

Uncovering Scandinavian Roots

by Robert C. Boraker

Who are the ancestors of today's Scandinavians? Here is their intriguing history — traced back to 700 B.C.

Few people today know the truth about Nordic origins.

Where did the people of Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Denmark come from? Why do they have so much in common with the British and Americans?

The answers to these questions are startling.

Family and National History

The study of family history is a popular hobby among both Americans and Europeans. It became even more well-known after Alex Haley published his family history in the book entitled *Roots*. This book was later serialized in a television epic that captured the eyes of millions.

Related families anciently made up a tribe. And tribes developed later into nations. The study of family history therefore often leads to the study of a nation's origins — digging way back to its roots.

To find the roots of either a family or a nation, one method is to begin with what is known in the present era. Then trace the thread of evidence back through the centuries to the dim or unknown past.

Tracing Scandinavian roots in history is a fascinating study. Working like a detective, clues and evidence must be searched for, gathered together and sifted. Each piece is then placed in the puzzle to form a picture revealing the origins of the Nordic nations.

Where to Search

What do archaeologists, historians and classical writers say about the peoples who settled in Scandinavia? Some of the best sources of information are rare books to be found only in the best libraries of the world. In these many and varied documents of recorded history, four important items to look for are: names, dates, places and relationships.

Children in European schools learn about the Vikings, Danes, Jutes and Normans — the Scandinavians of recent times. The Viking Age (700-900 A.D.) was an important period of early Scandinavian history. That was a time when Viking Norsemen spread throughout Europe and as far away as Iceland, Greenland and North America.

Earlier at the end of the first century A.D., Tacitus wrote about people in Scandinavia. He called one of their tribes the Suiones. They were known for having powerful fleets. "The shape of their ships differs from the normal in having a prow at both ends which is always ready to be put into shore" (par. 44, *Germania*, Penguin Classics translation). That is an accurate description of the Viking longboat.

The Suiones mentioned by Tacitus were also known as the Svear. The word Svear or Sviar is constantly used in the Nordic Sagas to denote the inhabitants of Sweden. Swedish stamps give the name of the country as "Sverige." It comes from *Svea rike* — meaning "the kingdom of the Svear."

The empire of the Svear was in the territory around Lake Malar near where Stockholm is today. This empire "was called the Lesser Svithiod, or Sweden, in contrast to the Larger Svithiod, or Scythia, from whence they had emigrated" (Vol. 1, page 79, *Scandinavia* by Andrew Crichton and Henry Wheaton).

Great Scythia was the area around the Black and Caspian Seas. When the Svear arrived in Scandinavia, they found the country already inhabited by "the Goths, who had emigrated thither at a remote period, veiled from the eyes of history," says Henry Wheaton in his book *History of the Northmen*.

Scandinavian Goths

Paul Siding begins his history of Scandinavia by saying, "The present inhabitants of Denmark, as well as of Norway and Sweden, are successors of the enormous *Gothic* tribe formerly dwelling round about the Black Sea" (page 19, *Scandinavian Races*).

Notice that both the Svear and the Goths came from the area of the Black Sea. At the mouth of the Danube on the western shore is the area of Getae and Dacia in Roman times. According to Procopius, who wrote his history in the fifth century, Romans "say that the Goths are of the Getic race" (Book V. xxiv, 30).

The Getae are mentioned in the history of Herodotus (fifth century B.C.). In the translation by George Rawlinson, his brother Sir Henry gives this footnote: "The identity of the Getae with the Goths of later times is more than a plausible conjecture. It may be regarded as historically certain" (Vol. III, page 84, 1862 edition).

Jordanes, the best known Gothic historian, always speaks of the Getae and Goths as one people. He also calls them "Scythae."

We find more evidence in other historical accounts. For example, “The Pictish Chronicle declares that the Scythians and Goths had a common origin” (page 216, *The Races of Ireland and Scotland* by W. C. Mackenzie).

The evidence also indicates that the Getae were the same kind of people as the Dacians. They both spoke the same language according to Strabo (7.3.13). Pliny says that the Getae were called Dacians by the Romans (Book IV, xxi, 80).

