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## LIBREDÓN, ARCIS MARMORICIS NEW ETYMOLOGIES IN THE POSSIBLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCENARIO OF THE PRE-ROMAN CELTIC SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

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**Abstract:** *The Celtic nature of pre-Roman Galicia and during the Roman occupation is increasingly accepted as a fact in academic circles. Around 50 per cent of Galicia's toponyms have their etymology in the Celtic language. This Celtic language spoken in Galicia, the Galaican, would not be related to Gaulish (Brittonic) but would be close to Irish (Gaelic). I suggest the first fully Celtic solution for the toponym Libredón (Santiago de Compostela), which I attest based on historical data from a related toponym, published by the Galician philologist Cabeza Quiles. I review the possible etymology of Arcis Marmoricis (Latin) and suggest a new etymology to Achaia Marmarica (Greek). My interpretation of the main toponyms related to the Libredón hill in Santiago de Compostela correctly describes the topography, hydrography and building that probably existed in Libredón during the Galaican era there. This match leads me to think that my suggestions would have a good level of feasibility. Based on these investigations, at the end of this article I try to discern Compostela now stands. Galicia is a region that had a vigorous Celtic culture. Therefore, if there was a pre-Christian sanctuary in the Libredón to observe the solstices and equinoxes, it was most probably consecrated to Lug. Being a funerary hill, the Libredón would have been the dwelling place of Dôn, the Gaelic deity of death. The Galician legend of the Queen Lupa may bear traces of the veneration to the moon. I hope this article contributes to the debate on these relevant topics in the Celtic pre-Roman history of Santiago de Compostela.*

**Key words:** *Compostela, Libredón, Arcis Marmoricis, duno, dôn*



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**1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE LIBREDÓN AND THE ARCIS MARMORICIS**

Archaeological excavations at the Compostela Cathedral have revealed that there is a Galician-Roman necropolis dating from around the 3AC century followed by a Germanic (Suevian and Gothic) cemetery in the 6AC to 7AC centuries. The hill on which the cathedral stands was a burial mound [Bouzas-Sierra, Antón. 2013, v.36, p.48]. After that, until the 9th century AD, there was a layer of earth indicating that the site was abandoned. In 1988, archaeological research found an inscription in Greek dating from the 2nd century AD: Athanasios Martyr [Blanco Freijeiro, Antonio and González Pardo, Isidro Milán. 1989], in the place where the remains of Saint James the Great (Santiago Maior) are thought to have been buried, inside Compostela Cathedral. According to the Galician legend of the Queen Lupa (the Wolf Queen), his remains were buried there together with his disciples Athanasios and Theodore.

James the Great was a cousin of Jesus and the first of the Twelve Apostles to die through martyrdom, in the year 44AC at the hands of Herodes Agrippa, king of Judea (Acts of the Apostles 12:2). There are no records of what happened in the Libredón hill between the still debated burial of the remains of St James the Great, and its rediscovery between 829AC and 866AC. The lack of information may indicate that the site was no

longer relevant. The layer of earth after the Germanic era (6th-7th centuries AD) indicates an abandoned site. In the year 710AC, the Arab and Berber invasion unleashed one of the worst, if not the worst social, political, religious and humanitarian chaos that struck the Iberian Peninsula in history.

Already two hundred years later in the 9th century, the Christian Reconquista had recovered Galicia and León, and there were Christian hermits living there at the Libredón hill, such as Paio the Hermit, mentioned in one of the Santiago de Compostela legends as the person that rediscovered the tomb of Santiago. Paio would have had his hermitage near the current church of San Fiz de Solovio [Sánchez-Montaña, Carlos. 2021], 247 metres as the crow flies from the chancel of the Compostela Cathedral where the remains of Saint James are kept. Paio allegedly saw lights on the ground at a deserted place nearby. We know they were probably the result of combustion of methane and phosphines formed by the decomposition of organic matter, but for him that was something magic or sacred. He told Bishop Teodomiro of Iria (?-847) about those lights. Teodomiro assembled his full retinue of assistant and servants and went to the Libredón and discovered the mausoleum of St James the Great. Hermits seek out uninhabited places to live in solitude and meditation. This suggests that in Paio's time (around 829-866AC) the area around the current church of San Fiz de Solovio was abandoned land. Who knows if between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> Century the oak woods that existed in this abandoned area, whose fragments still exist today, expanded and once again covered most of the Libredón hill.

**San Fiz, a Celtic Christian saint in the heart of the Libredón.** Although it is suggested that St Fins was St Felix, I propose another solution that seems to be more feasible. St Fins would have been St Finbarr (550-623), abbot of Cork (Ireland) [Webster, Charles Alexander. 1913]. He founded a monastery from which the city of Cork was born (Corcag Mor, the Great Marsh) and was patron of the island of Barra, named after the saint. On this island, there is the chapel of St Barr, whose feast day is on 27 September and is celebrated with horse rides and ends with a cavalcade that takes three laps around the church. It so happens that in Ireland, St Finbarr or Finbar was known in the 13th century as St Fin Barre [Caulfield, Richard. 1864]. It seems more feasible to me that the Galician name Fiz and the Portuguese Fins (of Lousada) was derived from the Irish Fin or Finn. The cult of São Fiz (Fis, Fins) attests to the evangelising power of Ireland, a great centre for spreading the Christian faith that had influence in Galicia and northern Portugal before the great growth of the cult of Santiago Maior from the 9th century onwards, when Paio rediscovered its remains. This cultural and religious influence from Ireland may have existed during pre-Christian times too, as the Celtic Sea was an important trading route that linked all the Celtic nations that existed in its shores.

**Existing etymological suggestions for Libredón.** The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was built on the hill of Libredón. According to former suggestions, the toponym Libredón seemed to have come from *\*Liberdunum*, a Latin-Celtic toponym where *liber* means *free* and *dunum* means *hill*. The Latin word *dunum* is imported from the Celtic *\*duno* which in the Gaulish language means *elevation, hill, mountain* [Dauzat, Albert. 1982, p.140]. In Vulgar Latin, *Liberdunum* would mean *Free Hill*. Those who propose this etymology explain that it would mean *land free for cultivation*. A variant of the legend of Queen Lupa, one from the five most significant Legends of Saint James the Apostle in Galicia, mentions that it was she who gave these lands to everyone to cultivate. But the Galician philologist Cabeza Quiles dismisses this

etymology [Cabeza Quiles, Fernando. 2014, p.180]. However, he and other philologists do not propose non-Latin solutions for the first part of the toponym *Liberdunum*, which is the word *liber*. In this article I propose a full solution for it with what seems to me a solid attestation in one Medieval source. My solution is the first to suggest a fully Celtic etymology for *Libredón*.

## 2. NEW ETYMOLOGY OF LIBREDÓN (GALICIA), LLIBARDON (ASTURIAS) AND LIVERDUN (FRANCE)

There may have been at least 40 clans from Brigantia (A Corunha), according to the *Lebor Gábala Érenn*, a manuscript dated from around the year 1,100. Those 40 clans took part in the legendary invasion and conquest of Ireland [Macalister, Stewart. 1956, v.5, p.21-25, 79] led by their king Éremon mac Miled, who was the king of Spáin, says the book. His older brother Amairgen mac Miled, a legendary poet and judge, went along in the military expedition. As a magister, Amairgen would later partition Ireland between himself and his brothers Éremon and Éber Finn Macalister, Stewart. 1956, v.5, p.8, 31-35, 37, 47, 53, 55,69, 73]. The Galician philologist Higinio Martins seems to have identified around 44 different territories of Celtic clans according to the toponymy of each place in Galicia [Martins Esteves, Higinio. 2008]. Regardless of whether this Irish legend written down in the 12th century is true or not, and regardless of whether Higinio Martins' proposals are confirmed, there were several Celtic clans in Galicia. The Roman general Decimus Junius Brutus defeated a confederate army of Celtic clans at the mouth of the river Douro. He called all these different clans "Galicians". That was a "catch-all" denomination, and it is not known for sure what the Celtic linguistic landscape of Galicia was at the time of the Roman invasion, if the language was the same overall or there were already dialects. For this reason, in this article I use the generic term "Galician language" to make my proposals easier to understand.

