

OWL-LIKE PLAQUES FROM THE COPPER AGE AND THE DUSIO, DUSO, DUSION, DŪSIUS AND DUC. NOT PRIMARILY TOYS AND WITH DEEP RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE (DEATH)

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***Abstract:** The article Owl-like plaques of the Copper Age and the involvement of children, [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)] in Science Reports proposes that those plaques were manufactured by children who learned to make them by playing with them as toys. The authors propose that the plaques were primarily dolls and toys that were later used as votive objects in funerals. Owls were selected for the plaques' design because they are the most anthropomorphic of all animals, excluding apes. The plaques had no deep ritual significance. Owl ear tufts were important enough to be mimicked in owl-like plaques, whose holes were probably used to fix owl feathers, suggest the authors [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)]. In this article, I present new traces from mythology that may tell us otherwise. Etymologic research in this article strengthens the traditional view of scholars who propose that owls are related to death. Also, I believe that the etymologic research firmly links the owls to a psychopomp role, possibly pre-Celtic, like the crows were for the Celtic peoples. Therefore, owl-like plaques would have had significant ritual importance in the Copper Age. Death was a serious event that resulted in elaborate burying rituals and symbolism. Taking into account the harsh living conditions and early death rates during the Late Neolithic, the owl-like plaques were manufactured as amulets and not votive objects. Even if used by children, they were primarily used as protective amulets. If some of the owl-like plaques, broken, discarded, unfinished, or stolen from the manufacturing place, ended up being sometimes used by children as dolls and toys, it does not mean that they were primarily (initially, firstly) used as such. This article sheds new light on how many owl epigraphs in Europe, described by several archaeologists, could be better understood as a death myth. As a whole, this article goes further than merely re-discussing the owl-like plaque scenario proposed by [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)] and offers a refreshing new view on how the pre-Celtic peoples may have seen the owl in their mythology.*

Key words: *duso, dusio, dūsius, duc, owl-like plaques*

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2022, I conducted some research for an article about the owl's possible role as a psychopomp, like the crows are for Celtic peoples. At the end of 2022, when I found the article *Owl-like plaques of the Copper Age and the involvement of children* [Negro, J.J. et al, 2020], I felt that something was missing in the scenario they suggested: owl-like plaques were initially dolls and toys used later as votive objects in funerals. The owl-like plaques had not deep ritual significance.

Death was a serious business in ancient communities that might ask for elaborated rituals for the bodies and souls of the deceased. Tombs, necropolis, other types of burial places were carefully decorated with inscriptions and images of death-related animals and objects. The time, efforts, and resources dedicated to setting up a place for the dead indicate that death was ritually important. For these and other reasons, mainstream scholars believe that the owl was related to death. However, would owl-like plaques be related to death? They were mostly found in tombs and other types of burial places. The elaborated inscriptions in Late Neolithic burial places include a significant number of owl eyes or owl depictions. Certain surviving tales in Western Europe may reinforce the proposition that the owls were related to death and may have even been psychopomps. If they were psychopomps, I could not imagine a deeper ritual significance than to guide each individual's soul to the otherworld. And, if the owls had that deep mythological importance, the owl-like plaques had too, and they were not primarily designed to be dolls or tolls, but as protective amulets.

In this article, I also add a short review including the Portuguese scholars who were the first to study owl-like plaques. Some of their conclusions from the late 19th and early 20th centuries were later attested by present-day scholars. In addition, the output of my research for this article brings readers enticing new glimpses into the role of the owl in the mythology of certain Western and Central European regions. This article may help archaeologists better understand not only the owl-like plaques but also the owl-designed inscriptions from the Stone Age, described in detail in the work of Marija Alseikaitė Gimbutas.

2. METHODOLOGY

After a short review of the existing information about the owl-like plaques, the investigation moved to (1) how the psychopomps functioned in Celtic culture. After that, (2) investigation of the etymology of certain owl names helped to establish the link between them and the possible psychopomp role in pre-Celtic cultures, and (3) research on related mythology in Western Europe, which was confirmed through legends about death and how souls travel to the otherworld.

3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

We start with a short and non-exhaustive review of the existing information on owl-like plaques. Marija Alseikaitė Gimbutas takes us through the pre-Indo-European Megalithic scenario in Europe related to depictions or interments of raptor birds in or close to communal graves: owls, crows, eagles, and ravens. Gimbutas' universalist analysis is not anymore mainstream, replaced in part by contextual analysis [Lillios, K.

T. (2012)]. However, for the purposes of this article Gimbuta's descriptions of sites are relevant: in Isbister (South Ronaldsay, Orkney Islands), a communal megalithic tomb held hundreds of excarnated skeletal remains with thirty-five sea eagle skeletons. The Palaeolithic bones of Ensisheim (Haut-Rhin, France), one of which bears owl-like eyes, and in Southern France, menhirs with owl-eye depictions are situated close to a communal grave. In England (Newgrange entrance stone and kerbstone nr.52), the Baltics, and the Mediterranean region, depictions of owl eyes were found, sometimes associated with female breasts and vulvae, while the eyes are sometimes depicted as coiled lines that some interpret as serpents. The Casainhos (Fanhões) Neolithic dolmen in Portugal rendered phallic objects with owl eyes. Sardinian tombs from the Ozieri people were painted with blood-red ochre and decorated with eyes, breasts, owl heads, and ram horns. For Gimbutas, the owl represented an ancient goddess of regeneration and death [Gimbutas, M. A. (1999), p.19, 20 figures 11, 12, p.63, 66, 68, 69, 71, 177].

Lillios proposes that the owl-like plaques originated in Portugal [Lillios, K. T. (2008)]. Portuguese archaeologist José Leite de Vasconcellos detailed the owl-like plaques in his book *Religiões da Lusitania* (1897). He and before him Estácio da Veiga noticed that some plaques' orifices had traces of use (from cordons?), while other plaques seem not to have been used because their holes still had rotation grooves produced by flint tips. Estácio da Veiga found plaques engraved on both sides and other plaques with three holes, while one from the Cesareda (Óbidos) cave had holes on its right side (and not on its top). He dated them to the transition from the Late Neolithic to the Copper Age. He doubted that owl-like plaques could be used in collars because they were fragile [Estacio da Veiga, S.P.M. (1887), v.2, p.434-439].

Portuguese archaeologist Virgílio Correa mentioned that most findings were in Portugal, mainly in the centre and south of the country, in Portuguese Estremadura, the Alentejo and the Algarve, but also as far north as in the city of Viseu. In Spain, they were found in Extremadura and the South. During short excavations (1914-1915) in a dolmen (anta) site in Pavia (Mora) in the Évora region (Portugal), Correa found 50 of these plaques. Correa proposed the following classification: Plaque Idols (stone), Sculpture Idols (stone, mud and bones) and Cylinder Idols (stone and bones). The first to appear in the chronology were the Plaque Idols, which disappeared with the first findings of contemporary copper objects in the early Copper Age. Cylinder Idols followed the Plaque Idols, and last came the owl Sculpture Idols (stone, mud and bones), with some superposition in time among them. Correa says that only the Sculpture Idols lasted into the Bronze Age [Correa, V. (1917)].

