The Antiquaries Journal, **93**, 2013, pp 81–91 © The Society of Antiquaries of London, 2013
doi:10.1017/s0003581513000243. First published online 25 July 2013

RETHINKING ROMANO-BRITISH **CORINIUM*

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It is suggested that the name generally accepted as the Romano-British name of Cirencester, *Corinium, *the traditional spelling deriving from a Latin rendering of that in Ptolemy's* Geography, *is mistaken, and that for philologically sound reasons the authentic name is more likely to have been* Cironium, *as recorded in the Ravenna Cosmography.*

The ancient name of the town of Cirencester, Gloucestershire, has caused considerable problems of interpretation. It is recorded in the second century AD in Ptolemy's *Geography* (II.3.13) as *Korínion* (variants *Korínnion*, *Korónion*).[1] *Korínion*, taken as authentic, has been generally understood to represent a Romano-British **Corinium*.[2] The most recent commentators, A L F Rivet and Colin Smith, do not state in which of the many surviving manuscripts of Ptolemy the variants occur. I have not been able to locate a variorum edition of the *Geography*, and I cannot therefore form an independent view on their relative authority. Ptolemy expert Dr Florian Mittenhuber has kindly provided me with the information set out in the Appendix (below), but I am responsible for the use made of it. Of the three forms, *Korínion* has always carried most weight so far, no doubt because it is overwhelmingly the most frequent form in the record. *Korínnion* is what we find in the manuscript considered to show the most ancient features, whilst *Korónion* is a ghost-form (it is, in other words, an error or invention that has entered the academic literature). However, I shall presume that the standard opinion is essentially correct, and that the form with <nn>, despite its venerability, has been influenced by knowledge in the Greek world of such personal names as *Korínna* and *Korínnos*. Note that if *Korínnion* rather than *Korínion* were taken as the authentic name of the town, none of the philological essentials below would be affected except in a single place (noted below).

There is no other known mention of Cirencester in antiquity, for example on coins of the local people, the Dobunni, or in inscriptions in stone. The place is notoriously omitted from its expected position in Iter XIII of the Antonine Itinerary,[3] which therefore provides no corroboration of Ptolemy. *Corinium* is the form which appears in all modern historical and touristic writing about the ancient place (and, for example, in the name of the local museum and football stadium). It is a regular latinisation of the Greek. However, this form does not actually appear in the record; hence the linguistic asterisk for a form

1. Rivet and Smith 1979, 144. All Ptolemaic forms cited are taken from this book. See also Parsons 2000, 175; Esmonde Cleary *et al* nd, based on Talbert 2000.
2. The asterisk is attached to a form that is not actually recorded, but which has been reconstructed by philological methods and is confidently believed to have existed. *Corinium* has achieved a status which is traditional in representing names in Ptolemy, but is not strictly warranted.
3. Rivet and Jackson 1970.

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reconstructed or inferred from other evidence. Linguists wrestling with this name have had to confront some difficulties. All have assumed that **Corinium* is what lies behind the first element, *Ciren-*, of the current place name, and all have therefore encountered philological problems, which we must rehearse here.

Before we embark on the discussion, we need to attend to some terminology for the languages of Britain in antiquity and later. The main native language of Britain in the Roman period was British Celtic, recorded almost exclusively in a latinised form called Romano-British (RB), for which the main evidence is personal and place names. In the period after the collapse of Roman rule, this language evolved through a stage called, in this paper, Brittonic (roughly AD 450–550), for which there is little direct evidence, and from this into Welsh, Cornish and Breton (each being a distinct modern language, collectively called the neo-Brittonic languages; AD 550 onwards). The earliest stages of these, before written texts appear (AD 550–750/800), are called Proto-Welsh, Proto-Cornish and Proto-Breton, and the earliest texts are described as being in Old Welsh, Old Cornish and Old Breton.[4] The incoming Anglo-Saxons spoke a range of West Germanic dialects that we can label Prehistoric or Pre-Old English.[5] For the Old English (OE) of the settled Anglo-Saxons, there is some textual evidence from the period which coincided with Proto-Welsh and Proto-Cornish. This later evolved into Middle English, which competed in its early centuries with Anglo-Norman French.