We must start at the beginning, and in this article the beginning is to reason that if Galicia was so embedded into Celtic culture and language, it is possible that Compostelan toponyms like *Libredón* (<\**Liberdunum*) may have a fully Celtic etymology. When I test this hypothesis: I see in \**Liberdunum* the supposed Celtic word \**liberduno* or \**liverduno*. When I segment those two words tentatively, I get \**li-verduno* and \**li-ber-duno*. In the sources I've researched, I haven't found a Celtic *-ber-radical*. Although Iberian-language toponyms do exist in the northern regions of the Iberian Peninsula, if *ber* stemmed from the Iberian language the toponym \**li-ber-duno* would result in a very rare sandwich made up of two words (*li* and *duno*) that I believe are Celtic with an Iberian word (*ber*) in the middle. Without ruling out this possibility, I'm sticking to the aim of this article, which is to find a completely Celtic solution for \**Liberdunum*. I see that \**li-ver-duno* may give me some hope of solution. I then analyse each one of its three supposed radicals from the perspective of the Celtic etymology, in search of more consistency in the hypothesis I propose:

### 2.1. The Celtic radical – *duno*

Let's start with the last radical from *Li-ver-duno*, which is *duno*. It is widely accepted that it is indeed Celtic. In the Gaulish language, the radical *-duno* occurs more often with the meaning of *elevation, hill, mound* [Dauzat, Albert. 1982, p.140]. Others suggest that *-duno* means *settlement* [Pauwels, Jacques. 2010, p.86] and some suggest

that *-duno* means *fortification*. But the two latter seem to be secondary meanings and derived from the primary ones (elevation, hill, mound). The *-duno* radical may have adopted the meaning of *settlements* and later on *fortifications*, as those buildings were almost always built on top of elevations, hills and mountains. In the toponyms of the Iberian Peninsula, two words of similar meaning coexist: *duno* and *-briga*, the latter being cognate with the Germanic *berg* (*hill, mountain*) [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.77]. If *briga* is cognate with Germanic and *duno* is a Celtic word, both most probably have roots in the Proto Indo-European language. In Ireland, the toponym *duno* may have denoted the deity of death Dôn of the Sands. The word *brigo* means *power, strength* [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.77-78] and I think it may have generated the early medieval Galician and later Portuguese word *briga* (*fight, dispute, competition*).

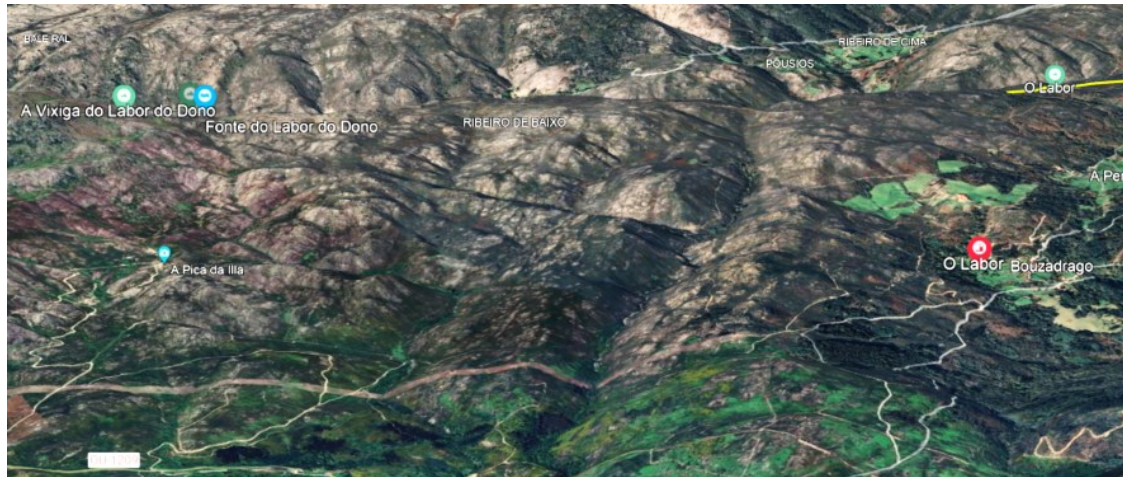
**The donos who aren't lords (dominus).** This play with words in Galician and Portuguese (os donos que não são donos) loses its zest when translated into English. But let's move ahead. In the Iberian Peninsula, *briga* seems to be more frequent than *duno*, which makes up the toponym Libredón. The philologist Falileyev states that "the Celtic radical *-dunum* is rare in the Iberian Peninsula" [Falileyev, Alexander. 2017, entry "Caladunum"]. I think that, on the contrary, there are quite a lot of them. They are not so obvious if we do not take a deep look into the subject. The reason for their "stealth" existence is that the word *duno* has evolved in a peculiar way since the end of all significant Continental Celtic languages and the subsequent Latinisation of the names of certain Celtic toponyms.

For example, let's check the topography of the place name Labor do Dono (A Ilha, Entrimo, Ourense) in Galicia. A hasty interpretation of the meaning of this place name would be Labor do Dono, from Latin *labor dominus*. It would mean that the owner labours on that piece of land he owns. But what do we find there at the Labor do Dono? It is a mountain that peaks at 1,163 metres above sea level (masl) on a very steep, rocky and uninhabited slope, close to the water source of the same name. The nearest village, Bouzadrago (773masl), is 3.2 kilometres away as the crow flies. Why on Earth would anyone climb 390 metres up from Bouzadrago to Labor do Dono to work or cultivate (Latin *labor, laborare*) a rocky piece of land on a very steep and barren ground where, as you can see in the Figure 1, even bad grasses do not grow up well. Country people wouldn't do that, because they have a utilitarian spirit. They know that they will spend more energy going up and down that mountain than the energy (food) they could produce there. Shepherds would not go up 390 meters in transhumance to a rocky and distant place with no good pastures for their herd. The distance of 3,2 kilometres seems short but we see in the map how rough seems to be the trail. Furthermore, there are plenty of grazing lands close to Bouzadrago. So, I don't think that the name of this mountain (Labor do Dono) indicates that some owner (dono) of those slopes was doing any kind of work there (labor).

If neither *labor* came from the Latin *labor* (*work*) nor *dono* derived from the Latin *dominus* (*owner, lord*), we are left with the Celtic alternative for the etymology of this place name, because Galicia's culture was significantly Celtic. The Suevi, Goths, Arabs and Berbers in Galicia had a greater impact on urban toponymy but mostly not on the toponymy of the countryside, especially in remote places like the Labor do Dono. According to linguist Higinio Martins, in some of those remote places in Galicia the native Celtic language (the Galaican Gaelic), was spoken possibly until the 11<sup>th</sup> Century:



"A clear picture emerges of the linguistic situation in the West of the peninsula in the first millennium. It was surprising to find evidence of the survival of a pre-Roman Indo-European language of the Celtic type until around the year one thousand, coexisting with a rather archaic Republican Latin. The pre-Roman language shows a profile close to Goidelic Celtic (n.a. Gaelic Celtic spoken in Ireland, Irish) ... In addition, many other words increasingly emphasise the Celtic status of a long-forgotten Celtic language, with intact labiovelar, of the Goidelic type." [Cabeza Quiles, Fernando. 2014, p.270].



**Figure 1.** The village of Bouzadrage (right) has land for labour (working land), for cultivation (green colour). The hill of Labor do Dono (blue icon on the left) is rocky, remote, difficult to access and therefore not suitable for labour (cultivation). In this case, labour does not come from the Latin word labor.

Under that Celtic language perspective, Labor do Dono refers to Celtic *duno* (elevation, hill), which that mount actually is. But how about the other word, Labor? *Labor* would not refer to the Latin *labor* (work) or *lebor* (hare) [Porto da Pena, José Álvaro. 1985, p.525]. I suggest it comes from *labarus*, a Celtic word attested in Gaulish, derived from the Proto-Celtic *\*labar(o)* which means *talkative, eloquent*. Its cognates are Old Irish *labar*, the Old Cornish language *lauar* (sermon) and Middle Breton *lauaret* (to speak) [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.231]. Derived Galician words such as *labareda* (flame) and others may have been imported from other medieval post-Latin languages (Italian, French and other), but the root is the same: the Celtic word *\*labar(o)*. Since *labar* is attested in the main Celtic languages from the Brittonic and Gaelic families, it is quite possible that it also existed in the Galaican Gaelic language.

But what is the relationship between *speaking* (Breton *lauaret*), *preaching* (Old Cornish *lauar*), a *flag* (Portuguese *lábaro*) and a big fire (Galician *labarada* and Portuguese *labareda*)? The relationship is semantic: all three mean communicating at a distance. Speaking or preaching can be communication at a distance. Since ancient times until the invention of electricity-based communications, *flags* (*lábaros*) were used by commanders and generals to remotely communicate pre-established orders to troops during battles. To this day, naval forces all over the world use flag semaphores and flag hoists to communicate from a distance using the International Code of Signals (INTERCO) when ordered to maintain total silence in war, turning off all electronic

communications. For instance, this remote communication possibly took place, perhaps with the use of flag waving or more probably fire smoke (Portuguese *labareda*, big flame), in the line of Templar castles along the Tagus River (Portugal) when that region was the border with the lands occupied by the Islamic invader. Gualdim Paes, Grand Master of the Knights Templar, built these castles so that there could be visual communication between them at a distance. Therefore, the fire (Galician *labareda*) “speaks” (Breton *lauaret*) at a distance. Aside its possible use for long-range communications, I see three important components of Celtic religion on the mount Labor do Dono:

- The mount (duno>dono): a higher place favoured for the worship of a deity,
- A water source: the Labor do Dono spring. Springs are portals to the afterlife, according to traditions in Galicia and Ireland,
- Fire (*labareda* flame, smoke): of ritual purification importance in Galician (Saint John’s eve bonfires) and Celtic traditions.

