**Brit-Am Note: The article below by John Hemingway is a Linguistic Study using technical terms proving that the Names Scyth (i.e. Scythian) and Scot (for somebody from Scotland) are one and the same. This strengthens the credibility of Scottish Tradition that their ancestors came from the Scythians. He concludes:** The conclusion is that *Scot* does not necessarily derive from *Scyth,* but these names, in fact, *descend from the same Aramaic origin:* sqwty and sqyty.

**Does the Name *Scot* Derive from *Scyth*?**

**by John Hemingway, 2022.**

**Introduction**

Many publications state that the name *Scot* is derived from *Scyth* and while the names look somewhat alike, no conclusive corroboration of this statement is offered. Yet, there is a historical connection between *Scot* and *Scyth*. Evidence suggests that it would be more accurate to suggest that *these terms come from the same origin.* The most likely etymology of these terms needs to be explored on the basis of their lexical association. To do so, one must examine the letter differences in the names: 'o 'versus 'y 'and 't 'versus 'th.' This paper suggests that they developed from the Aramaic synonyms for 'Scythian' and outlines the evidence of the historical lexical evolution of 'Scot' and 'Scythian.'

**The Aramaic Origin**

First, the recorded origins of "Scot' and 'Scyth' come from an unexpected source, the Aramaic language. The *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (CAL)* lists two entries, **sqwty** and **sqyty,** for 'Scythian' [1]. These entries are recorded as consonants without vowels since Aramaic, a Semitic language which, like Hebrew, is written only with consonants. In transliterated forms, sqwty and sqyty are shown below [2]. Note that in the transliteration of Aramaic, *t* represents *th* (whereas *ṭ* stands for *t*).

> **sqwty**      pronounced as *Scothy* or *Scuthy*
> **sqyty**      pronounced as *Scithy* or *Scythy* if the medial *y* is a semi-vowel

In Aramaic sources, the words sqwty and sqyty appear only sporadically. The *CAL* attributes only four instances of sqwty to the Syriac Aramaic dialect dating from the first century CE, and one instance of sqyty to the Christian Palestinian Aramaic dialect which emerged in the fifth century CE. Considering that these dialects were geographically distant from Scythia, it is remarkable that these words are preserved in Aramaic texts.

**sqyty** is derived from Greek *Skythia* [3]. The suffix **-ty** is typical of many Aramaic gentilic names such as gzty 'Gazan,' ḥyty' Hittite,' and plyšty 'Philistine' [4]. While sqyty bears the most faithful resemblance to Greek *Skythia* (excepting for its gentilic ending *ia*), its counterpart **sqwty** is a *synonymous* ethnonym. As well, the difference in vowel pronunciation in these Aramaic variants is identical to the variations of *i* (or *y*) and *o* as found in Old English, Old Irish, and Latin ethnonyms for Scottish people which are discussed later in this paper.

**The Origin of the Double *tt***

The difference of 't' versus 'th' stems mainly from gemination, or the doubling of consonants in a word. A medial consonant is doubled if the preceding vowel is short and stressed and is followed by another vowel. (For example, in English we pronounce apple *ap·pel.)* The change from Greek *th* (in *Skythia)* to **tt** occurred in the pronunciation of sqyty, because of the Semitic manner of gemination. If the word had a medial *th*, it was geminated as **double t,** not double *th,* according to Aramaic and Hebrew rules of pronunciation [5]. As a result and in certain circumstances, Aramaic sqwty would be pronounced *Scotty.* To Latin ears, this word would sound as *Scotti* [6].

The earliest historical reference to Scots is found in the Latin list *Nomina Provinciarum Omnium* (Names of All the Provinces). Dated to about 312 CE, it refers to *Scotti* with a double *tt* [7]. This record suggests that Romans first heard *Scotti* in its geminated manner of pronunciation in Aramaic. In the ensuing centuries, Scots became widely known in the Latin world as Latin manuscripts frequently referred to them as *Scotti, Scottas,* and *Scottos.*

**The Disappearance of the Double *tt***

In early Irish history, Scots were called **Scuitt** or **Scuit** [8]. Note that the former has a double *tt.* The double consonant in the final position in a word usually indicates that the final vowel was lost, leaving the medial consonant remaining as the final consonant. During the Old Irish period, geminates were simplified or shortened to single consonants such as **Scoit** and **Scoitic**. The long vowels in these names hint that the names were at one time geminated before the short and stressed vowels became lengthened [9]. Likely, their etymon was **Scotty**. Historical accounts were originally written in Old Irish, but scholars presume them to have been extensively *rewritten* and *redacted* in Middle Irish. As well, many words were *recast* according to the Middle Irish spelling conventions. As a result, and not surprisingly, only a very few cases of gemination are found in these ancient Irish manuscripts.