The first element of *Cirencester* is believed to be etymologically connected with those of the nearby villages North and South Cerney and with that of the River Churn, which flows through all three places.[6] The exact development of the relation between the three place names is not particularly important in the present context. Suffice it to say the consensus, at least since Edmund McClure,[7] accepts that *Ciren-* and *Cern-* are forms of *Churn* that have been affected by the pronunciation of Anglo-Norman, and/or by the spelling systems used by scribes accustomed to writing administrative and legal documents in that language; or perhaps the scribes simply represented early Middle English as best they could using their current spelling conventions for vernacular languages (ie, everything except Latin), which had originally been devised for (Anglo-)Norman. I accept that the three are indeed related, and that the river name is probably the basis for the others. All four names are recorded from Anglo-Saxon times in spellings that indicate a pronunciation with initial [ʧ],[8] ie <ci-> and <cy-> (but the latter is ambiguous, and for more thorough discussion see below). It is interesting that only three spellings for the inhabited places in the entire post-Conquest record have been noted that could suggest a pronunciation in [ʧ]: *Chiringecestre*, in Gervase of Canterbury's Mappa Mundi (*c* 1270 in

4. The Celtic chronology given here is essentially that of Jackson 1953, 4–6. My term 'Brittonic' includes Jackson's 'Late British'. I use 'Proto' for Jackson's 'Primitive'.
5. Campbell 1959, 4–5; Hogg 1992, 2–9.
6. Early spellings of these names, with documentary sources, are given in Smith 1964–5, I, 5, 58, 60–2, 148; also Ekwall 1960, 108a; Watts 2004, 139b–140a. Typical specimens are: *Cyrnéa*, *Cirnea* (with OE *ēa*, 'river') for the Churn; *Cyrne* for (South) Cerney; *Cirenceaster*, *Cirneceastre*, *Cyrne-*, *Cyrenceastre* for Cirencester. Note that William Camden was so sure of the connection that in his *Britannia* (1590) he invented a spurious Latin form, *Corinius*, for the river name.
7. McClure 1910, 288 n 2.
8. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol for the sound at the beginning and end of *church*. Note the following linguistic conventions: IPA symbols for physical sounds are enclosed in [square brackets]; contrastive sound-units of a language (phonemes) in /slashes/; and letters of spellings in <angle brackets>.

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its present form), but this record is problematic in other ways too; *Chirenchestre* in Layamon's poem *Brut* (*c* 1200), and *North Cherney*, once in a foot of a fine written in 1646.[9] On the other hand the river name is not amply recorded, but all spellings which have come down to us from the post-Conquest period have <ch>. The form of 1646 is clearly an aberration influenced by the name of the river.

Irrespective of the detail of the relations between these names, their collective relation to **Corinium* is problematic, and problematic to an extent that has been glossed over somewhat, both in the academic and in the public mind. Commentators have struggled, using philological special pleadings, to connect them with the RB name. Margaret Gelling remarked: 'The transformation of *Corinium* into the first part of Cirencester has never been fully explained.'[10] The main difficulty begins with the fact that, on the ancient evidence, the British Celtic and RB name which represents it must have begun with the sound [k], as must its descendants in Brittonic and then Welsh. Therefore the change to OE [ʧ], spelt <c>, needs to be explained. It is not straightforward for a British Celtic form beginning */ko-/ to yield an OE form spelt <ce-> or <ci->. We need a way of showing how the British Celtic rounded vowel *[o] represented by the <o> of Ptolemy's form can become an unrounded front vowel in Old English, ie [e] or [i], because these are the only vowels that effect the change of a preceding [k] to [ʧ] in all dialects of Old English.[11] A H Smith shows that W H Stevenson was wrong to believe that **Corinium* could directly yield an ancestor, **Kerin-*, for the OE name by way of the British Celtic phonetic change called internal *i*-affection, because that change is one which operated in seventh- or eighth-century Proto-Welsh, that is after the period of Saxon expansion that engulfed the territory around Cirencester.[12] If the Saxon takeover of the area was linguistically effective from their capture of the town in AD 577, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* allows but does not require us to believe, internal *i*-affection would have operated too late to have produced a Brittonic form which could give rise to an OE form of the type **Cerin*. Brittonic speech may well have survived in the Cotswolds after 577, but it is unlikely that changes in their language after that date would have been copied into name-forms already borrowed into English. Given Cirencester's importance, it may have been known to the Anglo-Saxons well before the date of this battle and therefore have been even less likely to be subject to a later Brittonic sound-change.[13]