The plaques (see Figure 1) were found in open fields, inside dolmens (antas), and in artificial and natural caves. Further research has been conducted since Correa established that they are mostly found in communal graves. A plaque found by Correa at the dolmen of Cabeço da Anta situated at Casa Branca do Outeiro (Pavia, Portugal) still had clear residues of red ochre on its surface. The plaque found at Mamaltar dolmen also had ochre residues on it, leading Correa to propose that all plaques were painted [Correa, V. (1917), p.29-34]. The red colour may have had an important symbolism for the Late Neolithic people, going back to the Palaeolithic [Gimbutas, M. A. (1999), p.70], possibly representing blood (life, birth). Anthropologist Dr. K.T. Lillios directed comprehensive excavations (2007-2008) with enticing results in a semi-artificial cave at Bolores (Torres Vedras, Portugal) in the Sizandro river valley during 2007-2008, suggested that the owl-like plaques were heraldry badges [Lillios, K. T. (2008)]. Like [Estacio da Veiga, S.P.M. (1887), v.2, p.434-439], she determined that the

hole wear patterns that developed quickly on owl-like plaque replicas were not present in several real owl-like plaques from archaeological findings. She used replica plaques as collars and felt they were cumbersome. They were manufactured specifically to accompany the dead, Lillios (op.cit.) concluded.

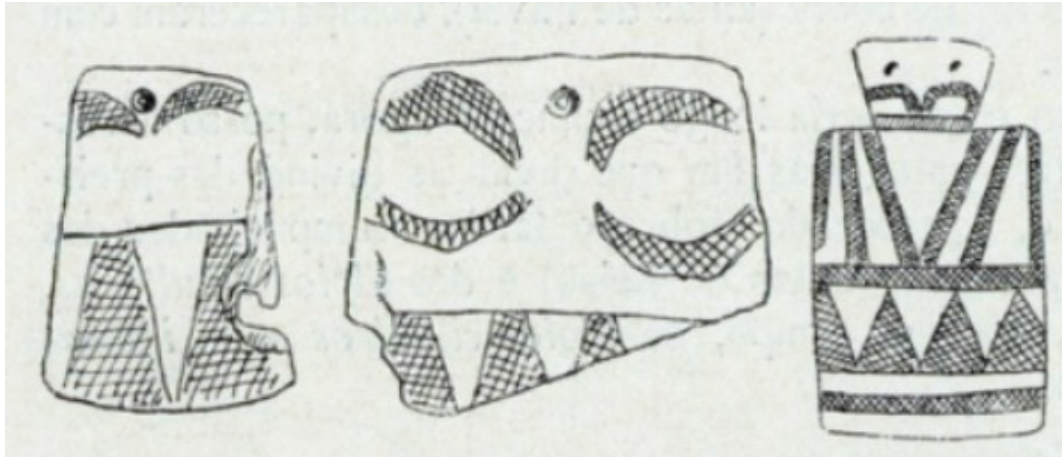


Figure 1. From left to right, owl-like plaques from the caves of Alcanena (Santarém), the dolmen de Brissos (Pavia), and Spain (Rotondo Collection) in [Correa, V. (1917), p.34].

Contrary to Lillios, [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)] suggest that the owl-like plaques were manufactured and used initially as toys and dolls, and their engraving would be part of a play. Later on, they would be used as votive objects for the dead, according to [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)] based on [Langley, M. C. & Litster, M. (2018)]. They do not have a deep ritual value:

“Contrary to the previous interpretations ascribing highly ritualistic and deep significance to these objects...their basic and fast manufacture point to their crafting and use by young members of the community, possibly as dolls, toys, drawings or amulets...”, “...many ended up as possible votive elements in burials”

and they continue:

“...the slate plaques and some related objects were children dolls or toys of little ritual value...” [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)].

Parents and relatives of children will not spare a laugh when they see that the kids will play with almost any object they can grab. Not infrequently, the children would prefer their selected piece of anything they found around to the real toys purchased by their parents. Children’s ability to play with any kind of object could have existed to the Late Neolithic children who lived in or close to the owl-like plaque manufacturing sites. Their curiosity would make them go to check how the plaques were manufactured and play with the broken and discarded owl-like plaques. Older children could have taught younger children to make the toy owl plaques. However, we should consider the harsh reality of life at that time.

3.1 Children in the Late Neolithic: extreme poverty, high-calorie malnutrition and a 30-40% Death Rate

Adult stature is directly linked to living, nutrition, health, and sanitary conditions. Research has attested that the adult stature in Portugal grew very slowly from the Mesolithic until the 1960's, with slight oscillations for higher or lower stature during the period under study [Cardoso, H.F.V. and Gomes, J.F.A. (2009)]. Although there have been recent advances in historic age-expectancy research, many rely on the statistics by Lawrence J. Angel:

- Decline (-10% to -20%) in meat consumption from the Mesolithic (hunter gatherer) to the Neolithic (semi-sedentary cereal farming) era.
- Decrease in -6,2% in the Average Median Adult male stature from the Late Palaeolithic to the Late Neolithic.
- The Average Median Lifespan for males decreased from 35,4 years to 31,6 years (-10,7%) during the same period.

Population increase: however, the population increased 10- to 50-fold from the Palaeolithic to the Late Neolithic. The reason is that cereal farming resulted in much more calories available for the population [Ward, N. (1999)], hence the birth rate increased. At the same time, age expectation declined and child death skyrocketed to 30%–40%. The reason for this could be that cereal consumption increases phytic acid (phytate) levels in the body, which bind with minerals and block the absorption of calcium, magnesium, iron, copper, and zinc. This may explain the higher incidence of diseases at that time. In addition, farming life imposed greater stress on the bones [Ward, N. (1999)], which were probably weaker because of calcium deficiency from phytic acid ingestion. Looking at that data, it seems to me that this is a *high-calorie malnutrition* scenario and could have led to a higher mortality rate for 0–6-year- old children, as proposed by researchers mentioned further. Armelagos further confirms that:

“The Neolithic revolution dramatically narrowed the dietary niche by decreasing the variety of available foods, with the shift to intensive agriculture creating a dramatic decline in human nutrition.”

High-calorie malnutrition and higher mortality rate: he further compares the worsening diet in the Neolithic to the present high-calorie malnutrition diet from highly processed foods, resulting in damaging obesity in a significant number of individuals [Armelagos, G.J. (2014)]. Agriculture brought a higher food supply, but settled communities had a higher incidence of infections. More energy was allocated to maintain body defences and reproduction, while there was less energy left for growth and maintenance [Wells, C.K. and Stock, J.T. (2020)]. Furthermore, it is well established that there was a high mortality rate in the Late Neolithic, as attested for South Western Iberia [Waterman, A.J. and Thomas, J.T. (2011)]. In Portugal, at Bolores (Torres Vedras), skeletal remains of 36 individuals (males and females) were found in a communal grave in an artificial cave: 46% were subadult individuals aged less than 20 years; and 29% were aged 21–30 years [Lillios, K. T. et al. (2017)]. Therefore, almost 40% of the subadults (less than 21 y.o.) disappeared during their infancy years.