In the fourth century CE, a major change occurred in the way the consonant *th* was pronounced in Greek and Latin, which affected the spelling of *Scythia* in Latin passages found in ancient Irish texts. In Classical Latin and Classic Attic Greek, the sound *th* was an aspirated stop. Scythia was pronounced *Skyt̪ʰia.* Later, when the Greeks began to pronounce the consonant *th* as a dental fricative /θ/, it became *Skyθia.* As native Latin did not have this sound at the time, the Romans developed a digraph *th* to reflect this pronunciation and wrote Scythia as **Scithia.**

There was yet another historical change in pronunciation. In the late third century CE, ecclesiastical Latin emerged. It treated the dental fricative /θ/ as a *t* in place of *th* [10]. As a result, *Scythia* was written *Shitia* in Europe, and spelled **Scitia** in the British Isles [11]. Old Irish manuscripts contain a few occasions of **Scitia** in reference to the Scottish origin of Scythia [12]. Keating, a seventeenth-century Roman Catholic priest and historian, famous for his work *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn,* consistently uses the term *Scitia* for *Scythia* with *Scithia* being the one exception [13].

Questions of *authorial intent* arise when *Scitia* is mentioned in Old Irish and Latin texts as these medieval works were written at the different time intervals over the course of a few centuries. Did *Scitia* mean the same thing to an eighth-century medieval scribe as it did to a fourth-century medieval author? Were later medieval scribes aware that *Scitia* represented the connection of Scottish peoples to Scythia?

The meaning of words can change over time. For example, in the King James Bible, *meat* denotes food in general, but today we understand it to refer to animal flesh. Likewise, it is possible that *Scitia*

began to lose its original denotation and came to mean just Scots after several centuries. On the other hand, the original meaning of Scythians could have been preserved from the earlier centuries.

**The Return of the Double *tt***

In Old English, the ***Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC)*** exists in nine versions written by different authors or copyists over time. This permits us to compare what Scottish people were called in one version to the next. Most of the versions cite ***Scyttisc.*** One version uses ***Scittisc*** (Version A) and another preserves ***Scottysc*** (Version D)**.** In the bilingual version, written in Latin and Old English, Scottish people were called ***Scithi*** in Latin (*Scyttisc* in OE), an illuminating divergence from the usual Latin rendition of *Scotti* or *Scottos* found in many medieval texts.

In the *ASC* versions, *Scittisc, Scyttisc,* and *Scottysc* are lexically synonymous. Presumably, they represent the names that Anglo-Saxons learned from the Scots themselves [14]. These Old English ethnonyms were used interchangeably, and importantly, they reflect the *identical* vowel differences noted in Aramaic sqyty and sqwty. The Old Irish cognates were geminated with a double *t* when they were borrowed by Old English, a language that rigorously clung to the traditional rules of gemination. Anglo-Saxons used these three ethnonyms for Scots for a long period of time, before *Scot* emerged as a popular nickname among the English-speaking population.

**What the Medieval Literature Reveals**

From *The Pictish Chronicle* (c. tenth century CE), the following passage is reproduced with the original Latin names shown in brackets. "The Scots *(Scotti),* who are now called corrupted Irish, as it were the ***Sciti,*** because they came from the regions of Scythia *(Scithia)*, and traced their origin from thence; or from Scotta, daughter of Pharaoh king of Egypt, who was, as is said, queen of the Scots (*Scottorum)*" [15]. Although the writer offers two possibilities for the origin of the Scots, this passage throws some helpful light on the authorial intent behind the citation of *Scitia.* This name retained its association with Scythians, but whether this was general knowledge among Scots at the time is another question.

*The Declaration of Arbroath* in 1320 addresses this question to a certain extent. It boldly declares, "We know and from the chronicles and books of the ancients we find that among other famous nations our own, the Scots, has been graced with widespread renown. They journeyed from Greater Scythia by way of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Pillars of Hercules" [16]. This document clearly asserts the Scythian origin of the Scottish people.

However, many historians remain skeptical of the Scottish connection to Scythia: they consider it a mythical link. Some of this skepticism arises from what one book calls "*a priori* suspicion or doubt… on the ground of the distance that is supposed to exist between the beginning and the end of the testimonial chain" [17]. This is a valid objection, and for this reason, it is suggested that ecclesiastical Latin *Scitia* offers an historically credible testimonial chain. For it preserves both the meaning and the name *Scitia* from the time when Romans knew Scythians by that name [18].

**Summary**

Aramaic has two variants for 'Scythian' which are geminated with a double *t*, not a double *th.* Romans heard the name *Scotty,* the way it was pronounced in accordance with Semitic convention. Old Irish underwent massive degemination by lengthening the short and stressed vowel in words, so Scots

were called *Scoit, Scuit* or *Scuitt,* derived from *Scotti*. In ecclesiastical Latin, *th* was written as *t,* hiding the original meaning of *Scitia* 'Scythians' from twentieth-first century eyes. *Scitia* appears in the Old Irish and Latin manuscripts and gained the double *t* when borrowed into Old English. *Scittisc, Scyttisc,* and *Scottysc* are synonymous in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* a reflection of the identical vowel differences found in the Aramaic etymons. Historical Scottish manuscripts insist on the Scythian origin of the Scots. The conclusion is that *Scot* does not necessarily derive from *Scyth,* but these names, in fact, *descend from the same Aramaic origin:* sqwty and sqyty.