9. The first and third MSS references are taken from Smith 1964–5, I, 60, 148, and the second from Ekwall 1960, 108a.
10. Gelling 1997, 55.
11. Original *[æ] also had this effect in the West Saxon dialect, but that is not relevant here.
12. Stevenson 1920; Smith 1964–5, I, 61. Smith rather misrepresents the view of Stevenson, who actually ascribed the English form, unexpected if it derives from **Corinium*, to a sound-substitution occurring *within* the development of Old English. For the Celtic philology discussed in this paragraph, see Jackson 1953, 579–618, esp 616–17.
13. Reference is made in this paragraph and the next to two sound-changes operating in Brittonic, called internal and final *i*-affection. Simplifying to focus on their relevance here, both are changes by which a back rounded vowel such as [o] becomes front unrounded, ie [e], under the influence of a sound representable by <i> in the following syllable. Final *i*-affection, in which the <i> in question is in the final syllable of the word, operates earlier than internal *i*-affection, in which the <i> is in a pre-final syllable. In final *i*-affection the vowel causing the change is then lost. Final *i*-affection is dated to well before AD 600, and internal *i*-affection considerably after. For full details, see Jackson 1953, 579–618. There has been some debate about the exact chronology of internal *i*-affection, but no current opinion suggests that it was happening as early as the later 6th century. Patrick Sims-Williams places the period after its operation as no earlier

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The Swedish toponymist Eilert Ekwall had originally accepted Stevenson's view, but later recanted,[14] and countered this difficulty by proposing that Ptolemy's *Korinion* was actually a scribal error for **Kornion*, a reduced form of a hypothetical **Cornovion* [*sic*] related to the well-known tribal name *Cornovii*. He says that '[s]hortened … forms of tribal names and of place names occur occasionally in Celtic languages'.[15] A name of this alternative shape could be subject to the somewhat earlier Brittonic phonetic change of final (as opposed to internal) *i*-affection, which could indeed yield a Brittonic form **Kern-*. This is a form that would be of the right shape when borrowed into Old English, and could, for technical reasons within Old English, yield the range of spellings found in the Anglo-Saxon period, ie <ci-> and <cy-> (and the <ce-> found only in Welsh or Welsh-mediated sources). The Brittonic sound [k], traditionally spelt <c> in the Celtic languages, would become [ʧ] in Old English before an unrounded front vowel, ie [e] or [i], as noted; <y>, in the West Saxon Old English of the records in which Cirencester and the Cerneys appear, may in some words also represent [i], ie a vowel compatible with a preceding [ʧ], namely those which in earlier Old English had [i] or [i:] or the sound of more than one origin spelt <ie>,[16] and such spellings in the record (of which some are given in note 6) are best taken as being equivalent to <ci->. The consonant cluster [rn] might be broken up by a so-called epenthetic vowel, represented by the <e> of later spellings. The borrowed name might also have been influenced by the form of the OE word *cerin* or *cyrin*, which means 'churn' and is the ancestor of this modern word. Ekwall suggests, as an alternative, that the Brittonic name could after all have been borrowed if the relevant sub-case of internal *i*-affection had operated earlier than the others, as **Kerin* from *Corinium*, and that this would, because of the structure of OE phonology at the time, naturally have taken on the shape *Cirin-* or *Cyrin-*. But that is so only in early West Saxon, ie the West Saxon dialect attested from about AD 890 onwards, because *Cirin-*/*Cyrin-* could arise from earlier **Kerin* only through well-attested pronunciation changes in West Saxon,[17] and there is no textual evidence from the intervening years that might substantiate Ekwall's special pleading. Yet Ekwall is dependent on this possibility, because there are no truly OE spellings in <ce->.

Cirencester is mentioned in Asser's *Life of Alfred* in the Old Welsh form *Cairceri*, and by Nennius as *Cair Ceri*, which seems to indicate the reality of the Brittonic form used to explain the Old English.[18] Ekwall suggests, however, that this form has been influenced by the name of the village of Kerry in Asser's native Wales (modern Montgomeryshire; *Ceri* in Welsh[19]) and may not in fact represent an authentic name for Cirencester. It is also true that the disappearance of the final <n> from the presumed **Kerin* has no ready explanation within Welsh.[20] Moreover, Asser was writing in the late ninth century, so it is possible that *Cairceri* is an invention by an earlier scholar, welshifying the already 300-year-old

than the 7th century (Sims-Williams 2003, 286). There is some evidence that, irregularly, it did not take place in certain words and names, but that is not relevant here.