At another Late Neolithic site excavation further north at Alto de Reinoso (Burgos, Castille and León), the scenario is similar: 8 infants aged 3–13 years (23%), 8 juveniles aged 14–20 years (23%), in total 46% subadults. Ten individuals were 21–30 year age adults (29%) and 4 adults were over 21 years old, whose precise age range could not be set [Alt, K.W. et al (2016), Table 1]. The population decreased by 28% when transitioning from the subadult to the adult segment.

Poverty and diet increase violent behaviour: extreme poverty damages brain development in children. Exposure to physiological malnutrition and psychosocial stress in childhood makes them less able to control their emotions when they are adults. Adults in extreme poverty have a higher level of mental health issues and psychological distress [Evans, G. (2017)]. There is evidence that *high-calorie malnutrition* contributes to crime and violence [Lonsdale D. (1994)]. Vitamin B12 (Cyanocobalamin) is found naturally only in meat, eggs, and dairy products. With part of their diet coming from cultivated cereals, I speculate that the average Neolithic community had a higher incidence of vitamin B12 deficiency than the Mesolithic communities. A lack of vitamin B12 may cause depression, bipolar disorder, cyclothymic personality, violent behaviour with rage attacks, temper outbursts and domestic violence, fatigue, paranoid psychosis, and paranoid ideation [Jayaram, N. et al. (2013)].

I conclude that high-calorie malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies could have affected entire Late Neolithic communities in certain places, resulting in a stressful and violent intra-community social environment.

3.2 Intra and Intercommunal violence. Servants and slaves?

[Alt, K.W. et al. (2016)] believe that there should have been more *infans* at Alto do Reinoso, which were excluded from collective burials. They quote previous research that shows the *age group 0-6 comprises the largest proportion of deaths in pre-historic samples*. Older children (>6 years old) were buried with the adults, and the authors do not know why the community did not do the same with their younger children. Perhaps, they suggest, the bones of the younger children deteriorated as they are more fragile. Perhaps the younger children had special burial rituals that excluded them from the collective burials.

I believe that children's slavery or any other form of social death or discrimination could also have played a role in the below-average number of children's skeletal remains detected by the authors at the Alto do Reinoso communal grave.

Late Neolithic slavery? But did servants or slaves exist in the Late Neolithic? Recent research seems to point in that direction. Studies on a Late Neolithic community that existed until the mid-Bronze Age in the Lech River valley (Germany) indicate a stratified patrilocal society with a high-status core family and unrelated low-status individuals. Long-term residential stability of families and female exogamy were observed. The female brides were brought from as far away as Northern Italy. Even being foreigners, they were buried with many offerings and objects, attesting that they lived as part of the hosting community's higher class. However, of the 104 graves examined, a proportion were from lower-class individuals who were not related to the core family and were buried with few objects, indicating their subordinate class status. While it is difficult to attest that they were slaves, they would represent the beginning of

a servant or slave class distinct from farmers, think [Mittnik, A. et al. (2019)] [Arnold, B. (1988)]. We get out of the European Late Neolithic bubble and go to Brazil where the indigenous people around the year 1500 lived mostly as semi-nomadic tribes, living from gathering, fishing, hunting and migrant agriculture. The Kadiwéu tribe at present live from selling and exporting their ceramic items painted with natural shiny resins. They manufacture fashion clothing replicating their ancient body paint, which are prized artisanal items in Brazil. Lévy-Strauss studied this tribe in 1930. Formerly they were constantly at war. Abortion and infanticide were so frequent that the Kadiwéu had to raid other tribes to abduct their children to be adopted into the Kadiwéu tribe. They used to charge taxes, tolls, plundering and enslaving the neighbouring tribes. The Terena tribe were slaves of the Kadiwéu, but the Terena themselves had slaves. The Kadiwéu kept the Guaná tribe as vassals. The Guaná paid taxes to the Kadiwéu to keep their plantations safe from raids and paid a toll so they could transit through the Kadiwéu lands for their trade activities. The Kadiwéu society was stratified into classes, the lowest of which was composed of slaves from any other tribe they could raid. The Kadiwéu women used slaves for menial work and agriculture and were free to dedicate their time to body painting, which was considered an art. Historically, the Kadiwéu considered themselves artists and not artisans. [Melatti, J. C. (2007)]. Then, we have this pre-historic community living from gathering, fishing, hunting and migrant agriculture, but also establishing complex social relations with their neighbours, including master communities, their clients, vassals and slaves. With the due respect for the differences that may exist between those two realities, I wonder if this complex social structure in a late Pre-Columbian Brazilian community, which was much less developed than the Andean, could not have existed also in a certain measure in the European Late Neolithic communities.

Intercommunal massacres. At present, an array of research is published, of which I mention two. The first lists eighteen cases of massacres from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age [Parker Pearson, M. and Thorpe, I.J. (2005)] and the second evidences that intercommunal violence seems to have increased in the Late Neolithic [Díaz-Navarro, S. et al. (2021)]. Other academic research evidences intercommunal violence in Neolithic communities in Anatolia, France, Upper Nubia, Poland, and other places. Intercommunal violence has existed since at least the Mesolithic.

Large-scale warfare and clan vendettas. New archaeological discoveries attest to evidence of “large-scale and organised warfare among pre- and protohistoric populations”. In the case of the massacre at the La Hoya settlement (Iron Age, c. 1500 inhabitants), houses with food, craft items, and personal objects were abandoned and some houses were burned. Findings suggest that part of the population was massacred and the other part fled or was abducted. From the 13 skeletal remains found up to now, nine were adults (70%, 6 males, 3 females), two adolescents (15%), and one child with around three years of age and a six-month-old infant (15%) [Fernández-Crespo, T. et al. (2020), p.1245, 1246, 1248]. These data can change with further excavation.

Selling their own children. Parents in need would sell or trade their children, and inter-community raids could have been used to replenish an existing workforce. The tragic real-life case of a deprived US family who sold their four 2,4,6, and 6 years old children in the 1940s and the fifth too, who was sold while still not born, was widely discussed at the time. Unfortunately, some “purchased” children were treated as slaves by their acquirers [Dillon, A. (2021)]. Actions by husbands to sell their spouses and children in 18th-century Southern England were widely practiced [Stone, L. (2002)].

During the Chinese famine of 1953-54, parents sold or bartered their children in droves [Dikkötter, F. (2013)]. At present, parents experiencing stress use social media to do the same. Why would this behaviour, which is frequent in recent and present times, be less significant in extreme poverty conditions in the Late Neolithic? At that time, the birth rate was high and health and nutrition conditions were worse from the Mesolithic. The excess number of children could be sold very young (0-6 years old) before they die of malnutrition and illnesses.

