastoralists and farmers. These were the Firbolgs, (men and women of the Belgae tribes in Belgica shown on the earlier map).

Unlike their predecessors, the Firbolgs (Belgae tribesmen from Belgica) they

did not encounter any resistance from the Fomorians. A simple explanation for this would be that, because of previous dealings, the two groups knew each other and were on good terms. Corroborating evidence for this is the fact that the Fomorians, like the Menapians, a Belgae tribe, worshipped the sea god Manaán.

The next arrivals were the Tuatha De Danaan or more precisely, as we now know, the Menapians, a trading community which, as seen on the earlier map, established itself in southeastern Leinster.

The next arrivals were the Milesians of Spain, distant cousins of the Tuatha De Danaans who, at the recommendation of their druids, relocated as a group to Ireland. Equipped with more advanced iron-age weapons they quickly overthrew the Tuatha De Danaans. However, recognizing the superior knowledge and skills of the Tuatha De Danaan they intermarried with them and admitted them to their ruling class.

This is how it came to be that towards the end of the 4th century BC Ugainé Mór, a Menapian tribesman with both Tuatha De Danaan (paternal) and Milesian (maternal) ancestry was chosen as Ard Ri (c331-301 BC).

Tuatha De Danaan and Scythian Roots

Mouth of the Rhine (Belgica)

According to the Lebor Gabála Érenn the Tuatha De Danaan came to Ireland from four islands in the North Atlantic. Given what we now know i.e. that the Tuatha De Danaan in Ireland were Menapians, it is not unreasonable to assume that these “four islands” were the ones at the mouth of the Rhine.

From the Irish legends in the Lebor Gabála, we also know that the Tuatha De Danaan mastered all the arts and sciences of their day on these four islands and possessed:

- a cauldron of regeneration
- a cauldron of plenty
- a sword/goblet of truth
- a cloak of invisibility
- a horse which could travel on water as easily on land.

Interpreting the above “with a grain of sait” i.e. critically, from a modern-day standpoint, one could say that what they really possessed were:

- medical knowledge and skills
- advanced farming skills
- highly developed reasoning skills
- the ability to hide in plain sight through trickery and subterfuge
- large ships with manned oars.



[First Century Menapian Boat](#)

Rhine-Main-Danube River System

The Menapians were originally a tribe from the Danube river system and, for trade, they employed large moderately-sized vessels manned with oars which could easily be portaged between rivers and lakes.

In support of long-distance trade, they also built fortified hillforts such as the [hillfort at Heuneburg in southern Germany](#) at the foot of the Austrian Alps which, at its height, provided employment and shelter for 5,000 to 10,000 people.



Pontic Steppes of Ukraine (Scythia)

Given what we know of Ugaine Mór i.e. his involvement in long-distance trading, it is reasonable to assume that his Scythian ancestor had also been a long-distance trader, a “trade prince”

with headquarters in a hillfort (such as the one shown on the previous page), part of the ruling class, tasked with seeking out new trading opportunities.

Identifying as a Nolan

Common Ancestor

All modern-day Nolans, not just the Carlow Nolans (such as the Shangarry Nolans) are descended from Ugaine Mór, the first historically-verifiable Ard Ri of Ireland or, more broadly speaking from the Tuatha De Danaan. The latter may be the case for the Nolans with roots in Fermanagh whose ancestors also worshipped the sea god Manaan, like the Menapians.

Ugaine Mór

According to historians Ugaine Mór reigned c331-301 BC and, according to some, was not only Ard Ri of Ireland but also of the lands between Alba (Scotland) and the Sea of Wight (modern-day Celtic Sea lying between Brittany, Cornwall and Leinster).

To the early Irish Annalists, he was known as Ugaine Mór, the 66th Ard Ri of Ireland.

To the Romans he was known as Hugonius Maximus (Hugh the Great), the Celtic king, a contemporary of Alexander the Great, who landed his

forces in Africa and, from there, attacked Sicily lending military support to his Greek trading partners who were being harassed by the Romans.

From his base in Ireland (“Menapia” in Wexford harbour) or possibly even in the Isles of Scilly (Hugh town), he likely commanded a large fleet of trade ships and ventured far and wide in search of new trade opportunities.

He married Ceassair, a daughter of the Gaulish king and, upon his death, held extensive lands in Ireland which were divided amongst his 25 children, most notably, Laogaire Lorc and Cobhthach Cael Breagh.

According to the early Annalists this partitioning of the island stood for approximately three hundred years.