14. Ekwall 1924, 16; 1928, lxviii–lxx and 78–9. Rather surprisingly, Watts 2004, *s.n.*, reverts to Stevenson's view despite Ekwall's careful argument against it.
15. Ekwall 1928, 79.
16. Campbell 1959, 132; Hogg 1992, 194–6.
17. Campbell 1959, 126–8; see also 8–9.
18. Stevenson 1904, 47 (*Life* ¶57. 5); Jackson 1938, 52; Morris 1980 (no. XIV in Nennius's list of the cities of Britain).
19. Morgan 2001, 54–5.
20. On this point, see also Sims-Williams 2006, 205 n 103.

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English name on the basis of an existing Welsh word, most likely the ancestor of *ceri*, 'berrying or fruiting trees; eg service-trees or medlars';[21] that is, it is not truly an inherited Welsh name for Cirencester at all. Something comparable has certainly happened with other, later, Welsh inventions for English place names, such as *Rhydychen* for *Oxford*, of which it is a literal translation, and indeed the *kaer vudei*, an alternative for Cirencester itself, in the story of Arthur in the *Red Book of Hergest*, which means 'churn town' (not '(River) Churn town').[22]

This is all problematical in several ways. Ekwall's first solution requires (1) the presence of the first <i> in Ptolemy's *Korínion* to be a scribal blunder; (2) the name of this place belonging to the territory of the presumably Anglian-speaking[23] Hwicce people, as recorded in Anglo-Saxon times, to be always in a West Saxon form rather than Anglian; and (3) a vowel to appear precisely in place of the 'lost' <i> thanks to a wholly English process in later centuries. His second solution falls foul of his own objection based on the date of internal *i*-affection, though his formulation allows him the space to believe that that objection might just be unfounded; I think his original position was right. A further problem is that **korin*-, the alleged base of the name, has no known British Celtic etymology, though that is not an insuperable obstacle, since ancient and obscured river names often outlast language shifts. David Parsons classifies *Korínion* among the 'very difficult' names in Ptolemy and, according to Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Celticity of [the name in Britain] is uncertain.'[24] Smith associates **korin*- with the stem of the RB tribal name *Cornovii* and with that of two forts in Britain mentioned in Roman-period documents and called *Durocornovio*.[25] It was originally Ekwall who suggested the connection, and speculated that Cirencester, identified with one of the instances of *Durocornovio*,[26] was a colony of the Cornovii, or that the local Dobunni were a branch of that people. However, since *Cornovii* cannot account for the shape of the OE name without the special pleading of 'shortened forms of tribal names', the phonological difficulties set out in the last paragraph but one need to be addressed to explain the name on the basis of Ptolemy's authority.

If the name is originally that of the River Churn, it has no analogues in the corpus of Welsh river names assembled by R J Thomas.[27] Rivet and Smith reject O'Rahilly's suggestion of a connection with the Irish mythic personal name *Cuirenn*, which they relate instead to British Celtic **korjo*-, 'host', plus a suffix **-no*-.[28] *Corio* is in fact the name of a Dobunnic king,[29] but there seems to be no pressing reason to associate it with the town

21. Cf Thomas 1950–2002, 467c–468a.
22. Ekwall 1937, 38.
23. Judging by the bulk of the evidence provided in Smith 1964–5, IV, Introduction. I have argued elsewhere (Coates forthcoming) that the *name* of this people is of British Celtic origin.
24. Parsons 2000, 175; Sims-Williams 2006, 205.
25. Smith 1964–5, I, 61; Rivet and Smith 1979, 350.
26. Ekwall 1928, 79; 1937, 37. This *Durocornovio* is now generally identified with Wanborough (Wilts) (Rivet and Smith 1979, 175–6), despite Smith's note on the matter (Smith 1964–5, I, xi).
27. One might consider the river *Coran* (Carms), whose name is obscure in origin ('Ansicr iawn yw tarddiad yr enw hwn': Thomas 1938, 58). The parallel could not be precise because if this name-form is a base, it has no suffix such as the *-i*- which *Corinium* appears to have.
28. O'Rahilly 1946a, ch 1; Rivet and Smith 1979, 321; genealogies, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502, fol 139 b 37, ¶755.
29. Wacher 1995, 302–4; Oxford Celtic Coin Index, eg 01.0210, 〈http://www.finds.org.uk/CCI/details.php?coin_num=01.0210〉 (6 Mar 2013). This may be a truncated version of some longer name.

