

10 years ago, what formerly was known as the Celts suddenly became nothing but a myth. It became fashionable to deconstruct the Celts. No more than knocking down a straw person, many have said since. An absolute necessity, long overdue, others stated. Even the word Celt itself has, in some circles, become a dirty word, politically incorrect, a no-say.

Some lone voices have expressed some doubt about whether anyone in that debate was really looking at any evidence at all, rather than jumping onto the fashionable bandwagon of Celtoscepticism or trying to defend old Celtomaniac dreams of a heroic age where the grass was greener, the light brighter, more flashy and shiny than we would ever dare imagine. Today, thanks to Celtoscepticism, it seems as if Celtomania has almost been overcome. The Celts, as one people, as one culture, as one essential group are dead.

But did we benefit from Celtoscepticism? Have our explanations of Iron Age peoples in Britain, Ireland or anywhere else in Europe become any better? Or is it rather that we killed an idea that none but a few had ever really believed anyway, and while doing so, threw out the baby with the bathtub? Shouldn't we better be sceptic about Celtoscepticism as well?

Celtoscepticism

A convenient excuse for ignoring non-archaeological evidence?

While Malcolm Chapman's (1992) and Simon James' (1999) deconstructions of the "Celtic Myth" have probably received the greatest public attention, the direct relevancy of their studies for what might have been called "Celtic archaeology" is limited. It rather is in the wake of the renewed interest in the creation of identity, and especially "ethnic" identity (Graves-Brown, Jones and Gamble 1996; Jones 1997) that a number of scholars, spearheaded by John Collis (1994; 1996; 1997 a; 1997b; 1999a; 1999b), have expressed Celtosceptic views in a direct archaeological context. John Collis (1999b) gives a summary of the main Celtosceptic arguments:

- 1. The classical sources are ambiguous, it is impossible to locate the origin of the Celts*
- 2. The idea of Celts in Great Britain is a modern invention.*
- 3. The use of the term "Celts" ... by linguistic criteria is erroneous.*
- 4. The use of the term "Celts" for a people speaking a Celtic language cannot be extended back into Antiquity.*
- 5. The interpretation of La Tène artwork as "Celtic" depends on a modern definition of the Celts and thus is unacceptable.*
- 6. The correlation of La Tène culture with Celts is based on a questionable interpretation of classical sources.*
- 7. The methodology of the paradigm that "La Tène culture" equals "Celtic language" equals "the Celts" is based on the unacceptable method of the German archaeologist Kossinna (1911).*
- 8. This methodology is a medium for a political and racist interpretation of archaeology and therefore has to be refuted." (Collis 1999b: 16; my translation)*

Many of the above points are doubtless correct and require no further discussion. Problematic are Collis' points 2, 3 and 5, which can only be explained by a belief that we could directly access a past reality via our interpretation of the archaeological sources. This, however, is an epistemological impossibility: all definitions, any term, every model we might ever use to describe a past always remain modern constructs (Karl 2002a). Thus, contrasting "invented" or "constructed", "modern" definitions or ideas with an unspecified and unexplained opposite, implying a (miraculously arrived at) knowledge of how "the past really was" by Celtosceptics, can only be understood as a tool to discredit any opposition by pretending that the Celtosceptic views would be less "constructed", more "real", less "modern", more truly representing "ancient" reality "as it was".

Reconstructing Iron Age Societies

John Collis (1994) most clearly points out what the ground rules for reconstructing Iron Age societies should be from a Celtosceptics point of view. It is one of the main criticisms of Celtosceptics on reconstructions of Iron Age societies that non-archaeological sources, either from classical or Irish

literature, are used to reconstruct social aspects of Iron Age societies by scholars like Barry Cunliffe (1984). Collis, in laying out his creed, writes:

"... 'Celtic Society' is still very much with us, using either the classical sources, or the Irish literature. The first ground rule must be that detailed descriptions of societies are only directly applicable to the place and time they describe. I suspect there is nothing in the written European sources which remotely resembles the Iron Age societies of central southern England in the Middle Iron Age which Cunliffe was trying to interpret, and African analogies may well be as relevant, perhaps more relevant, than the Irish sources of a millennium later. The ethnographic record encompasses a wider and better described range of choices than the two or three 'Celtic' societies handed down on us by ancient sources. ...