## Endnotes

**[1]** The *CAL* tentatively lists the second sense "Scot?" under the entry sqwty.

**[2]** A brief explanation of Semitic pronunciation is in order. The Semitic consonant ***q*** is pronounced as ***k*** (or *c*), as illustrated by the English transliteration of Hebrew *Yaaqob* to *Jacob.* As well, the consonants ***w*** and ***y*** often served as place holders for a vowel in Aramaic texts. They represented *o* or *u* and *i* respectively.

**[3]** The *CAL* shows the original form, ˀsqwty with an initial prosthetic *aleph* letter ˀ. In Aramaic, when a word with an initial consonant cluster was borrowed from a foreign source, an initial prosthetic *aleph* letter ˀ was added because of the difficulty in pronouncing a consonant cluster (in this case, *sc* or *sk*). This fact suggests Greek *Skythia* as the origin of sqwty. Over time, the prosthetic *aleph* was dropped.

**[4]** Other examples are ˤzty 'Gazaite,' ˀgwpṭy, ˀgypṭy 'Egyptian,' ˀlmyṭy 'Elamite,' and kṭyˤ Hittite.'

**[5]** *Hittite* is a good example of gemination of how *th* changed to double *t.* This word denotes a descendant of *Heth* or *Cheth* (Gen 10:15). In Hebrew, it is *Chittiy.* Another example is *Gath*, a Philistine city, of which an inhabitant is called *Gittiy* (Gittite). The name of the city derives from *gath* 'a wine-press.' In the plural sense, git·tō·wṯ 'wine-presses' is pronounced with a double *t* (Neh 13:15). Doubled letters are not indicated in ancient Aramaic or Hebrew texts.

**[6]** The vowel *y* was not native to Classical Latin speakers. It was pronounced as *i*, hence *Scotti.*

**[7]** In 2012, Rance published the discovery of the second earliest instance of *Scotti*. This instance is Greek Σκόττοι, recorded about 373/74 CE. It attests to the double *t* in the name for Scots. Rance, Philip. "Epiphanius of Salamis and the Scotti: New Evidence for Late Roman-Irish Relations." *Britannia* 43 (2012): 227–242.

**[8]** The source is *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, "Book of Invasions," a major collection of poem and prose narratives, which was compiled in the eleventh century. Some of the narratives date back to the eighth century.

**[9]** Thurneysen, a Celtic scholar who was one of the first to use the principles of modern historical linguistics in Old Irish, states, "After stressed long vowels geminates are more commonly written single." If the preceding vowel becomes a long vowel, the word is no longer subject to the rules of gemination. Thurneysen, Rudolf. *An Old Irish Grammar.* Translated by D.A. Binchy and Osborn Bergin. Dublin: Dublin Institute, 1998, 90 (cf 89).

**[10]** Refer to *Online Etymology Dictionary* at https://www.etymonline.com/word/th, and *Wiktionary at* https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Scythia#Latin.

**[11a]** A footnote indicates that *Scythia* was written as *Schitia* or *Scitia* in another manuscript. Higden, Ranulf. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis.* Translated by John of Trevisa. London: Longman, 1865, 341.

**[11b]** The *Online Etymology Dictionary* states that *sh* was originally pronounced "-sk-" before softening to "-sh-" in late Old English. It adds that after the Norman Conquest, French scribes represented *sh* as *sch-* in initial positions. Online: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=sh.

**[12]** Macalister, R.A. Stewart. *Lebor Gabala Erenn.* Dublin: Educational Society of Ireland, Part 1, 1938, 22 and Part 5, 1956, 62-63.

**[13a]** The exception of *Scithia* is found on page 138 under the title *An ceathramhadh alt* in the online text of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* published by University College, Cork. Online: https://celt.ucc.ie/published/G100054.html.

**[13b]** Incidentally, Keating writes **Scitae** once and in this instance, he calls *Scitae* 'the Scotic race' in the above-mentioned source (chapter XLVIII, page 374).

**[14]** How *Scythia* is written as a proper name in Old English merits an explanation. In the Old English literature, **Sciðða** and **Sciþþia** are occasionally cited as a place name in historical narrative contexts such as *King Alfred's Orosius,* an Old English translation of Orosius' Latin work. These terms display the uncommon manner of doubling *th* (ð is voiced *th;* þ is voiceless *th).* Likely, their etymon would be vernacular Latin *Scithia,* which retained *th* unlike ecclesiastical Latin. It is apparent that *Sciðða* and *Sciþþia* on one hand, and *Scitia* on the other, come from two different routes of phonological change.

**[15]** Translated from the original Latin passage. Skene, William, ed. *The Chronicles of the Picts, The Chronicles of the Scots, and Other Early Memorials of Scottish History.* Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1867, 3.

**[16]** Ibid.*,* 292.

**[17]** Provan, Iain, et al. *A Biblical History of Israel.* Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2003, 62.

**[18]** The earliest instances of *Scitia* occurred at the time Scythians still existed both as a term and as a people. Historians believe that during the third century CE, Scythians passed into obscurity, although Ammianus Marcellinus and Gregory of Nyssa mentioned Scythians a century later.