

Summary 18. The Mystery Men of Europe

If you ask historians who are the mystery peoples of Europe they will probably all agree on the Gypsies, Basques and Picts of whom we believe much but actually know little. Of these, the Roma — or Gypsy — people are a pariah race shrouded in superstition while the Basques have long been reputed to speak a language spoken by the first humans to settle in Europe. And the Picts are reputed to have appeared out of nowhere two thousand years ago and a thousand years later, vanished without trace.

Gypsies: When they first arrived in Europe in the Middle ages, the Roma or Gypsies were accused of being the accomplices of the Jews in the Crucifixion of Jesus and as being thieves, beggars and practitioners of magic, the black arts and fortune telling. More recently, between 500,000 and 600,000 gypsies died during the Nazi Holocaust. It is currently estimated that there are now between 4 and 10 million Roma in Europe, most concentrated in central and southeastern Europe. The big question has always been *where did they come from?* While these people call themselves *Rom* or *Roma*, the common term *gypsy* is generally thought to be a corruption of *Egyptian* because in the Middle Ages they were incorrectly believed to have originated in Egypt. Nowadays they are known to have originated in Northern India or the Punjab and migrated to Europe via Persia and the Levant. They entered Constantinople around 1000 AD and from there went on to Greece and the Balkans, Hungary and adjoining Slavic regions, before arriving in Austria and Germany in the late 15th Century. Genetically, nearly 50% of Roma men belong to yHg H and about a quarter of them share mtHg M, both of which are very characteristic of Indians.

The Basques: There is a saying in the Basque country: "*Before God was God and boulders were boulders, Basques were already Basques.*" We have talked a lot in this course about the Franco-Iberian refugia during the LGM. For the most part, this is modern Basque country, made up of the Pays-Basque in southern France and two Special Autonomous Communities in north-western Spain which the Basques call *Euskadi* - in Spanish, *País Vasco*. The Basques were living in this part of the world at least since the Late Pleistocene. Genetically, they appear to be the origin of all the R1b1c peoples who spread out over western Europe in the Mesolithic migrations before the Younger Dryas and whose communities expanded during the Neolithic and later. Two sub-clades common among the Basques are R1b1c4 (defined by M153) and R1b1c6 (SRY2627, M167). Oppenheimer isolated a cluster of genes he labelled R1b-9 and called the Basque Modal Haplotype. For a very readable account of the Basque, see Mark Kurlansky: *The Basque History of the World* (Vintage, 2000).

The Vanishing Picts: When referring to the troublesome, un-subdued tribesmen from north of the Antonine Wall, the Romans called them the "Painted People". This probably meant the indigenous Celts north of the frontier were tattooed, but many interpret it to mean their warriors painted their often naked bodies with *woad*, the European form of *indigo*. Both might be true: indigo has an antiseptic property and it was possibly used as a prophylactic against flesh wounds in battle.

The Picts were thought to be mysterious, partly because they seemed to appear upon the stage of history from out of nowhere, partly because descent was reckoned in the maternal line and this was regarded for a long time as evidence of primitivism; and partly because they left no written account of themselves except beautiful but enigmatic carved stones.

In reality, the Picts were a tribal people, mostly farmers, hunters, renowned fishers, ferocious warriors and superb craftsmen. They lived north of the Forth-Clyde line in what is now Scotland. Probably the best-known and earliest reference is by Tacitus in his history *Agricola* in which he also describes the battle of Mons Graupius in AD 80. Although the Romans won, they quit Caledonia after this date.

Other than accounts of the Picts by outsiders (often enemies), we have only two sources of information about them by their own hand: the *Pictish King List* and their carved stones. The *List* names 69 kings (some of whom might have been women) down to 839 AD when the king and most of the Pictish aristocracy were killed in a mighty battle with the Vikings. At this point, Kenneth mac Alpin, the king of Dal Riata, taking advantage of the power vacuum, claimed the Pictish throne and united Caledonia into one nation we ironically call Scotland after the Scotti immigrants from Ireland and from which the Dal Riata kingdom derived.

The carved stone are conventionally divided into Class I are stones carved before the Picts were converted to Christianity some time between the 4th and 5th Centuries while Class II stones are post-conversion carvings, often with crosses and other Christian symbols inter-twined with the old Pictish ones. Some of these carry cryptic inscriptions in Ogham but most show only symbols.

Of course these Scotti were not the first Irish to reach Alba: the Irish and Picts had been in frequent contact since the Mesolithic, so there must have been some interaction, both linguistic and genetic, for a very long time. Because St Columba required an interpreter when converting the Picts to Christianity, we deduce his Dal Riata Goidelic (or Gaelic) language and P-Celtic Pictish were not mutually intelligible. Even so, they were related and there was a long time in which the one could assimilate the other. During this time too, interbreeding would have mixed the genes of both nations where they weren't already well intermixed. So, both linguistically and genetically, the Picts began to disappear.

One of the testing laboratories, Ethnoancestry, offers a test to determine Pictish descent. The only trouble is, no one knows what markers are included. Speculation is rife that this "test" is basically for the Scottish Modal Haplotype. Generally speaking, genetic genealogists on the Lists are wary of paying for this test without knowing exactly what they are buying. What history we do know tells us that the Picts in the north-east of the country remained strongest and least affected by the fusion of the Dal Riata and Pictish kingdoms. Bryan Sykes in *Blood of the Isles* regarded Grampian, Tayside and Fife as the heartland of Pictland. In this area he found R1b1c predominated, rising to 84% of males in Grampian. Haplogroup I — associated with Vikings — was only 12 % in Grampian and 18% in Tayside while R1a was almost unrepresented.

On the west coast where Irish and Viking influence was greatest (but discounting the Viking haplogroups) Sykes found that the female mtDNA patterns in Argyll were much the same as in the heart of Pictland and elsewhere in Scotland, leading him to conclude that the maternal bed-rock of Scotland remains Pictish in origin. However, on the y-chromosome side (and similarly discounting Viking genes), Sykes found that there had been a 30-40% replacement of Pictish males by Gaelic Irish in the Dal Riata heartland in Argyll. This he argued was a "*hostile replacement of Pictish males by the Dalriadan Celts, most of whom relied on Pictish rather than Irish women to propagate their genes.*" Even so, distinguishing dal Riata from Pict remains a very difficult task for the simple reason they are so similar. This goes back a long way, some researchers now believing that "pre Scots" haplotype emerged from central Europe and moved to England then to Scotland where it became a major regional haplotype cluster. In other words, the Picts were (and are still today) the remnants of the first native British.