The same characteristics of Monte Labor do Dono that make it totally unfeasible to farming work (Latin *labor*) make it a favourable place for religious cults. In short, the Labor do Dono would mean the *Mount of Speech (communication, signalling, warning)* for some utilitarian purpose for the peasants or the *Mount of Fire (flame)* where religious rites were practiced. The word *labareda* is very rare in Medieval documents from Galicia, and I could not find the word *labaro* in the Galician sources I consulted.

We leave the imposing and beautiful Mount Labor do Dono and head for the hamlet of Mouretán (Arbo) in Galicia. It is located at 156 masl and is cut by the river Deva (Celtic *\*dewa, goddess*) [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.96]. At that place, a beautiful Roman bridge crosses over the Deva. Our targeted toponym there is plural: Os Doños (Os Donhos). If from Latin, it would mean The Owners, but this is not the case. If what I’m proposing is correct, this toponym is telling us there is more than one hill there. In fact, from Mouretán (and from the town of Arbo not far away) we can see three imposing mounts side by side towering over the hamlets and villages around: the mounts Chán do Rei (peaks at 954 masl), Coto Redondo (931 masl) and Coto da Velha, which peaks at 928 masl. The Coto da Velha (Peak of the Old Woman) may have been related to the Celtic deity Cailleach. In Ireland, Cailleach is a witch, but according to Irish legend, and Galician legends too, she also protects food stored during the winter [Cuba, Xoán Ramiro et al. 2023, p.41]. Cailleach is associated with the Winter solstice, the beginning of the dark season where everything is “dead”. In the Irish Gaelic language *cailleach* is literally *the one who wears a veil*, and means *nun, old woman* but also *druidess* [eDil Dictionary. 2024]. Perhaps the Coto da Velha (Mouretán) was used to check the autumn equinox or the winter solstice, when Cailleach begins to protect the crops and therefore it was time for everyone to start harvesting and storing food.

There are other Galician toponyms like A Cortinha do Dono (Meira, Lugo), which would mean *Prado do Monte (Meadow of the Mount)*. Next one is A Lagoa de Doniños (Fontá) in Serantes. According to Galician tradition, in the bottom of this lagoon there is the village of Valverde. Its villagers refused to help Jesus Christ who was asking for alms and a great wave of the sea submerged the village. Only two children survived, and they are the Doniños (Little Landlords, Little Owners) who gave the lagoon its name [A Lagoa de Doniños. 2024]. The lagoon is situated in a valley between two hills: O Confurco and O Outeiro. A third hill forms part of the scenery: O

Monteventoso. In fact, the two boys from the submerged village of Valverde never existed and the three hills around the lagoon are the small *duno* (*Doniños*), small hills whose tops are between 230-245 masl. The hillfort of Croa de Fontá, next to the lagoon, and not far away the hillfort of Lobadiz, where a gold torque was found, attest to the Celtic nature of the pre-Roman culture in this area. The torque was registered with the Dirección General del Patrimonio (Archaeological Museum of A Corunha) in 2016 but has since disappeared [Perles Perez, Isabel. 2017].

There are several more examples in Galicia that seem to be related to the Celtic radical *duno*: O Casaldoño (Santa Maria do Cexo), A Hora do Dono (Villastro) and Duño (Paderne), still to be if their topography confirms the suggested Celtic etymology. There's the Facho de Donón (Cangas), on the coast almost opposite the islands Cíes. As explained by friar Martin Sarmiento (1746-1770):

*“La voz facho es muy común en Galicia a las eminencias en onde, para avisar de la venida de los enemigos, se encienden hogueras; y así viene de fax, facis. Si en ellas hay farol continuo para guiar a los marineros, se llaman Faros, y si só para hogueras Fachos.”* [Sarmiento, Martin. 1970].

Facho means bonfire. But what about Donón? It all depends on when this place name was attributed. If post-Roman invasion, it could be a hybrid word of the Celtic radical *don* with the Latin augmentative suffix *-one* (*\*donone*, *big hill*). If pre-Roman, this toponym kept the Celtic Brittonic plural and augmentative suffix *-(i)on* and the Gaulish suffix *-on(o)*. These two suffixes take us back to a reconstructed Proto-Celtic *\*dun(i)on*. The Brittonic suffix *-(i)on* derived to the Middle Welsh *-(y)on* [Ball, Martin J. and Müller, Nicole. 2010, p.134]. The suffix *-(i)on* was originally augmentative, but later indicated the plural. Outeiro de Batente, the hill, would be the modern denomination of Dun(i)on (*big hill* or *hills*) and the name of the town of Donón preserved the ancient Celtic name of the big hill.

Two larger cousins of the Outeiro de Batente live in France, in the Vosges mountains, which according to Roman sources were inhabited by Celtic peoples: the Grand Donon with its peak at 1,008 masl, the third highest mountain in the Vosges. Its smaller brother, the Petit Donon (718 masl), is right next to it, separated by a valley. The two are effectively *dun-(i)on* (*large elevations, hills, mounts*).

**Donas and dueñas who are not ladies (dominas).** Outside the Iberian Peninsula, toponyms *dona* also occur. In France, the village of Done (Saint-Michel-de-Villadeix) was attested with the name of *casalis voc. de la Dona* (1482) [Gourgue, Alexis. 1873, p.99], located near the hamlet of Les Janissoux. If from Latin, *Casalis de la Dona* could mean the Hamlet of the Lady (woman, mistress). If from Celtic, the toponym *Dona* would derive from *duno* (*hill*) and seems not to bear the augmentative plural suffix *-(i)on*. Therefore, there should be only one hill there. I checked on the map and true to its Celtic etymology, the village of Done is situated at the foot of a lone and low 208-metre-high hill. The land around is at about 185 masl (Carte Militaire de l'État Major of France). In Asturias, at the parish of La Riera (Cangas de Onís) there is the Cueva de las Dueñas (Cave of the Ladies). The Asturian anthropologist Constantino Cabal collected a local legend about two bewitched girls who are imprisoned in that cave. They would be the *dueñas* (women, owners, ladies) of the cave [Cabal, Constantino. 1925, p.52-64]. The Celtic option takes me instead to the meaning Cave on the Hills. The legendary *dueñas* (ladies) were born out of the medieval imagination



when the people forgot of the meaning of this Celtic toponym created by their forefathers. Still in Asturias, the Cueva Dueña in the municipality of Llanes is a cave located in an elevated place in the Sierra del Cuera "which distinguishes it from other caves in the region" [Dueña, la cueva. 2024]. It's a cave on an elevation (*duno*>*don*). Cueva Dueña would mean originally Cave of the Mount. In Galicia, El Castillo de las Donas (Manín) is a mountain where there are no hamlets for several kilometres around. No donas (women, owners, ladies) may have lived on that rocky, sterile and isolated mountain. The Donas (Rubiós) are steep and rocky mountains where no "dona" (woman, owner, lady) would have ever lived there. As Donas (Friol) is a hamlet with only three or four houses, situated at 513 masl on relatively flat ground. It is placed 500 metres away from two hills that are 700 masl high. Those two hills are the Donas (Celtic *duno*). We can see that the Celtic radical *duno* occurs quite frequently in the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, when philologist Falileyev states that "the Celtic -dunum stem is rare in the Iberian Peninsula" [Falileyev, Alexander. 2017, entry "Caladunum"], this differs from reality. The *duno* stem is frequent in the Iberian Peninsula, but it is masked, hidden, because of its transformation into *dona*, *dueña*, *dono*, *doño*, *duño*, *donón*, their plurals and other variants. In the Iberian Peninsula, the people having lost the knowledge of their Celtic meaning (hill) and attributed to them the Latin meanings of *donas* (*ladies*), *donos* (*lords*) and *doniños*. This led to the creation of many legends about mysterious ladies, lords, boys and girls who were in many cases trapped in hard-to-reach and uninhabited places on hills and mountains, forming part of the beautiful magical charm of Galician (and Iberian) traditions. Back to the Libredón hill (Santiago de Compostela), the meaning of *duno* (*elevation, hill, mound*) corresponds exactly to the topography of the place: a hill.

## 2.2. The Celtic radical -ver-

To the Celtic word *-duno* I add the Proto-Celtic radical *-ver-* and we have *\*verduno*. I don't make this addition in an unsubstantiated way. Real-life precedents exist by the lot: Verduno (Cuneo, Italy), Verda (Catalonia), Berdan (Huesca) and others [Delamarre, Xavier. 2003, p.155]. Perhaps the best-known Celtic toponym based on *\*verduno* is the city of Verdun (France), which according to Roman sources, was called Clavorum in the 4th century AD and was later renamed Virodunum [Liénard, Felix. 1862, p.247-248]. Virodunum takes us to the reconstructed Proto-Celtic language word *\*wiro*, which means *truth, man*. [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.423]. Would *\*Wiroduno* mean the Hill of Truth or the Hill of Man? It could be, but it could have another meaning from the point of view of utilitarian toponymy, which I prefer to follow, without discarding the other possible alternatives. Countrypersons in antiquity often used utilitarian toponyms to mentally map out places where they would find game, land for cultivation, rivers with fish, water springs for drinking and healing. Utilitarian toponyms also spare time and work, for instance, by denominating places where the land is infertile or other places to be avoided. Therefore, in Verdun (France) the meaning Hill of Truth or Hill of Man may be right but keeping my focus on utilitarian toponymy I must search additional meanings.