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name; if his name, apparently an *-n*-stem noun, had been suffixed with the **-jon* seen in other town names, it would have regularly yielded RB **Corionium*, which could not have given the recorded OE forms for the same technical reason involving internal *i*-affection already set out.

Ptolemy's witness, the only secure Roman-period attestation of the place, has been regarded as authoritative. But Cirencester is also mentioned in the Ravenna Cosmography, a text from very late antiquity, in the form in which it is known to us, as *Cironium Dobunorum*.[30] This has evidently not been taken seriously by commentators because of the well-known and demonstrable unreliability of the anonymous Cosmographer's text as a whole, including, as it does, such letter transpositions as *Condecor* for the etymologically transparent British Celtic place name *Conderco* (Benwell, Northumberland).[31] The Cosmographer's editor Schnetz confidently emends to *Corinium*, presumably on Ptolemy's authority. Rivet and Smith regard *Cironium* as an error of the same type,[32] and there is a close and suggestive (though inverse) parallel for the vowel transposition in *Termonin* for *Terminon*.[33] But the Cosmographer is not always wrong. His *Brano Genium* agrees with Ptolemy's *Bran(n)ogénion* (Leintwardine, Herefordshire), which is taken as authoritative, better than does the Antonine Itinerary's *Bravonio*,[34] and it has been shown, for example, that the odd-looking two-line entry *Rate Corion/Eltauori* (Leicester) preserves a tribal name, *Corieltauvi*, found in recently reappraised inscriptions better than does the formerly accepted form *Coritani* (*Koritanoí*) of Ptolemy (*Geography* II.3.11).[35] Suppose Ptolemy's form is in error for the **Kirónion* that the Cosmographer's form seems to attest. All the complex philology set out by Ekwall, and argued for ingeniously yet diffidently, is unnecessary. The Brittonic descendant of **Kirónion* at the dawn of the Anglo-Saxon period would be **Kīren'*, with [o] becoming [e] by *final* (not medial) *i*-affection, borrowed directly as OE *Ciren-*, and this can, as it stands, explain the recorded forms of *Cirencester*, *Cerney* and *Churn*.

There are more technical issues to explore, but for now note simply that this proposal resolves at a stroke the chronologically tricky phonological issues. It is true that the suggested original form of the name, **Kir/Kīr + -on-jon* (see further below), with its transparent suffixation, makes the <-nn-> in MS X of Ptolemy (noted above), harder to account for, if not by the associations mentioned there. A simple explanation for the letter transposition in Ptolemy would be the influence of another place called *Korínion*, in Illyricum, modern Karin Donji, near Benkovac, Croatia (Ptolemy, *Geography* II.16.2),[36] or, even more likely, that of the familiar Greek place name *Kórinthos* (Corinth). In either case, this must have happened extremely early in the textual history of the *Geography*, in fact before the archetype of all known manuscripts.[37]

30. Schnetz 1942, 106, I 31; Rivet and Smith 1979, 207.
31. The spelling *Cironium* is particularly clear in MS Codex Vaticanus Urbinas Latinus 961, fol 46, col I (= MS V; printed in Richmond and Crawford 1949, pl II).
32. Rivet and Smith 1979, 204.
33. Ibid, 204 and 472.
34. Ibid, 275.
35. Tomlin 1983; Hassall and Tomlin 1993; and cf Breeze 2002; Coates 2012.
36. Rivet and Smith 1979, 320.
37. On the chronology, see also the Appendix to this article. Sims-Williams reminds us that the Balkan name, and a debatable one, *Corinaeum*, in Cyprus, may be quite distinct from the name in Britain, noting the existence of Macedonian [Greek] *korinaîos*, 'bastard' (Sims-Williams 2006, 205 and 283).