Duchesne, who collected the Norman chronicles in the seventeenth century, has no doubt whatever that the Normans were Dacians and consistently calls them by that name in his preface.

Dudo, who wrote the earliest history of the Normans in the tenth century, also had no doubt that they came from Scythia beyond the Danube. He also said they were Dacians.

The Cimbri in Denmark

The Svear and Goths were not the only founders of the great Scandinavian race. We also need to consider the Danes, Jutes and Cimbri. The Cimbri gave their name to the Jutland and Holstein area of Denmark. It was formerly called the *Cimbrica Chersonesus* or Cimbric Peninsula.

Where did the Cimbri come from? When Henry Long wrote about the early geography of Europe, he had no doubts when he said: “Strabo (vii, 2,2) informs us that the Cimbri were the same people called by the Greeks Cimmerii. Under this name, we find them in two widely different positions at the northwestern and north-eastern extremities of the then known world — in the peninsula of Jutland upon the German Ocean (Baltic) and in that of Tauris in the Black Sea” (pages 70-71), *Early Geography of Western Europe*, 1859).

Here again is another root leading us back to the Black Sea. There is also a connection with the Dacians and Getae. Notice what Anderson’s *Royal Genealogies* has to say about it:

The Cimbri were in time expelled by the Scythians, and wandering westward into Europe, after long travels arrived at this Chersonesus, called from them Cimbrica; and the Danes, called by Ptolemy Dauciones and Gutae, soon invaded that part of this peninsula, called from them Jutland to this day, and mixing with the Cimbri became one nation, called by the ancients All Cimbri in general” (page 415).

The term “Scythians” is sometimes applied by historians to a particular people and sometimes to all the nomad tribes in the vast territory north of the Black and Caspian Seas. It is this area where we must find the roots of the Scandinavian peoples.

The Gimirrai

The Cimmerians were the oldest inhabitants of Scythia. Their history can be traced back to near the close of the eighth century B.C. in Assyrian records.

A collection of letters preserved in Ashurbanipal’s library inform us of events in the Urartu area of Armenia during the years 707-706 B.C. Included in this collection were reports from Assyrian frontier posts. One said the king of Urartu came into “the land of Gamir” and had to be forced back.

For many years E. D. Phillips studied the history of the nomads in Scythia. He says the Cimmerians “appear late in the eighth century on the northern border of the Kingdom of Urartu as the Gimirrai or Gamir of Assyrian records” (page 52, *The Royal Hordes, Nomad Peoples of the Steppes*). Other historians agree that the Gimirrai were the “Kimmerioi” Cimmerians of the Greeks.

There is also a connection with the biblical Gomer in Hosea’s prophecy. Notice that the prophet Hosea married a woman called “Gomer” (Hos. 1:3). She represented the unfaithfulness and slavery of the ten tribes of the House of Israel (chapter 3).

This prophecy indicates that the northern ten tribes of Israel would also be called “Gomer” while in captivity. The Israelites were actually known as Gomerians or Cimmerians.

Tiglath Pileser III was the first king of Assyria to invade northern Israel. He deported Israelites to Assyria during the reign of Pekah (II Kings 15:29). This event is confirmed by the ancient records of Assyria.

The inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III says, “The land of Bit-Humria, all of its people together with their goods I carried off to Assyria” (Vol. 1, par. 816). *Ancient Records of Babylonia and Assyria* by Lukenbill).

Historians have found no mention of the exiled Israelites in ancient records because the Assyrians did not call them “Israel.” They referred to Israel as “Bit Humria” or “Bit-Khumri.” Why? That name means the “land of Omri.” They probably used that name because Omri built Samaria as the capital city of northern Israel (I Kings 16:24).

Omri was originally pronounced as “Ghomri” according to Dr. T.G. Pinches in his book *Assyria and Babylonia*, (page 339). That is why the Assyrian names for the captive Israelites were Beth-Omri, Bit-Khumri, Bit-Humri and Bit-Ghumri. The Ghumri or Ghomri later were known as the “Gamera.” By the time of Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.), Ghomri was written as Gimirrai.

Assyrian records say the Gamir or Gimirrai were living in northern Media in 707 B.C. — in exactly the same place where some of the Israelites were placed in captivity only fourteen years earlier.