For this reason, instead of *\*wiro* (*truth, man*) I suggest the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) radical *\*auēr* which means *water, rain, river* and would have originated the Latin word *urina* [Pokorny, Julius. 1959, v.1, p.80.c]. The radical *ur-* was applied to toponyms like the river Urola (Guipuzkoa, Basque Country), the village of Urine (La

Baume, Haute-Savoie) in France, close to the brook Nant de la Scie and the peak Col d'Urine (Queyras, Hautes-Alpes) in France. This same PIE *\*auēr* radical evolved into *\*uēr* in the Celtic Iberian and Gaulish languages [Pokorny, Julius. 1959, v.1, p.80.c], next deriving into *ver*, *var* and *ber* and indicates the presence of water. Applying this to the Compostelan toponym Libredón (<*\*Li-ver-duno*), if it contains the Celtic word *\*ver* it could mean *Water Hill*, *Rain Hill* or *River Hill*.

Does this etymology make sense? I think so. Libredón (Compostela) isn't near a river, but it does have several water sources and at least one of them, the Fonte do Franco, seems to be very old. If the Galician Legend of Queen Lupa has any truth to it, this fountain would have existed in the 1st century AD (probably under a different Celtic name), because the oxen carting the remains of St James would have quenched their thirst at it. Therefore, when we analyse *\*Liverduno* (Libredón) from the point of view of utilitarian Celtic etymology, we have two radicals that explain exactly what we find on the site of the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela: *duno* (*hill*) and *\*ver* (*water, rain, river*). Rain hill seems not adequate. If it were a big mountain or *serra*, that would make sense. Why would it rain only over the small hill of Libredón? For this reason, I keep by the meanings *water* and *river*. After analysing and proposing solutions to *duno* and *\*ver*, we are left with the last radical from *\*Li-ver-duno*: *li-*.

### 2.3. The Celtic Radical *\*liy-*

The *li* radical I see in *\*Li-ver-duno* could perhaps be derived from the reconstructed Proto-Celtic stem *\*liy* which means *flow (of water), outflow*. From it comes the modern Welsh word *lli* (*rivulet, stream, flow of water*). In the Cornish language there is the word *lyf* (*rivulet, stream*) [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.243] and this reminds me of the River Liffey that runs through Dublin (Ireland), which is not a rivulet but a river, and attests that this radical did not exist only in the Brittonic branch of the Celtic languages, but also in the Gaelic branch. The Galaican Celtic spoken in Galicia was possibly related to the Gaelic branch [Martins Esteves, Higinio. 2015, p.2]. Like *duno* and *\*ver-*, *\*liy* (*flow (of water), outflow*) seems to me to be a pan-Celtic radical. This suspicion made me investigate the subject two years ago regarding a Portuguese toponym. I found that this stem also occurs in rare hydronyms in Galicia, León and northern Portugal. Considering that the Libredón never had a big river like the Liffey (Dublin), the Proto-Celtic radical *\*liy* (*flow (of water), outflow*) would explain the type of *\*uēr* (*water*) found in the *duno* (*hill*): it is a *flow of water, outflow*. It is a water source (outflow). The following place names don't include the Celtic word *-duno* (*hill*), which makes sense because they are situated in plains. There is the village of Libardac, which reminds me of the fine wine Llistrac-Médoc, name of the region where sits the village. Libardac is crossed to the west by the Ruisseau de l'Abreuvoir, which is currently dry. This former creek was the *\*liyuēr* (*water flow*) that denominated the place. Still in France, there is the Libarda' stream (Ouveillan). It was previously called Lo Libardar (1411), A Libardac (1404-1589) and La Limbarda (1776) [Sabarthès, Antoine. 1912, p.211]. In both cases, they may come from the reconstructed word *\*liver(t)ako* where the Celtic stem and suffix are joined by the linking consonant "t", an event that occurs in Irish Gaelic language, but in the sources I've researched I haven't been able to confirm whether it occurred Gaulish too. The frequent Celtic suffix *-ako* means a *lot of, plenty*. For example: *\*tored* is fruit, *\*toredako* is *fruitful* [Russell, Paul. 2013, p.36]. Therefore, *\*Liver(t)ako* would be a place where there was a *flow of water*

with plenty water, a place with plenty of running water. Nowadays, very little water flows in the Libarda' stream, but climate has changed. Also, we must take into account that the concept of too much or too little water is relative. An almost dry small lagoon in the middle of a torrid desert can be considered a lot of water by the locals. In the Amazon region, a large river (by European standards) will be seen by the locals as a smaller river compared to the big watercourses that exist there. For the Celtic inhabitants of Libardac and Libarda', their local stream had *-ako* (plenty) of water. Though the radical *\*liy* (flow (of water), outflow) in Wales and in Galicia and Northern Portugal seems to denominate small courses of water, rivulets, streams, it can be found in the denomination of bigger rivers in other countries, like the Liffey (Dublin) but probably not the Moselle (Liverdun), for the reasons explained next.

Liverdun's hill is close to the Moselle River. Would the Moselle be the *\*Liyuēr*? No. The Moselle was mentioned as Mosella by the Roman Historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus (56-120AC) [The Annals of Tacitus, 1962. Book 13, c.53] and as Musalla in the Tabula Peutingeriana (12<sup>th</sup> Century), but possibly based on Roman maps from the 4-5<sup>th</sup> Century. Which makes us pose the question: where it is the *\*liy* (flow (of water), outflow) of Liverdun? The water outflow or water source could be the Fontaine à Liverdun on top of the hill inside where it was the Medieval fortified town, close to the Saint-Pierre de Liverdun church (12<sup>th</sup> Century). French philologues from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century proposed the toponym Liverdun was an anthroponym, formed from the name of a certain "Libérius, a Gallo-roman man and the suffix *dunum* (Gaulish fort)" [Liverdun, bourg (Meurthe-et-Moselle). 2024.]. While Gaulish *dunum* is attested, the name Liber from Libérius is a solution that is mentioned with reluctance by Dauzat [Dauzat, Albert and Rostaing, Charles. 1979, p.406-b]. Dauzat is right. Liverdun as anthroponym is out of the question.

#### **2.4. Attestation of the etymology of *\*Liyuērduno*.**

If my suggestions are correct, the suggested place name *\*Liverduno* would mean *Hill of the Water Source*. But can this hypothetical etymology be verified? The proof may perhaps lie in Asturias, at Lliberdón (Colunga), a small parish which in 2008 had 224 inhabitants, and the village around 10 houses and one church. On the first check, it matches all the etymological criteria:

- ✓ The village of Lliberdón sits on an elevated site (*duno*, hill)
- ✓ 320 metres from the village there is the river Libardón. ( *uēr*, water)
- ✓ The river Libardón is not a big river, it is a stream (*\*lyi-*, flow of water, outflow)

Therefore, the toponym Lliberdón (Colunga) complies with the etymology I propose: *\*Liyuērduno*, a hill with, or close by, a *\*liy* (flow (of water), outflow). Furthermore, when investigating this place name, Cabeza Quiles found some valuable information: Lliberdón was documented in the year 803 under the name *Liuerdonem* [Cabeza Quiles, Fernando. 2014, p.180]. Cabeza Quiles associates Lliberdón (Colunga) with the Libredón hill at Compostela and Liverdun (Meurthe-et-Moselle). In a French source, I found that Liverdun was attested in a document from the year 894 under the name *Liberdunum* [Lepage, Henri. 1862, p.79]. Cabeza Quiles suggests that *duno* comes from *dunum* (hill, elevation) citing Moralejo, García Arias

and Rostaing [Cabeza Quiles, Fernando. 2014, p.180]. He rules out the Latin meaning of *libero* (*free*) for Libredón (Compostela) and what we've seen so far in this article confirms that. However, Cabeza Quiles does not follow ahead to suggest an etymology for the *liuer-* radical. My proposition (\*Liyuērduno) would be the full Celtic solution for Liverdun (Meurthe-et-Moselle), Lliberdón (Colunga) and for Libredón (Santiago de Compostela). It accurately describes the characteristics of these three places: hills where there is or are close by flows of water, or water outflows (water sources). I suggest this evolution for Libredón (Santiago de Compostela): \*Liyuērduno → \*Liuerdon (Medieval name of Lliberdón, Asturias) → Libredón. The spelling *Liuerdonem* attested by Cabeza Quiles seems to be Celtic radical that I propose in this article: \*Liyuērduno, literally *hill of the water outflow*, meaning *Hill of the Water Source*. I believe that my suggestion has a reasonable degree of feasibility, and I submit it for debate, which could confirm or refute what I propose. This means that in the Compostelan Libredón there would be in pre-Roman times *running water* or a *water source*. Indeed, there are several water springs and fountains there and we now check them to find out more.