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Patrick Sims-Williams[38] has considered that the RB name of London, *Londinium*, might result from a transparent **Lindonium*, 'pool place', by a vowel transposition identical to the one envisaged here, and has made the parallel explicit in personal correspondence (January 2013). However, I do not think *Londinium* can have the etymology he suggests, for reasons to do with the development of the name in Welsh,[39] and the parallel cannot therefore be sustained.

The above comments presume that the <i> in the first syllable represents British Celtic, and therefore Romano-British, short */i/. The essentials of this analysis are also valid if the first vowel was British Celtic long */i:/. The OE form will probably, and the Middle English form certainly, have had short /i/ even if the British source had a long vowel, because long vowels are regularly shortened in the first syllable of a late OE word or name having at least three syllables.[40] It is true that neither **kiron-* nor **kīron-* can be explained as British Celtic any more than can **korin-*, but a proposal about its etymology is explored below.

If the argument presented so far is accepted, then the RB name of Cirencester is more likely to have been *Cironium* than **Corinium*,[41] with a structure like that of the attested *Viroconium* (Wroxeter) and *Cataractonium* (Catterick). As noted above, there is no ready British Celtic explanation of a name with either form. Pursuing an etymology, we need to explore both of the possibilities raised above, namely an original short or long vowel in the first syllable. Following the idea that the river name is basic, we might propose a form cognate with Old Irish *cíar*, 'dark, etc', which is semantically plausible in a river name, and indeed has already been proposed for the river *Keer* in Westmorland and Lancashire and as the base of the Norfolk place name *Carbrooke*.[42] This is from Common Celtic (CC) **keir-*, which has no surviving Brittonic cognate. Such a connection would seem to entail an irregular change of *[ei] (via [e:]) to long [i:] before the stressed medial *-on-* of the hypothetical British **Keironjon*. That said, however, it must be noted that *Isca*, the RB name of Caerleon, some forty miles to the west, has exactly the same problematic relation to *Wysg*, the Welsh name of the River Usk on which it stands, which must descend from CC **Eiskā*, British **Ēska*, and the initial RB <I> representing British *[e:] appears aberrant.[43]

The argument offered about *Isca* (Caerleon) cannot be used to account for the name of the other *Isca* (Exeter), which must have RB short /i/. The English name supports the idea that the initial vowel was short, since the [e] can descend straightforwardly from Brittonic *[e], representing British */i/ normally in a syllable before one containing the suffix **-ā*. Cornish evidence supports the idea too, if the (unique) form used by Edward Lhuyd in *Archaeologica Britannica*[44] is trustworthy. Retranscribing the Cornish folk tale

38. Sims-Williams 2007, 32 n 189.
39. Coates 1998.
40. Campbell 1959, 121; Hogg 1992, 212.
41. Notice also that if this is correct, Andrew Breeze's emendation of *Iren* in the medieval *Life of Gildas* to *Cerin*, with the effect of situating Gildas's education at Cirencester, must be rejected in the form in which he presents it (Breeze 2010). But the present alternative would actually make the philological side of his argument slightly easier, since it requires the simpler (but to me still doubtful) emendation of *Iren* to *Ciren*.
42. Ekwall 1928, 223; Watts 2004, 115a.
43. Jackson 1970, 74–5. Rivet and Smith (1979, 377–8) offer a Latin-based explanation of the apparent change *Isca* > *Wysg*, which they themselves describe as special pleading.
44. Lhuyd 1707, 251.

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'John of Chyanhor', originally written down by John Boson,[45] Lhuyd writes *Karēsk*, where the <ē>, despite representing a long vowel in late Cornish, must descend from original short */i/.[46] Oliver Padel has suggested[47] that this name-form may be a creation modelled on the Welsh use of *caer*, rather than a traditional Cornish form, and that the entire form needs to be treated with caution. There is room to wonder whether the spelling originally used by Boson, *Ka'rEsk*, has <e>, representing short /e/, as a borrowed feature of general south-western *English*, since Middle English short [i] is recorded as sporadically lowered to [ɛ] in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset at the time of the Survey of English Dialects in the 1950s,[48] or even whether his supposedly Cornish form reflects the English initial vowel of *Exeter* directly. Either way, there is no evidence for a long vowel in *Isca* (Exeter) as there is in *Isca* (Caerleon), and this discrepancy remains a puzzle.