Stressful Late Neolithic scenario: it is difficult to believe that children would have time left for playing with toys, except if a few of them were born into the core families that led the community, higher in the social scale. Most children would rather spend their time surviving. As soon as they could grab something, they would help cultivate, harvest, hunt, and fish, and help the community with numerous daily tasks, which prioritised obtaining and storing food. Also, if vitamin B12 deficiency occurred as we mentioned earlier, the families would be prey to violent behaviours and aggressions. Whole malnourished families, and mothers overwhelmed by the high number of children would increase children mistreatment. As for these other adults and children that were either born as servants or were captured through raids and battles against other communities and those that were low in the social scale within the community, they would live as subjugated non-core community persons under worse living conditions than their masters. These servants would perform any mean work or taboo object manufacturing, including (I believe) the owl-like plaques, because they were associated with death (taboo). They would live as destitute outcasts on the settlement outskirts. They would not be allowed to bury their dead in a communal sacred place. Their children would be bartered for anything that suited their families or masters. Most likely, under this scenario, the children would be used as a cheap slave workforce to do any mean job, perhaps including owl-like plaque manufacturing. Those 0-6 years old children would have scarce, if any time, to manufacture toys on a large scale and play with them, and later offer them as votive objects for the dead [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)].

The unfortunate exploitation of children occurs every day at present. There is no reason it would not have happened in a Late Neolithic era plagued by malnutrition, declining age expectancy, increased impact from diseases, and intra- and intercommunity violence. Children living this stressful scenario would not have much time left to fabricate the owl-like plaques for initial use as a toy. They'd rather spend the day going after food.

3.3 Crows: *Celtic Avis Auguralis* and *Psychopomps*

Did the Late Neolithic owl-like plaques have no deep ritual meaning? Let's start with the crow myth in Celtic culture, so we can better compare it with the possible owl myth in pre-Celtic times. In Irish, "*badb* means a *scald crow*, under which form the war goddesses appeared, probably because these birds were seen near the slain. The *scald-crow* is also called *Badbcatha*, *battle crow*" [MacCulloch, J.A. (1911), p.71]. *Brân* means *raven* (*Corvus corax*). The *crow* is denominated *boduo* [Lacroix, J. (2007), p.100]. Cathubodua (battle crow) was a Continental Celtic battle goddess [Mackillop, J. (1998), p.113]. Borsje believes that these denominations also imply supernatural associations [Koch, J.T. (2012), p.101]. *Mor-rígain* shapeshifted herself into a huge raven during the battle of Maide Thuiread and flew over the enemy troops, killing them

in droves. Then she took the souls of her dead warriors, but only the gallant ones, off to the other world. The Irish goddesses *Badb* and *Macha* also used to shapeshift into crows. *Mor-rígain* is also associated with foretelling. Therefore, in the ancient Celtic world, crows were *avis augurales* and *psychopomps*.

In our materialistic and rationalistic world, if we see carrion-eating birds going through human bodies after a battle, we would immediately think they are scavenging for food. However, in a world where the natural and supernatural mix every minute of each day [Sherwood, A. (2009)], people would believe that carrion-eating birds interact supernaturally with the souls of deceased persons. John T. Koch suggests that the Gauls believed that birds would carry the souls of the deceased to the other world [Koch, J.T. (2016)]. [Lacroix, J. (2007), p.100] is more specific: those birds are crows. Several Celtic helmets are ornated either with bird wings or with carefully reproduced crows and ravens. Some of them have articulated wings that flap according to the movements of the warriors in battle. One of them is depicted in the Gundestrup Cauldron. The beautifully designed Celtic Helmet of Ciumești (Statu Mare) in Romania is among the most significant winged helmets on record.

3.4 Owls. Are they carrion eaters?

Crows in the Celtic myth were psychopomps because they are carrion eaters. This would perhaps apply to owls too if they were carrion eaters. There are several studies on the diet of these birds. The eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*) diet comprises 60.8% birds and 31% mammals [Boyan, P.M. (2016)] and [Caula, B. and Marotto, P. (2021), p.74]. The barn owl (*Tito alba*) prefers small mammals, which comprise 80%–90% of their diet [Obuch, J. (2009)]. The little owl (*Athene noctua*) loves insects (67.2%), but complements her nutrition with small mammals (21%) [Charter, M. et al. (2013)]. The Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) is mostly an insectivore (86.6% of its diet) [Kristin, A. and Latková, H. (2012)]. These studies have never mentioned that the owl is a carrion-eater bird. However, research in the US observed carrion feeding by the barred owl (*Strix varia*), provided the dead bait was recognised as part of their diet, such as grey squirrels and white-tailed deer. Dead chicken and turkey meat did not attract these American owls [Kapfer, J.M. et al. (2011)]. Carrion eating was attested for the eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*) in Bulgaria [Boyan, M. and Spassov, N. (2017)] and in the Ebro river valley (Zaragoza), where these owls ate bait chicken carcasses. Their carrion diet increased to 25% in winter and decreased to 6.9% in summer [Serrano, D. (2000)]. The eagle owl nests in winter and must find food for the owlets, even if from carrion. From these data, we conclude that the owls will prefer live prey but will not turn their beaks away from carrion, even in summer but especially during winter. Would they prey on human remains? I believe so. As they can feed on human remains, would they be considered psychopomps?

3.5 Are owls Celtic Psychopomps?

Roman owl mythology is related to Greek mythology, where owls are seen as a symbol of wisdom. Roman owls are *avis augurales*, not psychopomps. While it is well established that in Celtic culture the crows are psychopomps, what about Celtic psychopomp owls? They are carrion eaters like the crows, but there is no evidence of them being psychopomps. There are a few owl depictions from Gallo-Roman

archaeological findings in France, but they would probably come from the Roman owl tradition, not from the Celtic tradition. For the Romans, the owls, crows, eagles, and other birds were not psychopomps but *aves augurales* that predicted future events [Dumézil, G. (1974), p.588]. In France, there is not a single Celtic owl in the huge Musée d'Archéologie Nationale's Celtic and Gallo-Roman iconography collection [Olivier, L. and Ferret S. (2023, January 2)]. Likewise, there is no owl in the Iron Age iconography at the Musée de Bretagne [Six, M. (2023, January 4)]. Owls are not Celtic psychopomps. If they are psychopomps, they should be pre-Celtic.

3.6 A possible link to Pre-Celtic Psychopomp owls

Galician mythology sheds light on how the owl could have been seen in pre-Celtic times. This is the tale of the one-eyed giant ogre Olháparo.¹ This giant seems to have originated in the dense and isolated mountain forests of Serra do Courel (Galicia), part of a mountain range that in Asturias goes up north and follows the coast until Cantabria and farther. The Olháparo is also known as the Ojáncano in the Castilian-speaking regions outside Galicia, but in this article we keep his denomination in the Galician language.