### 3. LIBREDÓN'S WATER SOURCES

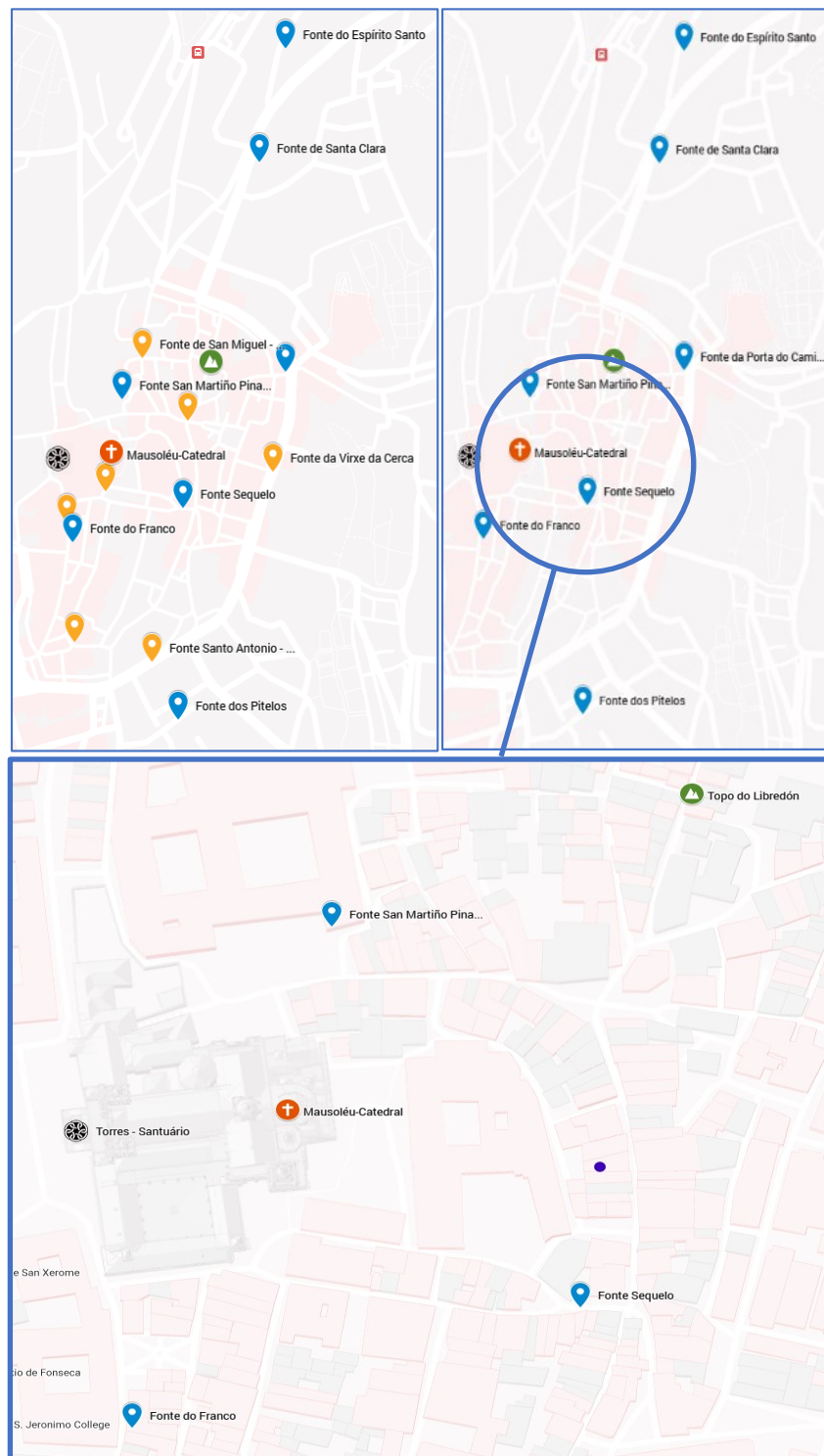
At present, there are several water springs and fountains at the Libredón. But the Galician legend of the Rainha Lupa mentions only one of them: the Fonte do Franco. This could possibly mean that this water source had some ritual importance in pre-Roman times. Can we attest it? Not in the sources I consulted, but there may be surviving traces of it. In 1541, the bricklayer officer Gregorio de Seoane, was charged to review all the springs and fountains of water at Santiago de Compostela. He wrote in his report to the powerful King Charles V (1500-1558) that little water flowed from the Fonte do Franco. When there was water, he reported, it flowed into a weak stream that served several nearby houses. There were fights between neighbours because there was so little water. Also, the water from the Fonte do Franco worked miracles [Fonte do Franco (2002)]. Why did the oxen carrying the remains of St James stopped at the Fonte do Franco among the three water sources existing on the hill of Libredón? For utilitarian reasons: anyone travelling from Castro Lupario, where Queen Lupa was based, be it placed in San Xulián de Bastavales or Aldea de los Francos in Teo, passes this fountain on their way to the top of the hill of Libredón. But, in 1541 the folk thought the water from the Fonte do Franco was miraculous. There are a couple unanswered alternatives:

- The Fonte do Franco was miraculous since pre-Christian times and that's why the oxen stopped to drink from it.
- The oxen turned the water from the Fonte do Franco miraculous because they were captured at the sacred Mount Ilianus. These oxen were sacred, not the water (at first).
- The Fonte do Franco became miraculous when oxen drank its water, because they carried the remains of St James of Compostela.

We don't know if the sacredness of Fonte do Franco stems from pre-Christian or Christian beliefs. However, the sacredness of water in Celtic culture is widely attested to. Galician popular tradition attributes miraculous cure qualities to the water of certain springs, which is a pre-Christian belief. So, there's nothing to stop us from thinking that



perhaps this spring, now called Fonte do Franco, could have been sacred and miraculous in pre-Christian times.



**Figure 2.** Map of the springs near Libredón.  
 Yellow: recent fountains built since the 18th century.  
 Blue: ancient fountains that have existed since at least the 16th century.

We can see on the top left map from Figure 2 that the Compostela Cathedral is surrounded to the east, north and south by many fountains. But not all of them are ancient water springs. Some of them, marked in yellow on the map, are monumental fountains that receive water through pipes that come from the Fonte Branca and Chã do Curro springs, and recently from the Mallou de Baixo spring. All of these are located outside the city of Santiago de Compostela. The following are artificial fountains:

- Fonte de San Miguel
- Fonte da Praça de Cervantes
- Fonte dos Cavalos
- Fonte da Praça de Fonseca
- Fonte do Jardim do Colégio de Fonseca
- Fonte da Virxe da Cerca.
- Fonte de Belvís (1852)
- Fonte do Espírito Santo (1852)
- Fonte do Toural

For example, the Fonte dos Cavalos (formerly the Fonte da Prataria) is the closest to the cathedral today, but it didn't exist in the Middle Ages. For this reason, in the analysis I am going to make from now on, I'm not taking into account those artificial fountains built by the Compostela authorities from the 18th century onwards. I only consider the oldest fountains, which are marked in blue on the map. They probably are water springs that gush (or gushed) water from the place *\*liy (flow (of water), outflow)*. I must emphasise that medieval sources on fountains are rare, and I was unable to access the work *Fontes e Lavadoiros do Concello de Santiago* (Aquagest, 2002) despite having requested it. Fortunately, it seems that part (or all?) of this work has been published online on the Compostela Verde website. Back to the audit made in 1541 by Gregorio de Soanes, he reported that these old fountains (*fontes populares*), which were local springs, were in a bad state [Fonte da Porta do Camino (2002)] [Fonte dos Pitelos (2002)].

- Fonte do Franco
- Fonte Sequelo
- Fonte da Porta do Caminho
- Fonte dos Pitelos
- Fonte do Burro, destroyed in 1852
- Fonte de San Martinho Pinário

Of these six ancient fountains, which are local natural springs (their water is not brought through manmade pipes from afar), three are closest to the Santiago de Compostela cathedral: the Fonte do Franco, the Fonte Sequelo and the Fonte de San Martinho Pinário. We can see these three water springs in the map at the bottom in the Figure 2. There is no evidence that these three fountains existed in Roman or pre-Roman times. As mentioned earlier, the Galician legend of Queen Lupa says only one of them, the Fonte do Franco, which back in 1541 had now and then enough water to feed a weak stream. The Fonte de San Martinho Pinário was rebuilt in 1747 as a

monumental fountain, but it had already existed since at least 1561, according to records of disputes over water between the citizens of Compostela and the monks of this monastery [Fonte do Monastery de San Martiño Pinario (2002)]. However, it draws the attention that these three springs surround the Santiago de Compostela cathedral to the north, south and east:

- The triangle formed by these springs in the Libredón hill seems to point eastwards to the sunrise, with the tip of this "arrowhead" being the Sequelo Fountain, as can be seen in the map at the bottom of Figure 2.
- At the heart of this triangle of water springs, there is the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, precisely its altar, where the remains of Saint James were found back in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
- The legend of the pagan Queen Lupa says the remains of Saint James were placed inside the mausoleum she had built for her and her nephew.
- This may mean that, if the legend preserved any traces of real history, a Celtic mausoleum from a noblewoman was built in the middle of the triangle formed by the three water springs.
- Back in the 1950s, a pre-Christian Galaican-roman cemetery was found below the Santiago de Compostela cathedral.
- The hills of Viso, Gozo and Pico Sagrado, which Sánchez-Montaña suggests were used for solstice observations, are also in the direction of sunrise and can be seen from the Libredón hill.
- Sánchez-Montaña believes there was a pre-Christian observatory (sanctuary?) where the cathedral now is.

