Ancient Irish closely related to Middle Easterners, genome analysis shows

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Evidence of massive migration to Ireland thousands of years ago has emerged from the sequencing of the first genomes from ancient Irish humans, carried out by geneticists from Trinity College Dublin and archaeologists from Queen's University Belfast.

Sequencing the genome of an early woman farmer, who lived near Belfast 5,200 years ago, showed her majority ancestry originated in the Middle East, where agriculture was invented.

Sequencing the genomes of three men whose bodies dated from the Bronze Age about 4,000 years ago showed one-third of their ancestry came from the Pontic steppe on the shores of the Black Sea.

The woman farmer had black hair, brown eyes and resembled southern Europeans, according to the researchers.

In contrast, the three men, who were from Rathlin Island, had the most common Irish Y chromosome type, blue eyes alleles and the most important variant for the genetic disease haemochromatosis, or excessive iron retention.

The latter mutation is so frequent in people of Irish descent that it is sometimes referred to as a Celtic disease.

"There was a great wave of genome change that swept into Europe, from above the Black Sea into Bronze Age Europe, and we now know it washed all the way to the shores of its most westerly island," said professor of population genetics in Trinity College Dublin, Dan Bradley, who led the study.

Read full, original post: Ancient Irish had Middle Eastern DNA, study reveals