The Israelites in Swedish History?

Shalmaneser V was the Assyrian king who finally besieged Samaria. He took the Israelites into exile — settling them on the Habor river and in the cities of the Medes (II Kings 17:6). At least one Swedish historian understood the truth about what happened to their descendants centuries later.

In his scholarly-produced *History of Sweden (Svea-rikes Historia)*, Dalin says “Shepherd-Scythians,” called Vodiner or Budiner, came to the Swedish islands around 400 B.C. because of pressure from Philip and Alexander of Macedonia. He says another race joined them, which was a mixture of Scythians, Greeks and Hebrews. They were called Neuri. According to Dalin, they were the ancestors of the Finns, Lapps and Estonians.

“Concerning the Neuri,” Dalin continues, ‘it should be noted that they seem to be remnants of the Ten Tribes of Israel which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, brought as captives out of Canaan.’ When one realises certain characteristics in which “the language of the ancient Finns, Lapps and Estonians is similar to the Hebrew and even that this people in ancient times reckoned their year’s beginning from the first of March, and Saturday as their Sabbath, then one sees that the Neuri in all probability had this origin” (pages 54-55, *Svea-rikes Historia*, Volume 1, 1747).

The Behistun Rock

The inscription on the rock cliff at Behistun in northern Persia has been a key to interpreting the languages of the ancient East. It also gives us a clue as to the names Israel bore in captivity. The inscription gives the names of 23 provinces in three languages that were subject to Darius Hystaspes.

In the Persian and Susian languages, one of the provinces listed is “Scythia” (from the phonetic word Saka). But in the Babylonian language, the same province is called the “land of the Cimmerians.” It was translated from the phonetic word “Gimiri.”

Sir Henry Rawlinson, who first copied and translated the inscription, considered the name “Gimiri” to be the Babylonian equivalent of “the tribes” (Vol. III, page 183, *History of Herodotus* translated by George Rawlinson, 1862).

Sir Henry also expressed his view that “we have reasonable grounds for regarding the Gimiri, or Cimmerians, who first appeared in the confines of Assyria and Media in the seventh century B.C., and the Sacae of the Behistun Rock nearly two centuries later, as identical with Israel” (page 61, *Great Britain’s Rank Among the Nations*, by R.N. Adams).

That is the startling truth! The House of Israel was captive in Assyria and Media. In the land of their captivity, their language and customs changed. The Israelites became known by different names. They were called Gimirrai, Cimmerians and Scythians. The Persians called all Scythians “Sacae.”

Some of the ten tribes were driven into the Caucasus Mountains between the Black and Caspian Seas. After they left those mountains, they migrated into northwestern Europe as the Cimbri, Celts, Danes, Normans and Saxons. They became known racially as “Caucasians.”

Anglo-Saxon Roots

Pliny says that the Sacae who settled in Armenia (south of the Black Sea) were named “Sacassani” (Book vi.19). They called their part of Armenia “Sacasena,” which is nearly the same as Saxonia or Saxony. Ptolemy also mentions a Scythian people called “Saxones.” The Anglo-Saxons are British ancestors.

Both British and Scandinavian roots therefore go back to the area of Scythia. They are kindred nations with a common origin. No wonder there are Scythian elements in both Viking and Celtic art (page 178, *The Scythians* by T. T. Rice).

Not all Scythians were Israelites. But we definitely know that the House of Israel — the northern ten tribes — was in the area of Scythia during the first century. The apostle James addressed his letter to them (James 1:1).

So did the apostle Peter. He specifically mentions the provinces south of the Black Sea where they were living as “sojourners” and “exiles” (I Peter 1:1, RSV).

Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote his history about the same period of time. In the last quarter of the first century, he said, “the ten tribes are beyond — (the river) — Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers” (Book XI, chapter V. 2, *Antiquities of the Jews*).

Although some Israelites had already migrated into northern Europe, many were still in the territory of Great Scythia when Josephus wrote.

This article doesn’t have space to give all the evidence available. It can only supplement the vast amount of biblical information on the subject in Mr. Armstrong’s booklet, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. Write for a free copy if you don’t already have it.

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