We know about the significance of the number three in Celtic mythology. From the top of the Santiago de Compostela cathedral's bell towers, Sánchez-Montaña could see the alignment of the sun with the top of three mountains: Monte do Gozo (summer solstice), Monte do Viso (equinoxes) and Pico Sacro (winter solstice) [Sánchez-Montaña, Carlos. 2021]. At the San Andrés de Teixido church (Galicia) there is a miraculous spring where the waters gush through three spouts. The legend of Santa Marinha das Águas Santas (Northern Portugal), most probably a pre-Christian deity transformed in saint later, tells that Marinha was a Christian martyr that was decapitated and whose head bounced three times on the ground, creating the three miraculous springs we find there at present. There are the Matribus Gallaicis, probably home deities, represented as three female faces or three full-bodied females. The rare images of Lug in inscriptions, one of the major Celtic gods, show him with three faces, probably so he can see everything (like a possibly related deity, the Persian Mitra).

St Nolwenn (6th century AD) was a girl who fled her family in Ireland and lived in the region of Bignan (Morbihan) in Brittany. The nobleman Tyran of Noyal fell in love with her. She refused his insinuations, and he beheaded her. Nolwenn took her head and walked the paths of the region until she reached a place near Noyal-Pontivy. There, she stopped and three drops of blood from her head, and therefore her soul, dripped from her fingers and fell onto the grass. From each drop sprang a spring, which are the Three Fountains of Noyal-Pontivy [Rio, Bernard. 2011, p.24]. In Maure-de-Bretagne, St Hermin walked around holding his decapitated head in his arms, until he tripped, and the head bounced three times on the ground, creating three springs of water [Rio, Bernard. 2011, p.37-39].

#### 4. THE SACRED OAK GROVE

Framing this scenario of the pre-Christian Libredón in Santiago de Compostela and its three hypothetically sacred springs, there was a sacred forest in that hill, which was an oak grove (*carvalheira*) predecessor to the current oak grove of Santa Susana de Braga. It covered a couple of hills and the neighbouring hill of the Libredón and went 850 metres east to the current *Carvalheira de San Lorenzo* [Fernández, Jose Maria and Fernández, Tachi. 2019]. The sacredness of oak groves in Galician mythology seems to me to be attested to by the toponym *Rovoeyra Sacrata* (Sacred Oak Forest) which is attested in the founding act of the monastery of Santa Maria de Montederramo (Caldelas) in 1124. Pliny the Elder described the high respect the druids had for the oak trees: “The Druids [...] held nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree that bears it, supposing always that tree to be the oak. Of itself the robur is selected by them to form whole groves, and *they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it*; [...] In fact, it is the notion with them that everything that grows on it has been sent immediately from heaven, and that the mistletoe upon it is a proof that the tree has been selected by God himself as an object of his especial favour.” [Bostok, John. 1855, book 16, chapter 95]. In Santa Marinha de Augas Santas (Alhariz) in Galicia, there is a tradition that perhaps may have preserved over the millennia how Celtic people understood the role of trees, particularly the sacred oak, in their mythology: the villagers used to say that the thousand-year-old oak tree growing in that village has blood instead of sap [Cuba, Xoán Ramiro et al. 2023, p.73].

#### 5. A TEMPLE AT THE LIBREDÓN. AN ORACLE?

\*Liverduno (Hill of the Water Source) would have been the name of the hill of Libredón in Celtic times and during the Roman occupation. Soon after, the burial place of St James of Compostela was mentioned in the 6th century AD in the *Breviarium Apostolorum* under the name of *Achaia Marmarica*.

**Achaia Marmarica.** Some researchers translate it as Marble Ark. Or does it mean *marble arches*? [Arcis Marmoricis, (2024)] The word *achaia* doesn't seem to have existed in Latin, at least not in the main texts preserved to this day. It exists in Greek (Ἀχαΐα) where it denotes the region of Achaia (Greece). However, the Achaia region in Greece is out of context here. *Achaia*, in the context of the mausoleum of St James of Compostela, seems to be a misrepresentation of another word. I speculate about the Ancient Greek feminine noun *ἀκοή* (*akoe*), meaning *hearing* [Montanari, Franco. 2007, p.70]. It may mean more than plain hearing a sound. In Biblical Greek it means *receiving spiritual instructions* [Exploring the meaning of Akoe in Greek, (2024)]. Its plural, *ἀκοαί* (*akoai*) means *hearings* but also *place where supernatural voices are heard* [Liddel, Henry George and Scott, Robert. 1940, v.1, p.51]. If the word *akoai* (*ἀκοαί*) relates to *achaia* or this later is a manuscript error from *akoai*, would this mean that the Arcis Marmoricis was known in early Eastern Christian times as an oracle?

**Arcis Marmoricis.** Later on, the Latin the place name Arcis Marmoricis was mentioned in the year 866: *...nobis fortissimo patrono sancto Iacobo apostolo, cuius corpus tumulatum esse dignoscitur in arcis Marmoricis...*[Floriano y Cumbreño, Antonio Cristino. 1949-1951], which translates as “...our powerful patron Saint Iacob the Apostle, whose body is known to have been buried in the Arcis Marmoricis...”. The



Latin radical to be analysed seems not to be *arca* but the feminine noun *arx*, which means *fortification, citadel, city* and *elevation, hilltop* and *refuge* [Lewis, Charlton T. and Short, Charles. 1891, p.169]. That leaves us Marmoricis, which means *marble*. Therefore, Arcis Marmoricis could mean *fortification, citadel, city, elevation, hilltop* or *refuge of marble*. The Libredón hill is not made up of marble rocks. Could there have been a marble fortification or city on it? This has never been found. A marble fortification or town would be unfeasible because of the need for a large quantity of this stone, which is not available locally. A marble *refuge* would be more feasible and gives us the idea of a small building. Two additional solutions seem most feasible to me: the Karl-Ernest George's Latin - German dictionary (1913), which quotes texts by Horace, in which the word *arces* means *divine dwelling, temple* and the Lewis & Short Latin dictionary that says that *arces* means a *temple on an elevation* [Lewis, Charlton T. and Short, Charles. 1891, p.170]. For this reason, I suggest that Arcis Marmoricis means not *Marble Arches* or *Marble Refuge*, but *Marble Temple on the Hill*. That's exactly how Bishop Teodomiro describes it in the 9<sup>th</sup> century when rediscovering the remains of Saint James the Greater into a (his words) *domuncula marmorea* (small marble house). It was a small mausoleum, with the remains of Santiago Maior, perhaps seen in early Christian times as a temple (Latin *arces*) where the Christians went to pray, plead, invoke, get blessings and, if the Greek word *ἀκοαί* (*akoai*) comes into play, to *hear supernatural voices*, in the case the guidance purportedly heard from the deceased St James of Compostela.

## 6. A POSSIBLE CELTIC MYTHOLOGICAL SCENARIO SUGGESTED FOR THE LIBREDÓN

Given the scarcity of attested information, speculation is bound to come into play when imagining the setting of the Libredón hill. I don't claim that all my suggestions are correct, but for me, the important thing is to put them up for debate so it can be corrected, improved or refuted.

**Libredón, the Hill of the Water Source.** Libredón would be a fully Celtic place name not mixed with Latin. It may derive from the Celtic root \*Liyūērduno (\*liy=outflow, ūēr=water, duno=hill). My suggestion describes what was there: a hill with a water outflow, that is, with a water source. The spelling Liuerdonem (year 803AD) attested for the Asturian toponym Lliberdón (Colunga) seems to prove my etymological proposal for Libredón.

**A possible Celtic Trinity of the Libredón Fountains.** The Sequelo, do Franco and San Martinho Pinário's natural water springs seem to be ancient and form a triangle around the Santiago de Compostela cathedral. The atrium of cathedral is the place where Saint James' remains were placed and rediscovered later in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The three springs point eastwards, towards the sunrise, therefore to the Celtic sun-God Lug's birth. This may add up to Sánchez-Montaña's hypothesis about the existence of a pre-Christian sanctuary there to observe the winter solstice through the peaks of the mounts of Gozo, Viso and Pico Sagrado [Sánchez-Montaña, Carlos. 2021].

**The highest hill is not the best: sacred water springs prevail.** Libredón (267 masl) is not the highest hill in its area. Next to it is Monte da Almaciga (321 masl), which, being higher, would be closer to the Heavens. However, the place of the Galaican-Roman cemetery under the Santiago de Compostela cathedral points that sacred water springs

prevail over the height of a hill. This could be explained by Galician and Irish traditions, that tell that they are entrances to the Otherworld:

*“In fact, many legends from Irish mythology tell that the Other World could be reached through water. The sea, a lake, a spring or a river were seen as a threshold or portal to the divine world, water demarcating the boundary between the natural and supernatural worlds”* [Beck, Noemie. 2015, p.277-297].

