The Horsemen / Horse-Warriors (?) of the *Uí Eachach Mumhan*.

In his commentary called De Bello Gallico (the Gallic Wars) Julius Caesar writing in 52-51 BC he describes the activities of his cavalry units against the Celtic tribal groups of Gaul. What was the story of these cavalry units, these **Equites** i.e. horsemen, cavalry, knights? In Gaelic the word for horse is *each* i.e. 'of the horse' being *eachach*. *Uí* means a people, tribe, group, clan or extended family. In Latin the word for horse is **Equs**.

The Roman author Tacitus - who also wrote about Irish ports opening up to trade at the end of the first century AD as the Roman conquest of Britain was completed - described the use of cavalry troops and chariots by the Celtic peoples of his day on the European mainland (see Wikipedia under Celtic Warfare). To what extent do images of the vestiges of this tradition of horsemanship survive in early Irish art e.g. in a panel of a high cross, in a relief on the gable end of a monastic church beside a round tower?

[Fr. Dinneen's Irish Dictionary has the word *Eachlach* for a cavalryman, horseman. Another word he has is *Marchach* which means a horseman, a rider, a Knight, a noble. *Marcradh* is the word for a cavalry. Etymologically, what was the origin of the word *each* and what was the origin of the word *marchach*? Did these two words - with the same or similar meanings - enter the Irish language from different cultural groups settling here in ancient times? A place 'abounding in steeds' is a *marcachaighe*.
An alternative word he has is *each-dhíle* (which reminds me of *Maighe Dhíle* **(Mogeely)** i.e. the plain of the horse stock, in Imokilly, East Cork). Check the range of words in Dinneen from *each* to *eachaire* (stable or horse-boy) and beyond]. A third word for a knight or rider is *Ridire (Ridirí* as plural*)....*sounding similar to the English word Rider. The service of Knighthood is *Ridireacht.* What was the cultural origin of the Irish word *Ridire*?

How close in origin (etymologically) are the words **equs** and *each*? So, who were those people of the horse? Were they Celtic (Gallic) cavalry and chariot units as described by Caesar in De Bello Gallico? Were they Roman cavalry, Roman knights leading cavalry with chariot units? Were some Roman cavalrymen and / or charioteers, persons of Gallic or Brittonic (including Irish) origin who acquired training abroad for several years in the Roman military, before returning home to their own people and establishing their own units? Were some horsemen and charioteers residing in Ireland persons who had absconded or were demobbed from Roman military service; and who for some reason or other migrated, either individually or as a group, to seek their fortunes in Ireland? What happened after the defeat of the Gauls by Caesar at Alesia in 56 BC and as Rome subsequently took control of Gallic tribe

lands and broke the native naval fleets? Did some Gallic horsemen, cavalry units and charioteers take ship and escape westward to Hibernia; arriving by ship, a ship in one case perhaps sinking close to a shoreline? How many left for new pastures, how many stayed and accepted the new regime and its implications?

The **Equitates** i.e. the Roman knights, represented the landowning classes enlisted in the ranks of the Roman military machine. What would those in Britannia have done if collapse of Empire meant that they would no longer have a land grant as a pension for their military service or a place to live out the rest of their lives at a garrison town without income? What happened with those based in Britannia, such as at forts along Hadrian's Wall, after Roman administration came to an end in the early years of the 5th century AD?

In Irish myths and legends how much might tales of the athletic feats of warrior gymnasts e.g. the training of the Fianna, and tales of chariots and charioteers, owe to oral traditions of the gladiator schools as well as military training routines (including horsemanship and charioteering) of the Roman Empire both in Britannia and beyond?

In the legends of the Milesians and their 'conquest' of Ireland who was the **Spanish Soldier** (*Miles Espaigne*) married to a Castillian princess named *Beara*? Was he someone who had spent time as a soldier (**miles**) of Rome during its long years of conquest in Spain? Was a shore line taken from *Rinn Beara* (Roche's Point, Cork?) to the *Beara* Peninsula? Who was the original the origin of *Cailleach Beara*, the wise-healer woman (*cailleach*)?

[**Fictional narrative:** Alesia decisive. Its consequences. Chariot and its horses after later minor battle lost, loaded to Venetii ship, bound for river channel in the centuries before a harbour going inland from coastline to Lough Mahon, to the Marshlands. Muddied **CORK HORNS** in the bucket of a river dredger circa 1901 by the Marina, by the Tivoli Ridge, by Penrose Quay..timbers of ship and/ or jetty…chariot and horses slipping overboard… in to the river mud..horses to shore, the rest not recovered, horse tackle not recovered, horned head-dress of horse not recovered…too many, too much to worry about…now thicken the headlands with fortifications, revamp whats already there, have a patrolling militia on horseback, a *fianna* to light the beacons, to give the the coastal signal…rumours of potentialities from the great garrisoned fortress by Severn's shoreline…**Classis** naval sails on the horizon perhaps… Britannia fell so easily, Gaul fell so easily…now last stand, here, Celtia last stand…but it never came and time forgot.]

As related by Caesar what Celtic tribes of Gaul spread / migrated into what would now be the German lands of Saxony and Bavaria? Did their progress

stretch further east towards what is today Austria? What was the extent of the Hercynian forest in his time (1982,145)? How do souterrain distributions map on to these lands? Where are they, where are they not?

…and someone spoke…of **Midir** and the **Horse People** [Horse tribe…the *Uí* of the *Eachaigh*] in the *Lebor Gabhala Erinn* (the Book of Invasions, the Book of the **Taking of Ireland)** …and someone spoke of a lost legion…and someone spoke of the founding of a Roman **Castellum at Cashel**…and someone spoke of **Eochaid Airem at Tara**..and someone spoke of **Eochú Airem** 'he who first dug the earth [in Ireland] to make caves'…and someone spoke of horse-bridal bits and horse blanket weights in museum cases… and someone spoke…and someone spoke of the **Fianna** and of cavalry and guarding the southern coast of Ireland…and someone spoke of naval and merchant ships westering out of Britannia towards the headland port of *Cionn tSáile* …and someone spoke…

Reference/ Further Reading:

Caesar, Julius (1982) The Conquest of Gaul. Translated by S.A. Handford, revised with a new introduction by Jane F. Gardner. Penguin Classics, London.

Dinneen, Patrick S. (1927) *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*. Irish Texts Society, Dublin.

Magan, Manchán (2020) **Thirty-two Words for Field**. Gill Books, Dublin.
[A seminal work of major significance in interpreting the Irish landscape and the cognitive history of its local peoples (their Dindshenchas) within Irish Studies; especially Ireland's historical geography, history and archaeology as interpreted through the theoretical scientific lens of international Anthropology, Ethnography and Social Studies.]