Ogres in Celtic mythology: perverse narcissist psychopaths, one-eyed evil giants, are not unknown in Celtic lore. Indeed, the Irish have a one-eyed giant Balor of the Evil Eye. He stole Glas, the giant cow, to keep the Irish milk production monopoly in his hands and thus control the masses of Irish dairy consumers. Balor lived in a castle on Tory Island (Donegal) and had a beautiful daughter. She would be the mother of Lugh, who would later kill his evil-eyed, cattle raider grandpa. Another Irish giant, Fionn Mac Cumhaíll (anglicised into Finn McCool), is of a noble family. His grandfather was a druid, hence a magister, historian, war strategist, spiritual leader, and poet, as Julius Caesar describes them in his book *Comentarii Belo Gallico*. Fionn himself was also a poet. He was married and lived in a house. His lovely wife helped him escape in the guise of a sleeping (giant) baby from the fury of a Scottish giant. Mac Cumhaíll was powerful and built with his own hands the Giant's Causeway, a stone passage that connected Ireland to Scotland. However, at heart, he was an educated gentleman. This was also the case of Carn Galva, a Cornish giant who accidentally killed a boy from a village not far from his cave home. He was deeply broken-hearted from that incident and gently died of sorrow seven years later. The one-eyed Greek *Κύκλωπες* (Kiklopes, Cyclopes) were artisans of the first quality and manufactured the sword used by Zeus himself. These are clearly refined and some of them are cult giants.

The Galician Olháparos: on their side, the Galician–Asturian– Cantabrian Olháparos had not such frills and skills as Fionn and Carn Galva. They could not manufacture anything, as the Kiklopes did. The Olháparos did not own castles like Balor, but they shared with the Irish giant traces of perverse narcissism. The big only eye (evil eye) from the Olháparo would covet anything he could see or think of. Olháparos would rather be in the same class as other brutish Celtic cave-dwelling one-eyed giants such as the Athach and the Ciudachs. Like them, the Olháparos also live in caves. When returning home after a hard day of work destroying everything that they

¹ Medieval Galician originated the Portuguese language. Galicia participates in the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, and for this reason, I use the converging spelling supported by the Galician Academy of the Portuguese Language, the Brazilian Academy of Letters, and the Lisbon Academy of Sciences.

cannot kill and eat around them, every Olháparo rolls a huge stone to block the entrance of his cave so he can rest in safety. Their hair is red, and their long beards are darker red. They wander around naked, covering their nudity with long beards greased with bear fat. The bear fat avoids their beard to entangle on trees and rocks, explains the tale. Even so, if one Olháparo gets his beard caught by trees, he will root out the huge centenary trees to free himself, leaving stretches of forests as if a tornado had passed through them [Cano Herrera, M. (2007)]. The Olháparos cannot utter a word. They bellow like bulls in the rut during sunsets. They are not born from sexual intercourse, but from worms buried nine months on the earth. These worms stem from the decomposing body of another dead Olháparo. They not only look evil, but they radiate their spiritual malignancy, contaminating everybody close to them. When an Olháparo is close to any settlement, even if the villagers and farmers are unaware that the ogre is close by, the number of infractions, disputes, and fights among them increases. The Olháparos bring bad spirituality, misery, death, and sickness to the villages and isolated homesteads in the Galician–Asturian– Cantabrian mountain wildernesses [Cano Herrera, M. (2007)].

When the Galician villagers at the Serra do Courel see great bands of flying crows joining and landing in a certain place, this means that there is an Olháparo there too. However, the legend does not detail anything more about those crows. They seem to be just flying apes that profit from the rest of the gigantic meals eaten by the narcissistic Olháparos. Aside from the rest of the crows, the Olháparos do not like to share anything with others, even with their kin. An Olháparo will fight to death any other Olháparo that crosses his path. They create whole valleys in the mountains with their fights by throwing huge rocks between them.

How to kill an Olháparo: peasants could never kill these giants. However, just in case you could be attacked by an Olháparo while hiking in the majestic Galician forests at the Serra do Courel, you'd better know the three ways to send those malign ogres to the kingdom come:

- Plan A: Pull off the one white hair that grows in their long red beard.
- Plan B: Throw a stone and hit a weak spot in the middle of their foreheads.
- Plan C: to throw an...*owl* to their heads [Cano Herrera, M. (2007)].

Plan A is too risky unless you were caught by the Olháparo and can easily reach his beard and pull off his only white beard hair before he throws you down the nearest cliff. But Plans B and C seem less daring...and interesting: kill the giant by throwing a stone that hits the middle of their foreheads, where it his only eye, or throw a fragile fluffy owl on the ogre's head. If an owl touches Olháparo's head he drops dead instantly, the Galician tale grants us [Cano Herrera, M. (2007)].

Psychopomp owls: but, why from all animals from the Galician wildernesses an owl can kill that hard-headed giant? Here is my suggestion: Koch proposes the Celtic peoples believed that the head was the site of the soul. Hence, when they cut the heads of their courageous adversaries in battle, they were preserving their souls for future consultations. They preserved the heads in oil. These head preserves would later be hung on the victorious warrior's horse, on the walls of forts, or piously exposed into niches in the pillars or walls of Celtic sanctuaries [Koch, J.T. (2012)]. In the ruins of the Entremont and Roquepertuse Celtic sanctuaries, we can see engravings and sculptures reproducing these heads. Brân the Blessed was a legendary Brittonic king who ruled

from his Celtic capital city, London. His legend says that before dying in Ireland from battle wounds, he requested that his nobles cut off his head and take it back to London [Cotterell, Arthur (2006), p.107] [Koch, J.T. (2012), p.104]. Brán's soul was in his head, and he wanted it taken back to his home.

Therefore, I believe that when an owl kills the giant Olháparo by touching his head, this may indicate that the owl is a psychopomp. The head is the seat of the soul. The owl abducts the soul from the head and takes it away into the otherworld. The giant Olháparo instantly collapses and dies. A Romanian tale states that the souls of repentant sinners fly to heaven in the guise of white owls [Weinstein, K. (1990), p.18]. This does not stem from the Greek or Roman tradition. Would this come from the Celtic, Slavic, Thracian, or Dacian traditions? These four cultures and peoples were Indo-European and lived at some time in what is now Romania. I could not confirm this Romanian white owl psychopomp from other sources. It seems to be a regional tradition [Pop, I. (2023, January 3)]. However, Celtic lore is full of descriptions about how butterflies and white moths perform a psychopomp role. In Wales, the word *pisky* means both (nocturnal) *moths and... fairies*, which in the tradition of various Celtic regions were the souls of deceased people. In Yorkshire (England) *white moths* were called *souls*. In Ireland, butterflies were the souls of deceased people. When you saw a butterfly flying near a deceased person, it was a sign that the person was happy in the afterlife [Rhys, J. (1901), p.162]. In Irish tradition, Étaín, the beautiful daughter of the King of Ulster, turns into a butterfly (dies). After a thousand years, she is reborn as a beautiful girl, also called Étaín [Freeman, P. (2017), p.29]. In certain regions of Galicia and northern Portugal, people believed the moths carried the souls of their relatives. At the Portuguese hamlet of Santa Leocádia de Briteiros (Guimarães), villagers put food offers from Christmas eve dinner in a dish at the door and put a candle close by, so their deceased relatives could see better the food and eat it. The relatives' souls in the white moths are from Paradise, and the ones in the black moths not [Veiga de Oliveira, E. (1995), p.170]. Therefore, why not investigate better the Romanian white owls that carry souls of repentant sinners to the otherworld.