Therefore, their possible role in the local pre-Christian mythology at the Libredón was rather that of connection channels with the Otherworld than protecting the sacred place, the Domuncula Marmorea or other structure before it (a Celtic sanctuary), which was situated between them. In the Middle Ages, nobles fought over the right to be buried as close as possible to the altar of a church or cathedral. Commoners were left to be buried outside the church or in a shallow grave elsewhere near the town where they lived. The ancient custom of building mausoleums and tombs as close as possible to the heart of a sacred place may have existed in pre-Christian times. Queen Lupa, if his legend has any grain of historical truth, did the same. The Domuncula Marmorea (Marble Mausoleum) was found out by bishop Theodomirus in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century AD or by Paio the Hermit. Inside it, the remains of St James were found. The mausoleum was not built on top of the hill of Libredón, a place with no religious significance, but between the triangle of the three sacred springs, around 300 meters down from the top of the hill (see Figure 2). The conclusion is that a hill would be important for the Celtic rite, but water sources seem to be more important for a place of death than the height of the hill as they channel the souls of the deceased to the Otherworld.

**Dôn of the Sands.** Below the Santiago de Compostela cathedral at the Libredón hill, archaeologists found out a Galaican-Roman cemetery. Therefore, the Libredón hill was a mortuary hill. Considering that Galicia and the Libredón were immersed in the Celtic culture, which was the Celtic deity of Death? It was Dôn of the Sands. Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has been proposed that Dôn is Danu (die Anu, goddess Anu). A Gaelic deity Anu existed, is very ancient and is attested. But the supposed Danu is nothing more than a modern cult recreation, created from the non-attested merge of Die Anu>Danu [Ó hÓgáin, Dáithí. 1999, p.65-66]. Aleatory inventions like this have caused enormous confusion because Danu was inserted into many sources such as books, papers and the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which mentions this supposed deity without warning that it is recently recreated mythology [Dôn, Celtic Goddess. (2024)]. In the Welsh Mabinogion there is no mention of Dôn's gender [Guest, Charlotte. 1902]. In Irish legends, Dôn is a male deity. According to McInerkey [McInerkey, Luke. 2022], Dôn seems to be an ancient, primal deity. Far from being a monstrous, terrifying and evil Hollywoodian demon of death, in medieval Irish traditions Dôn was described as an old man in white robes who lectured to groups of students. Yes, that's right: Dôn was a professor. His chair in the afterlife was enticing and important: the history of the universe "since when the first stars appeared". He could have been the patron of the academics. He lived in a castle at the sand dunes, but Celts living far from the coast believed he lived in any kind of hill (duno). According to Irish tradition, he was also a healer. It makes sense to look for the top healer divinity when we are gravely ill or near death, in a last attempt to save our life. When cure was not possible, for reasons only Dôn could explain, he was conveniently well placed to welcome the souls of the dead. In his spare time from his time-consuming agenda, he liked to ride his white stallion in

the stretch of a beach bathed by the waves [McInerkey, Luke. 2022]. This means he was the doorman between the world of the living (Earth) and the world of the dead (the Sea).

**The Galician legend of Queen Lupa and the sacredness of the pre-Roman Libredón.**

In the Galician legend of Queen Lupa, when the disciples Athanasius and Theodore disembarked from their ship at the port of Iria Flavia, they were told to go and see Queen Lupa at Castro Lupario. If this legend has partially or wholly preserved some real events and characters, this may indicate that the authority of Lupa (if she existed) extended as far as the Iria Flavia (Padrón) harbour on the Sar River, going to the Pico Sagrado, the sacred mountain not far from Santiago de Compostela. The legend tells us that the bulls carrying the remains of Saint James of Compostela departed from the Castro Lupario, where the Queen Lupa sat and governed, and left free to roam and chose the place of burial of the remains of the saint. The bulls went non-stop to the Libredón hill, where they drank from the Fonte do Franco water spring. There are two main hypotheses about the place where the Castro Lupario stood:

- San Xulián de Bastavalles or Aldea de los Francos, which are 14 kilometres away from the Libredón, and
- Monte Pedrullo, in Quilmas, which is 67 kilometres away from the Libredón

The legend says that at that place in the Libredón, close to the Fonte do Franco, Queen Lupa had built a mausoleum for her deceased niece. This means the bulls carted the remains of Saint James for a long distance. I read an academic article years ago, which unfortunately I couldn't find again, which stated that Roman vicus cemeteries in southern Germany were never located more than 3 kilometres away from each vicus. The reason is easy to understand: why carry the dead for many kilometres? It costs more. It takes time. The villager-peasants' life is hard, there's no time to waste. It's better to bury the dead quickly in a place not too far from the vicus. For the elites of antiquity, however, the reasoning was different. Money and time were not a problem for them. Having a mausoleum in a sacred place, even if it was far away, brought prestige and ensured that their souls would go to the afterlife more quickly and with a higher chance of going to Heaven. If the Queen Lupa had built the mausoleum to her niece at the Libredón, 14km or 67 km away from his capital *castrum* (the Castro Lupario), this means that the Libredón was the most sacred place in the territories that Lupa controlled, covering from the port of Iria Flavia to the Pico Sagrado. In other words, as the ultimate leader of that region, Queen Lupa would have the privilege of building her mausoleum as close as possible to the most sacred place in her realm, and she chose the Libredón. When she died, possibly a procession of her important relatives (she was a noblewoman) would follow her remains, cremated or not, until reaching her mausoleum placed at the most sacred place of the Libredón. And that takes us to another interesting finding.

**A sanctuary in the Libredón: Táraxis, Jupiter or Lug?** It's very difficult to discern amidst the complex web of local, regional, and pre-Celtic deities, which one(s) would be venerated at the Libredón. Then the Romans came along and superimposed on top of the Celtic deities their pantheon of deities, some of which were Greek in origin or influenced by Greek mythology. Within this confusing scenario we can tentatively find our way around if we strip all the non-core mythology and stick to the primal Celtic deities, coupled with the very few facts attested to so far.

- A stone found in excavations in Compostela Cathedral is dedicated to Jupiter Optimus [Escribano Bernal, Francisco. 1995, p.8] and so Libredón could have been a place of worship for this deity. Also called the Father God (Deus Pater), Jupiter (Iove, Jove) is the Roman deity of the day, the sky, thunder and king of all Roman deities. Since the first traces of his cult in the 5th century BC on the Alban Hills, 20 kilometres south-west of Rome, Jupiter is the deity who inhabited the hilltops. As Jupiter was also related to thunders, Escribano Bernal suggests that the temple was dedicated to Táránis, the Celtic deity of storms and lightning [Escribano Bernal, Francisco. 1995, p.8].
- Sánchez-Montaña's study suggests a possible pre-Roman solar sanctuary on the site of Compostela Cathedral. It would have been an observatory for the solstices and equinoxes. If this is the case, this sanctuary would not be dedicated to Táránis, but to Lug, the Celtic deity of the Sun [Sánchez-Montaña, Carlos. 2021].

The possible existence of a Celtic solar sanctuary-observatory in the Libredón hill, for the observation of solstices and equinoxes using the peaks of the mounts of Viso, Gozo and Pico Sacro (Ilianus), according to Sánchez-Montaña, may support the Lug option.

**Lug, Mitra and Mithra.** A granite inscription which archaeologist believe was found on the outskirts of Santiago de Compostela is dedicated to *Deo Invicto Soli M*. It may date from the 2nd century AD. This takes us into another leg in our tour along the possible pre-Christian scenario at the Libredón. This letter M associated with a Sun God would represent the Roman deity Mithra. In 1986, the German researcher Manfred Clauss suggested that in the time of the Roman Empire there were two deities named Mithra. To avoid confusion, he named the Persian deity as Mitra and the Roman deity as Mithra.

- **Mitra (Persian).** Mitra is an Indo-Aryan deity with origins in northern India and Iran. She is the deity of *treaties and contracts*. In the Avestan language (Ancient Iranian), the word *mitra* means *treaty* and *contract*. According to a hymn preserved in the Persian Avesta sacred texts, Mitra is "the god who has ten thousand spies, is strong, knows everything and can never be deceived." He is the all-seeing Sun God who travels the sky in his one-wheeled chariot made of gold [Clauss, Manfred. 2020, p.1-4]. That single golden wheel is the sun. But according to Clauss, the Persian deity Mithra was not the ancestor of the Roman deity Mithra [Clauss, Manfred. 2020, p.7].
- **Mithra (Roman)** Clauss goes on to suggest that the Roman Mithra was an independent creation, unique and more recent than the Persian Mithra. Mithra first appears in the early years of the Christian era in Rome and its neighbouring port, Ostia. Roman dedications to the god Mithra have been found that describe him as a hunter of hares (Germany) or gazelles (Palmyra, Syria). The first known inscription relating Mithra to the Sun is a statue found in Rome and dated to the first quarter of the 2nd century AD: *Alcimus Ti(beri) Cl(audi) Liviani ser(vus) vil(i)c(us) Sol(i) M(ithrae) v(otum) s(olvit) d(onum) d(edit)*. Another



inscription found in the German town of Dormagen (Neuss), in the Rhine valley is *D(eo) S(oli) I(nvicto) Imp(eratori)*.