Laogaire Lorc

Laogaire Lorc received the area around Dublin and the river Liffey and ruled as Ard Ri c300-284 BC. He is the **ancestor of Cathair Mór** who reigned as Ard Ri c174-177 AD and, according to tradition, was buried atop Ballon Hill in Co. Carlow. The **Ó hUllacháins** of counties Kilkenny, Offaly and Galway are descended from him. Some of these descendants adopted the Nolan family name in the late 16th century.

Cobhthach Cael Breagh

Cobhthach Cael Breagh received the area around the Hill of Tara and ruled as Ard Ri c284-267 BC. According to a medieval Irish legend Cobhthach was so consumed by jealousy that he devised a wicked plan to become Ard Ri of Ireland.

He first sent word to his brother Laogaire that he was ill. When Laogaire arrived Cobhthach feigned death and, as Laogaire leaned over to see him, he stabbed him. To further ensure his selection as the new Ard Ri Cobhthach also paid someone to poison his brother's son, Aillill Aine. As for Ailill's son, Labraidh, he was sent into exile after being forced to eat the hearts of both his father and grandfather. A gruesome story to say the least!

How much of this story is true is debatable but it certainly reminds us of the level of violence which can occur within families.

According to the Annals the terrorized Labraidh sought refuge in Gaul with his great-grandmother's (Ceassair's) people in Gaul. According to some accounts, Cobhthach did eventually make peace with Labraidh, granting him Leinster upon his return.

As interesting as this may be, more relevant to our discussion is the fact Cobhthach was the ancestor of **Feidlimidh Reachtmhar (Philip the lawgiver)**, Ard Ri of Ireland c111-119 AD who fathered three sons:

- Conn Ceadchathach (Conn of the Hundred Battles), **ancestor of Niall of the Nine Hostages** and thereby the northern O'Neills etc.
- Eochaidh Fionn Fuathairt, **ancestor of the Ó Nualláins** (O Nolans) of Co. Carlow, etc.; Eochaidh was **married to a granddaughter of Cathair Mór** and also had a foster son, Laoighseach Cean More (ancestor of the O Moores of Co. Leix)
- Fiachach Suigde, ancestor of the Déisi Mumhan of Co. Waterford and thereby the Ua Faeláin (Phelan/Whelan) etc.

The Defining Moment – c. 119AD

After the death of Feidlimidh Reachtmhar circa 119 AD, the kings of Ireland assembled at Tara to elect a new Ard Ri. They elected Cathair Mór, the then King of Leinster. However, this did not please Conn (*of the Hundred Battles*), the son of the deceased Ard Ri, prompting the latter to engage in wresting power from the new Ard Ri in battle, then a common Celtic practice.

The battle for supremacy lasted three years with casualties on both sides. Cathair Mór (Conn's father-in-law) was killed in battle and, according to tradition, was buried atop Ballon Hill in Co. Carlow. On the other side, Conn's two sons, Connla and Criona were both killed, supposedly by his brother Eochaidh. Here it is important to note that, in the battle for supremacy, Eochaidh and a third brother, Fiachach, had sided with the deposed Ard Ri.

After the battle, Conn asserted himself as Ard Ri and allowed his two brothers to stay at Tara but, after his death and that of an intervening Ard Ri, Conn's only remaining son, Art, was appointed Ard Ri (c165-195). This is when, in retaliation for the death of his two brothers Connla and Criona, he banished his uncles Eochaidh and Fiachach from Tara.

Eochaidh went to Co. Carlow where he had lands which had previously been granted lands in perpetuity to himself and his descendants. Fiachach went to Co. Waterford.

Becoming a People – the Nolans

When, towards the end of the 16th century, the Ó hUllacháins of Galway had to choose an English-sounding name, they remembered Cathair Mór and that early period in Irish history when the Ó Nualláins of Co. Carlow had joined in defending their ancestor Cathair Mór's right to rule as Ard Ri of Ireland. United more by friendship than by family ties the two families had acted as one, with "one heart, on the same path" (Cor Unum, Via Una). It is therefore not surprising that they would then choose to adopt the same family name i.e. Nolan.

Today there are many Nolan families strewn across the globe but it is believed that most have some sort of connection back to these two main Gaelic families, the Ó Nualláins and the Ó hUllacháins. Granted there are still some Nolan families where no definitive link to the two main Gaelic families has been found but, in the meantime, we remain united in spirit much in the same sense that on St Patrick's day, everybody is Irish.

Have a good one!

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 - [-for Cathair Mór mac Feidlimid - King of Leinster](#)