Then, there is Cailleach (the veiled one), the Celtic hag deity. In the sources I checked, I could not find that she would be represented as an owl, but her name is also used in Irish compound words, such as *cailleach-oídhche*, meaning owl such as *cailleach-oídhche* (lady of the night) [Lewis, H. and Pedersen, H. (1989), p.169]. The owls depicted in the Germanic Brå cauldron may have supernatural significance [Harding, D.W. (2007), p.20]. Blodeuwedd's tale attests that to be an owl was a punishment, and that an owl could never see the sunlight (see life?). It is true that the owl of Cwm Cawlwyd, from a Welsh tale, is associated with wisdom and is not a psychopomp. In Greece and Rome, owls are related to wisdom. Is Cwm Cawlwyd related to Greco-Roman mythology? The evidence for psychopomp owls is not as strong as that for psychopomp crows. This could indicate that the psychopomp owls are pre-Celtic. In addition, the brutish Olháparo seems to be a pre-Celtic myth. He and his colleagues, but not his friends, the Athach and the Ciudach, seem to have a primaevael origin. But then there are the widely known *duision* from Gaul, and I add to them their new Alpine relatives.

3.7 *The Duso and Dusio in Piedmont and the Alpine Dusion. Demons in Gaul and Incubi in Medieval Myth*

Let us travel to the scenic Piedmont, the land of the bagna cauda fondue, and the brasato al Barolo. There, in Cuneo, lived the ancient noble house of the Dusio di Bra. Their family shield, as described in the old books of heraldry, is an inverted gold horn: “*Di azzurro, al capriolo di oro, accompagnato in capo da due stelle ed in punta da un dusio d’oro. Cimiero: un dusio simile, col motto: In Tenebris Perspicax.*” In this V-format inverted horn (the capriolo), there is a golden *dusio* and another *dusio* at the shield’s crest [Crollanza, G.B. di (1886), v.3, p.224]. But what is a *dusio*?

Another noble family living not far away were the Dusio di Asti. The family shield motto is also In Tenebris Perspicax. Their family shield has a blue background, a golden inverted “V” and “*..in capo: da due stelle in punta dal gufo (Dusio); il tutto d’oro. Cimiero: Il gufo del campo*”. [Manno, A. (1895), p.114]. A *gufo del campo* sits up in the shield on top of an inverted “V” and the crest. The two Dusio families seem to be related, but most importantly, *dusio* means *gufo (del campo)*. The shield motto hints to it: In Tenebris Perspicax, sharp-sighted in the darkness. It probably refers to the good night vision of the *dusio* (the *gufo del campo*, the owl). We follow the *gufo del campo* thread: a *gufo* is the *gufo commune*, i.e., the long-eared owl (*Asio otus o.*). The *gufo reale* is the eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*). But what owl is the *gufo del campo*? It is probably the *gufo di palude* [Alba, R. (2022, December 21)], literally *swamp owl*, which is the *short-eared owl (Asio flammeus)*, also known as *hibou des marais* (FR), *búho campestre* (ES), and *mocho dos banhados* (PT). To confirm this, in the Piedmont, the *gufo reale* (eagle owl, *Bubo bubo*) is denominated *duso (cioch d’montagna)* [Ponza, M. (1832), v.1, p.440]. The *dusio* and *duso* are zoonyms that denote two different owl species. Now, the possible etymology of their names brings us very interesting insights into the way the Celtic peoples considered those birds in their mythical environment.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in his book City of God, wrote about “*certain demons, called dusii by the Gaulish people.*” The *dusii* were *incubi*, he says [Schaff, P. (1890), p.694-697]. Another medieval source informs us: “*...se vidisse Silvanos et Poeanes, quos Incubos nominant, Galli vero Dusios dicunt...*” [Fresne, C. du (1844), v.3, p.184], which again links the *dusios* to the *incubi* and considers the forest deities Pan and Silvanus as one of them. Another source reports differently: the *dusii* were evil deities who inhabited the forests or stole crops [Dowden, K. (2000), p.109]. However, harvest theft was the role of their cousins the *tempestarii* [Steel, C. et al, editors (2013), p.164], while the *dusii* were *forest deities, devils, or incubi*. Incubus is an evil spirit that lies on women in their sleep sometimes for sexual intercourse [Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)]. The succubus goes after men.

Thomas of Cantimpré lists other characteristics from the *dusii*: “*Hinc de Dusiiis, vel Dusionibus...*”, “*...de Dusiiis daemonibus et quomodo uno corpore sublato, aliud substituent*”, “*Quomodo etiam in montibus iidem daemones Dusii habitare dicantur...*”, “*Nam hoc etiam elementum, cum agitator flabellu, sensu corporis tactuque sentitur*”, that is, the *dusii* are also named *dusion* and they replace one dead body for another. Would this stem from the belief that they replace one soul for another? People say the *Dusii* live in the mountains. A wind sensation on the body precedes the *dusii* demons, such as when somebody agitates a (manual) fan. He further states that “*Dusiorum daemonum...his adhuc Prussiae gentiles silvas aestimant consecrates...*” [Tilbury,

Gervasius von (1856), p.41 and 145, quoting Bonum Universale de Apibus 1.2.c.57 nr. 17 and 23], linking the denomination *dusio* to the Old Prussian myth tradition.

3.8 Proto-indoeuropean radicals: how folk understood incubi and owls

This takes us to the etymology field, where I list a couple of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) radicals that may be related to *dusion*, the incubi and owls.

PIE radical *d^hus- (whiff, breath, spirit, soul). In the Old Prussian extinct language, *dusi* means *soul* [Mažiulis, V. (1988)]. This seems to me derived from Slavic languages because Proto-Slavic has the word **duša* meaning *soul*, which has been derived into Polish *duza* (*soul, spirit*) and Bulgarian *duša* (*soul, character, breath*) [Derksen, R. (2008), p.127]. The PIE root **d^hus-e-* mentioned in the Proto-Germanic dictionary [Kroonen, G. (2013), p.111] guides us back to Pokorny, who suggests the PIE radical **d^hus* meaning *der Hauch (whiff), der Atem (breath), der Geist (spirit)* [Pokorny, J. (1959), v.1, p.268].

PIE radical *dheuos-/*dhus- (god, theos, deus). Lecouteux proposes the word *dūsius* comes from the Proto-Indo-European root **dheuos-/*dhus-* (*god, theos, deus*) [Lecouteux, D. (2013), p.147-149], and refer them to [Jente, R. (1921), p.93, 290].

PIE radical *dhuōs- (devil). Pokorny lists the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) radical **dhuōs-* (*devil*), from which he mentions “*gallorom. dūsius, daemon immundus, incubus...*” [Pokorny, J. (1959), v.1, p.269].