Thanks to these epigraphs, we see that the (Roman) deity Mithra is associated with the Sun, hunting and the cult to the Roman emperor, but not with contracts and treaties. The cult of Mithra promoted loyalty to the Roman emperor and spread among the Roman military and bourgeoisie, important social classes that upheld the social and political stability of the Empire. With the support of Rome, by the end of the 2nd century AD the cult to Mithra was established in almost the entire Empire, including Galicia (Gallaecia). From the beginning of this cult, the god Mithra was nicknamed Invictus [Claus, Manfred. 2020, p.22-24]. The association of the Sun God with the Roman Emperor is attested by the Mithra cult.

**Lug was not Mercury.** Julius Caesar in his book *De Bello Gallico* (58-49 BC) wrote that Mercury was the most popular god in Gaul and Britannia:

*“They worship as their divinity, Mercury in particular, and have many images of him, and regard him as the inventor of all arts, they consider him the guide of their journeys and marches and believe him to have great influence over the acquisition of gain and mercantile transactions.” [McDevitte, W. A. and Bohn, W.S. (translators). 1869, b.6, c.17].*

Julius Caesar was writing about Lug, not Mercury. Lug sets (dies) after the nine waves of the sea before the horizon according to the Irish text *Immram Brán* (The Voyage of Brán, 7th century AD). Lug was the protector of travellers and *contracts* [Olmsted, Garret. 1994, p.117]. Very few epigraphs remain of the three-faced Celtic Sun-God-Big-Brother Lug. Some of them, notably the one in Paris, depicts Lug with three faces. He can see everything, nothing escapes to him, like the Persian Mitra who has a thousand spies, knows everything and cannot be deceived. As the protector of contracts and oaths, Lug was very important to any ancient tradesperson and other businesspersons. There are a few similar attributes between Lug and Mercury but mostly not. Julius Cesar was wrong. Mercury is far from honest, as he is also the patron of thieves, he cheats and is not the protector of contracts, the arts or respect for oaths. Mercury also doesn't see everything and wasn't even a primal Sun God. Cesar's wrong assumption was propagated through many academic papers and books until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In terms of coinciding attributes, Lug seems to be related to the Persian Mitra and not to Mercury or the Roman Mithra (see Table 1).

Can the etymology of the name Lug give us any additional information? Its name comes from the word Proto-Celtic *\*lugu* (bright?). This has been much debated but seems to have weak foundations [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.248]. Olmsted considers the most likely etymology to be *\*leugh-*, *\*lough-*, *\*Lug-* meaning "oath, vow" (PIE *\*h<sup>2</sup> leugh-*). This proposal was originally put forward by Swiss philologist Heinrich Wagner in 1970 [Olmsted, Garret. 1994, p.110]. Matasović created a separate entry for the Celtic root *\*luk-o* (*to see, perceive, observe*) and doesn't relate it to Lug [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.248], but I think these are important qualities of this Celtic deity and connect it with Mitra (Persian). Lug is represented with three faces, because he can *see, perceive and observe* (*\*luk-o*) everything at the same time.

**Table 1.** Comparison of attributes, Lug, Mitra, Mithra and Mercury.  
Five attributes relate Lug to Mitra. Three Lug attributes not exactly related to Mercury.

Lug	Mitra (Persian)	Mithra (Roman)	Mercury <sup>1</sup>
Millenary existence	Millenary existence	Existing from the 1 <sup>st</sup> century AD in Ostia (port of Rome)	Before the 3rd century BC but not one of the early Roman deities <sup>2</sup>
Sun God	Sun God	Undefeated Sun God	-
Sees everything	Sees everything	-	-
Two or three faces	Master of 10,000 spies	-	Three faces
Contract protection	Contract protection	-	-
Patron of all the Arts	-	Patron of the hunters	Patron of thieves and cheats
Oath	Oath	Oath of allegiance to the emperor	-
Protects traders	-	-	Protects travellers and traders
Good harvest (abundance)	-	-	Profit (abundance)
-	-	-	Messages

**The importance of the cult to the Sun at the pre-Christian Galician Fisterra.** If there was a Celtic sanctuary dedicated to the observation of the Sun solstices and equinoxes at the Libredón hill in Santiago de Compostela, we may find interesting the possible existence, not too far away, of the temple of Ara Solis. Its Latin name, Ara Solis, means Sanctuary of the Sun. Galician popular tradition places the Ara Solis in Duio. Claudius Ptolemy Alexandrinus places it in Mongia [Ptolomeo, Claudio ed. Gioseffo Rosaccio. 1599, p.182]. It would obviously be Muxía, on the Costa da Morte in Galicia. The Queen Lupa legend version collected by Giacomo Voragine (13<sup>th</sup> Century) tells that in Duio lived *a regulus (a prince)*, which imparts a certain significance to the place when we know that most druids were from noble families, as attested in early Christian Ireland, where several converted priests were former druids and/or nobles. In a region where Celtic culture was significant like in Galicia, it is very likely that in pre-Roman times the Ara Solis, a solar sanctuary, was dedicated to Lug, the Celtic Sun God. From the Ara Solis, in Duio or Muxía, the pre-Christian pilgrims could see Lug die in the sea, going to the island that exists after the nine waves before the horizon [Olmsted, Garret. 2024, p.4]. The very toponyms Duio and Muxía may be of Celtic origin. Duio may perhaps stem from the Proto-Celtic *\*dewo (god)* that derived to Middle Welsh *duiu*, Cornish *duy*, with the same meaning. [Matasović, Ranko. 2009, p.96] [Kroonen, Guus. 2013, p.519] [Cabeza Quiles, Fernando. 2014, p.270] Around Duio there are other toponyms that seem to stem from Celtic roots, like Brens (Celtic *bram*, meaning roar, noise from the water), Ameijenda (*\*Ambisenda*, between two trails). A bit further away is the town of Muxía, the other candidate to have hosted the disappeared sun temple Ara Solis. This town was mentioned by Ptolemy Alexandrinus (85-165AC) as Mongia. If this is not a mistype, this recalls me the Celtic word *\*mondika*, that could mean place where there are young (lactant) animals [Moralejo, Juan José. 2008, p.146-147] for hunting (*mond-eka, mond-eko*, the Portuguese river Mondego).

<sup>1</sup> Mercury, Roman god (2024) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mercury-Roman-god> on 08 May 2024

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The Celticity of that region that goes from Santiago de Compostela, the Pico Sacro to Duio and Muxía is evident. Galician philologue Higinio Martins believed that the Galician language was from the Gaelic family and was spoken until the 10<sup>th</sup> century [Martins Esteves, Higinio. 2015, p.2], perhaps in remote and isolated villages in the mountains of Galicia. That Celticity may not apply only to toponyms but to the culture and mythology existent there and perhaps in most of Galicia from the years 1.200-900BC (probable date of the Sword of Mouruás [Espada de Mouruás. 2006, p.2] now at the Museu Arqueológico de Ourense) to around 700AC, which is a safe estimate.

The Libredón in Santiago de Compostela was in the middle of this vigorous Celtic scenario. If the Libredón was a sacred site in pre-Christian times, it was a Celtic sacred site. If it was Celtic, the possible Sun sanctuary proposed by Sánchez-Montaña points to a sacred place related to Lug, who is the Celtic sun-god. Seeing from the Libredón hill the peaks of Gozo, Viso and the Pico Sagrado (Sacred Peak) seem to work as reference points to observe solstices and equinoxes [Sánchez-Montaña, Carlos. 2021]. The Galaican-Roman burial grounds at the Libredón, under the cathedral [Bouzas-Sierra, Antón. 2013, v.36, p.48], points to Dôn. The legend of the Queen Lupa, points to a possible cult to the Moon (Arianrhod, lupa, wolf). The largest stone circle in Ireland is that of Grange, near Lough Gour where Áine lives. It dates from 3020 BC. It's pre-Celtic. It seems to be *aligned with the moon* on the sun solstice day [Kelly, Eamonn P. 2022] and not with the *sun (Lug)*. The Grange sanctuary was possibly used for moon worship. Was it the same with the hypothetical sanctuary at the Libredón?

The Milky Way was considered a wild hunt [Thompson, Stith. 1956]. In Galician tradition, the souls of the deceased go to the afterlife via the Milky Way [Cuba, Xoán Ramiro et al. 2023, p.30-31]. The Welsh Celts called the Milky Way Caer Gwydion, Gwydion 's Castle [MacCulloch, J.A. 1948]. Gwydion fab Dôn is the brother of Arianrhod (Argantorota, the Moon). The two siblings are children of Dôn, the deity of death who lived at the top of the hills. According to the Mabinogion book, Arianrhod was the mother of Lug (Lleu, in Welsh) [Guest, Charlotte. 1902]. Dôn, his daughter Arianrhod (the Moon) and Lug (the Sun) are the three Celtic deities related to the Milky Way [MacCulloch, J.A. 1948]. The Libredón could possibly have been a place of observation and cult to Lug, but also to Dôn and the Moon (Argantorota>Arianrhod).

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