We might therefore tentatively suggest that the CC */ei/ which later became */e:/ could appear dialectally in the Romano-British of the Severn area as /i:/, ie that our *Cironium* might stand for a RB **Cēronium*, just as *Isca* appears to stand for RB **Ēska*. If CC */ei/ can indeed sometimes appear as RB /i:/ rather than /e:/, we could recall O'Rahilly's argument,[49] by no means universally accepted, that certain insular names with */i:/, such as the ancient name of Ireland traditionally written as *Hibernia*, are in fact alternatives for older forms in */e:/ from CC */ei/. That would allow us equally tentatively to add to our short list of affected names the *Ivernium* in the Ravenna Cosmography, generally taken to be (an unidentified place on) the River Iwerne in Dorset.[50] However, this is doubtful, and the parallel to *Cironium* offered by *Isca* (Caerleon) remains the single most defensible one.[51]

There is evidence that Latin /i:/ was open enough (ie with the blade of the tongue lowered) to be rendered in some exceptional borrowed words as Brittonic */e:/, and thus ultimately and regularly as the Welsh diphthong spelt <wy>: note Welsh *pabwyr*, 'wick'<*papīrus*, *paradwys*, 'paradise' < **paratīsus*, and *synnwyr*, 'sense, skill', if this is from Latin *sentīre* and not *sentērium*; also, the Berkshire place name *Speen* (from attested RB *Spinis*, ie *Spīnīs*) can only descend from a hypothetical Brittonic **Spēn-*, which demonstrates the same change of [i:] to *[e:].[52] This fact clearly has a bearing on whether the inverse possibility floated above is plausible, namely that British Celtic */e:/ could be understood as British Latin /i:/ and appear as such in Romano-British place names.

If the vowel in the initial syllable of RB *Cironium* and in *Isca* (Caerleon) were short even though the vowel of the source were British long [i:], that would be a problem, because a short vowel deriving unconditionally[53] from a diphthong or long vowel would remain a puzzle from the phonetic perspective. But this is purely hypothetical, because, as

45. Padel 1975, 16.
46. See George 1993, 426 (stressed vowels, point 2 (b)), for the change involved.
47. Pers comm, 2012. Lhuyd's *Karēsk* with a long vowel is suspicious because there is no phonological justification for a long vowel to appear before /sk/ in any of the neo-Brittonic languages.
48. Wakelin 1986, 21.
49. O'Rahilly 1946b.
50. Rivet and Smith 1979, 381–2.
51. The names *Keer* and *Carbrooke* mentioned above lack the development to [i:] suggested here as proper to the Severn region.
52. Jackson 1953, 304; the argument for the claimed development in *Speen* is put forward in Coates 2000.
53. In the sense that it does not appear to be governed by the position of stress: the relevant sound is in an unstressed syllable in *Cironium* but in a stressed one in *Isca*.

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we have seen, we do not need to postulate such a change in British or Romano-British since a surviving British long vowel is not ruled out in these names.[54]

What, on the other hand, if the CC and RB vowel in *Cironium* had been short */i/ after all? Whilst the proposed long vowel is clearly defensible, it might be possible to mount a defence of the short vowel starting from Old Irish *cir*, 'grey', a form of the same Proto-Indo-European (and hence Common Celtic) root meaning 'dark' that we have discussed, but representing what is technically called its zero grade, which appears as */i/ in Celtic.[55] This would entail abandoning the partial parallel of *Caerleon*/*Caer Wysg* and all the issues of dialect variation and merger of the RB phonemes /i:/ and /e:/ that followed from it. The question of long vowel versus short vowel cannot be fully resolved, but it is important to realise that it has no bearing on the preference for *Cironium* rather than **Corinium*.

In light of the possibility that RB <i> might represent British Celtic */e:/, the very obscure tribal name *Silures*, belonging to western neighbours of the Dobunni, might be understood as late British **Sēlo-ūr-* (Welsh *hwyl*, *ir*), '(green) fresh, vigorous, for a journey, rush, or attack',[56] with the theme-vowel elided before another vowel (in Romano-British), and with the ancestor of *ir* displaying something of the meaning-potential apparent in the medieval poet Dafydd ap Gwilym's line 'A'r enaid yn ir ynof' ('And the spirit fresh inside me'), though it is true that this stands in a poetic context where the literal meaning of *ir*, 'fresh (of vegetation)', is exploited.[57] This suggestion is highly speculative and not offered confidently.