PIE radical *dhus-e- (slumber, sleep, faint, breath, spirit, death). In the reconstructed Proto-Germanic language, the verb **dusen* (PIE **d^hus-e-*, MHG *dosen*) means *to slumber (doze)*. However, “*its original meaning seems to have been to lose one’s senses, to fall asleep...apparently the Indo-Europeans assumed that the spirit (breath) left the body during sleep.*” [Kroonen, G. (2013), p.111]. In the Proto-Germanic verb **dusen*, we have the root **dus-*, while the *-en* suffix transforms the subject into a verb. If **dusen* means *to fall asleep*, then the root **dus-* would mean *sleep*. Therefore, in Germanic languages, the root *dus-* generally means *doze, breath, and sleep*, and sleep is associated with *death* (because the soul gets out of our body when we sleep), (Figure 2).



Figure 2. “I am coming for your soul.” A majestic *duso* eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*).

If the denomination of the *duso* eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*) and the short-eared owl *dusio* (*Asio flammeus*).

Image Alexas_Fotos CC BY 4.0.

Finally, in Brittany (France), there are *duz* dwarfs (diminutive *dusik*, *dusig*). They are sometimes described as *duz de la nuit* (night dwarf) [Villemarqué, H. de la (1883), p.36, 59]. Therefore, far from being an isolated case, this radical is present in the major PIE descendant languages, including the Celtic ones.

3.9 *White psychopomp is from heaven, dark is not.*

A Romanian tale states that the souls of repentant sinners fly to heaven in the guise of white owls [Weinstein, K. (1990), p.18]. This does not stem from the Greek or Roman tradition. Would this come from the Celtic, Slavic, Thracian, or Dacian traditions? These four cultures and peoples were Indo-European and lived at some time in what is now Romania. I could not confirm this Romanian white owl psychopomp from other sources. It seems to be a regional tradition [Pop, I. (2023, January 3)]. However, Celtic lore is full of descriptions about how butterflies and white moths perform a psychopomp role. In Wales, the word *pisky* means both (nocturnal) *moths and... fairies*, which in the tradition of various Celtic regions were the souls of deceased people. In Yorkshire (England) *white moths* were called *souls*. In Ireland, butterflies were the souls of deceased people. When you saw a butterfly flying near a deceased person, it was a sign that the person was happy in the afterlife [Rhys, J. (1901), p.162]. In Irish tradition, Étaín, the beautiful daughter of the King of Ulster, turns into a butterfly (dies). After a thousand years, she is reborn as a beautiful girl, also called Étaín [Freeman, P. (2017), p.29]. In certain regions of Galicia and northern Portugal, people believed the moths carried the souls of their relatives. At the Portuguese hamlet of Santa Leocádia de Briteiros (Guimarães), villagers put food offers from Christmas eve dinner in a dish at the door and put a candle close by, so their deceased relatives could see better the food and eat it. The relatives' souls in the white moths are from Paradise, and the ones in the black moths not [Veiga de Oliveira, E. (1995), p.170]. Back to the Galician ogre Olháparo, this explains why we may kill him by pulling off his only white hair in his red beard. We are pulling off his soul from him. In this context of white (heaven, soul) and dark, why not investigate better the legend of the Romanian white owls that carry souls of repentant sinners to the otherworld.

3.10 *The Duc in Catalunya, the Duch, Düg, Dugo in Italy and the Gran Duque (Castille)*

I could not conclude this article without mentioning the Italian and Catalanian *duc* (Figure 3). We have seen that in the Piedmont, the gufo reale (eagle owl, *Bubo bubo*) is denominated *duso* [Ponza, M. (1832), v.1, p.440]. In other Italian regions, this elusive bird hides behind the aliases *dugo* (Northern Italian) [“Dugo” (2022)], *duch* (Lombard dialect), *dugo* (Ligurian Italian), and *düg* (Emilia Romagna) [“Düg, dugo, duch” (2019)]. In Catalonia, *duc* can be a *duke* (*heraldic title*) but also the *eagle owl* [Nebrija, A. de (1507), p.39]. It would have an onomatopoeic origin. The etymology is linked to the Latin word *duce* (duke), because the eagle owl is prominent among owls, states a dictionary [“Duc”, 1998]. In Castille, the *gran duque* is the eagle owl and not an important duke. The Romanian language also seems to have this semantic duplicity: *dus-* means to lead (attributed to Latin *duce*) but also means *away, far away, gone, dead*

[“Dus”, 2022]. Two very different semantics, possibly pointing to different linguistic roots:

- duc, from Latin duce (duke, leader), and
- duc (dutch, dugo, düg, gran duque) the eagle owl from an unknown language.

Would *duc* (*dugo*, *düg*, *dutch*) be related to the Welsh word *duch*, which means *sigh*, *groan*? [Pughe, W.O. (1832), v.1, p.481] [Spurrell, W. (1848), p.129]. If *sigh* could be related to *breath*, we may have here the link of the Welsh *duch* to the PIE roots **d^hus-e-* (*doze*, *breath*, *sleep*) and **d^hus* (*soul*, *breath*, *spirit*). The cognates to the zoonym *duc* are Polish and Czech *duch* (*spirit*, *ghost*) [“Duch”, 2013] [“Duch”, 2011].



Figure 3. From left to right, the “earless” little owl (*Athene noctua*), the *duasio* short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), the long-eared owl (*Asio otus*), and the *duso-duc-duch-dugo-düg-gran duque* eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*). Will the size of their “ears” be of ritual significance for the Late Neolithic communities of southwestern Iberia?

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Coromines could not find the etymology of *duc* and discarded a Mozarabic origin for Catalan toponyms such as Casalduc (Matarranya) and Casalduch. He sensed that the ethym was very old [Coromines, J. (1989), v.3, p.191]. Casalduc and Casalduch could possibly mean the Village of the Duc(h) (eagle-owl) [Mir de la Cruz, R. (1973-1974), p.80].

A quick look in France takes me to the city of Barrivilla ad Ornam (932), freely translated as the Town of Barri at the (river) Ornam, where *barr-* is the well-known radical meaning flat-topped hill or mountain. It was known as Bar-lou-Duc in 1242 and Bar-le-Duc after that [Liénard, F. (1872), p.14]. However, in 1242 Bar-lou-Duc was the capital city of a *county* and not a *dukedom*. The city and region became a duchy 112 years later in 1354 by the order of the Czech Emperor Karel IV (1316-1378), from the Holy Roman Empire. Robert I de Bar was the first duke of Bar from 1354 to 1411. One century earlier, in 1242, without a duke sitting in Bar and a dukedom that still did not exist, would Bar originally mean *hill*, *top*, *crest* from Celtic *barr-* [Matasovic, R. (2009), p.58]? Bar-le-Duc is the *Hill of the Eagle-Owl*? The mythological implications from that could be interesting. There are owls everywhere, but only certain places were denominated “owl”. The owl significance in mythology makes me believe these places were perhaps burial places or were taboo (death, sacrifices) in ancient times.