In summary, then, if the argument presented in this paper is correct, the RB name of Cirencester is more likely to have been *Cironium* than **Corinium*. *Cironium* represents a long-vowelled RB **Cīronium*, British **Kīronjon*, or possibly a similar form with a short vowel RB **Cironium*, British **Kironjon*. This conclusion highlights the need for a more critical evaluation of our most important documentary sources, since in relation to this name the many manuscripts of Ptolemy are collectively found wanting, and the denigrated Ravenna Cosmography allows us simultaneously to clear up a difficult issue in English onomastics and to propose a satisfactory Celtic etymology for the place name. An additional consequence is to make it more unlikely that Asser's and Nennius's already suspicious *Caerceri*/*Caer Ceri* is an authentic reference to Cirencester. It is possible that the town is intended, but the name-form is bogus, since it cannot descend either from a British */kir-/ or */ki:r-/ or from */ke:r-/.[58]

APPENDIX: ON MANUSCRIPTS OF PTOLEMY'S *GEOGRAPHY*

The *Geography* (for our purposes here a list of places in the ancient world with geographical co-ordinates expressed in a system of Ptolemy's devising) dates from the

54. It has been suggested by Peter Schrijver that there is evidence for regular analogous CC *([ei] >) [e:] to short [i] specifically before a stressed syllable in Welsh (Schrijver 1995, 243–54), but that is a different matter chronologically from the present one.
55. I am indebted to Patrick Sims-Williams for this suggestion.
56. Thomas 1950–2002, 1937b–1938a, 2025c–2026a. The <u> in the RB spelling would, in the 1st century AD, represent a Latin sound-substitution for the fronted [ʉ:] that was developing in British at that time from CC *[u:] (Jackson 1953, 317–21).
57. The line is quoted from Evans 1974, 247.
58. I am grateful to Oliver Padel, FSA, to Patrick Sims-Williams and to the Journal's anonymous referees for valuable comments on this article, and to Florian Mittenhuber for information supplied.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581513000243 Published online by Cambridge University Press

second century AD. No existing manuscripts are earlier than the thirteenth century. Only one, Vaticanus Graecus 191 (known as MS X), is believed to represent directly a tradition reaching back to antiquity, probably to a papyrus written in Egypt in the fourth century. This represents Recension *Ξ*. The rest, Recension *Ω*, contains a group of manuscripts known as *Π*, which can be traced to Alexandria, and which has some affinities with *Ξ*, and a distinct group known as Δ, written in Constantinople. Among the most important of the Δ group are Constantinopolitanus Seragliensis GI 57 (known as MS K), Vaticanus Urbinas Graecus 82 (known as MS U) and Vaticanus Graecus 177 (known as MS V), which are believed to have been written in Constantinople in about 1300.[59] Of the spellings for Cirencester, *Korínion* is in all manuscripts of *Ω*, including Florentinus Laurentianus 28.49 (known as MS O), the best representative of group *Π*. The variant *Korínnion* appears in MS X, which might be taken to give it special importance. The alleged variant *Korónion* appears to be a ghost; it is not in any of the manuscripts considered most important. Since it appears in both recensions, the scribal transposition resulting in *Korín(n)ion* is presumably earlier than MS X, ie earlier than the fourth century AD.

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59. Diller 1940; Mittenhuber 2010; Engels 2011, 104.

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RÉSUMÉ

Il est suggéré que le nom généralement accepté comme étant le nom romano-britannique de Cirencester, **Corinium*, orthographe traditionnelle dérivée d'une version latine de la *Géographie* de Ptolémée, est une erreur, et que, pour de bonnes raisons philologiques, le nom authentique serait plutôt *Cironium*, comme l'indique la Cosmographie de Ravenne.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Es wird darauf hingewiesen, dass der im Allgemeinen für Cirencester akzeptierte römisch-britische Name, **Corinium*, dessen traditionelle Schreibung von der lateinischen Form in der *Handbuch der Geographie* des Ptolemaios abgeleitet ist, falsch ist, und dass der authentische Name, philologisch begründet, wahrscheinlich viel eher *Cironium* lautete, wie dies auch beim Geographen von Ravenna festgelegt ist.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581513000243 Published online by Cambridge University Press