4. CONCLUSIONS

According to Mithology, the *dusii* or *dusion* is incubi. They live in the mountains and are related to forest deities. They attack through the air. When a woman feels a breath of wind, the dusion are already close by her, ready to strike. The sense is that when the dusion hits, it is too late for her (the prey) to escape. The PIE etymology relates the *dusio* (owls) to the *human soul* that escapes our body during *sleep* and that sleep means a temporary *death*.

Incubi act as owls. Similarities in the *dūsīus* (incubus) and *dusio* (owls) behaviour are evident. Owls fly silently in order not to spook their prey. The breath of wind from the dusion (incubus) relates to a stealth owl flying silently in the night until they are too close to their unaware prey, which only too late feels a whiff of wind...and death comes fast.

The owl eyes are the path to the soul. In the Galician Olháparo tale, a stone that hits the middle of the ogre's forehead (his only eye) kills him. Would ancient people believe that the eyes are more than a window (the path) to the soul? When a person sleeps or dies, his or her eyes close. A stone hit in the eye kills the soul. In the burial places described by Gimbutas, sometimes only owl eyes are depicted. What is the use of depicting the whole owl, when its eyes were the path to and from the soul.

Etymology of the Gaulish dusion. The *dusii incubi* are Gaulish, and the Piedmont probably was settled by the Gauls before Romans conquered the place. The Piedmont dialect preserved this link between the *dusii incubi* and the *dusio* (short-eared owl) and *duso* (eagle-owl) owls. The semantics of the radical *dus-* in the PIE family of languages except Italic (I could not check it) is related to *doze*, *breath*, *sleep*, *spirit* and *soul*. In Proto-Germanic, sleep is related to death.

Etymology of duc. The dialectal Italian words *duch*, *dugo*, *düg*, and Catalan *duc* are not related to the Latin *duce* (*leader*, *duke*). They would perhaps be cognates of the Slavic cognate *duch* (*soul*) and the Welsh word *duch* (*sigh*). All seem to be related to the PIE roots **dhus-e-* (*doze*, *breath*, *sleep*) and **dhus* (*soul*, *breath*, *spirit*).

The dukes that are not. The Castilian *gran duque owl* (*eagle owl*) comes not from duke, the nobility title. It means simply *big duc(h)*, *big owl*. The French city of Bar-le-Duc makes us aware that not all French *duc* toponyms are related to a duke or dukedom. If the *duc* (owl) is a psychopomp, then those places would perhaps be mythologically and ritually related to death.

Owls would be pre-Celtic psychopomps. Crows are Celtic psychopomps. The Piedmont *duso* (eagle owl, *Bubo bubo*) and *dusio* (short-eared owl, *Asio flammeus*) appear to be pre-Celtic psychopomps.

Owl plaques have deep significance (death). If the owls are pre-Celtic psychopomps, the owl-like plaques would probably not be initially dolls, toys devoid of any deep ritual

significance, as proposed by [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)]. Death usually has the deepest significance in communal life and death amulets too.

The size of the owl-like plaques does not denote less importance. The Megalithic graves are ritually important because of their size and the community work necessary to build them, as suggested by [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)]. However, this may not necessarily mean that the owl-like plaques would be less ritually important. If the owls are psychopomps, their role is as important or more than the burial place. Ritual importance may not always be related to the size of the ritual object.

Owls were not selected because of their anthropomorphism. The designers of the plaques would not have selected the owls because the birds are the most anthropomorphic of the animals, except for the apes, as suggested excepting the apes, as suggested by [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)] but because they had the essential role of psychopomps.

Feeding the community takes precedence. Aside from hunting and cultivating crops, the community would find endless work activities for children as soon as they could grab anything and carry it from one place to another. There was not much time left to play with toys and dolls, be they owl-like plaques or other, except for a few children that were born into the core families of the community. Survival was of the essence.

The manufacture of owl plaques was a job for outcasts. Not everybody would feel at ease manufacturing the owl-like plaques, fearing their association with death (taboo) or the body as something impure. We should consider the possibility that in some places plaque manufacture, with other menial work, could be reserved to servants, including children servants and outcasts.

Owl-like plaque holes: probably not for feathers. The little owl (*Athene noctua*) and the long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) were possibly used as models for the plaques [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)]. However, the little owl has no ear tufts. Furthermore, the *duasio* short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) and the *duso* eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*) with their large ear tufts were not selected as models for the plaques [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)]. Instead, the owl chest feather pattern could have significance [Negro, J.J. et al. (2022)], and they may be heraldic symbols [Lillios, K. T. (2008)]. The chest feather pattern was important, not the ear tufts.

Owl plaques: if not collars, where would they be placed? Used as collars, the owl-like plaque replicas proved to be inconvenient for daily tasks, according to [Lillios, K. T. (2008)]. Portuguese archaeologist Estacio da Veiga found that at least one of the owl-like plaques he studied had three holes on its right side (and not on its top/head), denoting that they could have been used and placed in various positions and ways [Estacio da Veiga, S.P.M. (1887), v.2, p.437-439]. The plaque found at the Casa da Moura dolmen (anta) appears to have been fixed in a wood stump. However, if the Late Neolithic people (like the Celtic) also believed that the soul was hosted at the head, I suggest that they also put the owl-like plaque somewhere in the heads of their deceased. But where in their heads?

In addition to throwing an owl at the Olháparo's head, the tale says that we can kill those ogres by throwing a stone in the middle of his forehead. Except for the one-eyed giants, who had their eye in the middle of the forehead, the rest of us have a quite impact-resistant middle forehead between the eyes. The Neolithic people may have known from killing themselves for one or other dispute that the physical weak points of the head are the temples and back of the head. I mentioned before that I believe the eyes perhaps would *be* the soul. The Olháparos used to fight throwing huge rocks at each other, and created whole valleys like that. A big rock will not kill an Olháparo. But, when we throw a small stone in the middle of the Olháparo forehead, that is, in his eye, in his soul, he dies. His soul was fatally hit. Us humans perhaps would have this spiritual weak spot in the middle of our foreheads. For this reason, I would fix the owl-like plaque right there in the middle of the forehead, the owl-depicted side facing the outside so that the owl feather pattern would show to all visitors of my resting place how important or unimportant my heraldry is. On the death of each individual, the amulet owl will be available 24/7 to guide the individual's soul to the other world. Or, if the psychopomp owls acted like the Celtic white horses that could go and come from the otherworld taking living and dead people with them, the owl-plaques would be a means of speaking with the spirits of the deceased. There are several "ifs" and speculations in my suggestions in this article, but I hope it fulfils my aim to open new venues for thinking about the owl myth and its possible connexions to pre-Celtic mythology in Europe. The new information linking owls (dusio, duso) to the dusioni incubi, the deadly stone that hits the Olháparo's soul, killing him, and the owl-projectile that steals the soul from the head of that otherwise invincible ogre, may perhaps help better understand the numerous owl-like or owl-eye Stone Age epigraphs found by archaeologists in the wide expanses of the European continent.

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