The second ground rule is that ancient descriptions of social structure are simply a model of how ancient people viewed their own, or other ethnic groups' social structure. This is obvious where Caesar talks of the 'senate' of the Aedui, perhaps less obvious in the tripartite division of Gallic society into warrior élite, bards and the common people. The societies described with this simple social division vary from developed urbanised societies to ones in which settlement patterns at least are decentralised. Though it is interesting to consider the ancient author's understanding of how societies functioned, their knowledge is limited in comparison to our own, and cannot be used as a basis from which we can work. ...

When considering the various sorts of society which have been termed 'Celtic', it is clear from the archaeology that there is an enormous range, from the urbanised societies of Gaul in the 1st century BC to the decentralised societies of the English Pennines; from the highly stratified societies represented in the burials of Vix and Hochdorf, to societies where it is difficult to pick out any prestige material goods. ... One of our first principles must therefore be to work from the archaeological evidence, and only use documentary evidence as we would use any other ethnographic material (the exception being when the written sources relate directly to the society being studied, and then to compare and contrast with the archaeology rather than using the written sources to form the basis for the archaeological interpretation)." (Collis 1994: 31-2)

Collis has one valuable point here. Non-archaeological sources have to be used with caution, like any ethnographic material. But else, these paragraphs are quite characteristic of the general dislike of non-archaeological evidence amongst Celtosceptics. Blatant errors, like misquoting Caesar as mentioning bards where he actually speaks of *druides*, clearly show that Collis didn't bother to consult Caesar's excursus on the Gauls, to look up the two short paragraphs in *De Bello Gallico* (VI, 13-14), let alone read the whole text, which contains a lot more information on Gaulish social structures than Collis would have us believe. Similarly, his knowledge of Irish sources obviously does not extend beyond the suspicion that there is nothing in them that might even remotely resemble anything in Iron Age societies in the southern English middle Iron Age – a suspicion obviously not even worth minimal scrutiny.

But it is not only the dislike of non-archaeological sources that makes this approach highly suspicious, it is also its total conviction in the "truth" of archaeological results that is highly questionable, given the epistemological and practical problems associated with the analysis of social structures in the archaeological record (see Burmeister 2000: 95-128). To argue, for instance, with the insurmountable differences between the allegedly highly stratified communities represented in the burial of Hochdorf, and societies where it is difficult to pick out any prestige material goods (as for instance, even though not mentioned as not of Iron Age date, the communities of early medieval Ireland that produced the literature usually used to interpret Iron Age societies), becomes an almost laughable overestimation of the possibilities of archaeological social analysis when one compares the results arrived at by Eggert (1988; 1991; 1999; 2001: 329-38) or Burmeister (2000: 169-211) for the allegedly highly stratified communities of Hallstatt D in Württemberg and the results arrived at by analysing the Irish literature (7th-10th century AD) for the contemporary communities of early medieval Ireland (Charles-Edwards 1993; 2000; Jaski 2000; Kelly 1988; Patterson 1994). In such a comparison, the Irish society decidedly shows the much higher social complexity.

Even worse, with ever more localised studies of local differences, which doubtless exist even on the level of comparisons of single neighbouring settlements, that follow as a logical consequence of

the negation of any application of results beyond the strict confinements of any “particular society” (Collis 1994: 32), however such a society might be defined, any explanatory possibilities for wide-ranging similarities other than in an ad hoc manner are lost. True, the old paradigm of an uniform, monolithic, genetically related, essential “Celtic” culture is dead, and it is rightfully dead (see also Karl 2002b; 2002c). But, as Andrew P. Fitzpatrick has put it

„The importance of the correlation between an archaeological culture and a people in the interpretation of the ‘Celts’, and the weaknesses of it are evident. Consequently, it can be tempting to dismiss the correlation out of hand, but it should be clear: the ancient evidence remains to be explained rather than explained away. That evidence poses a fundamental question; ‘why did peoples widely distributed across central and western Europe make material cultures which were different in some respects but essentially similar in others’.” (Fitzpatrick 1996: 246)

And, in fact, similarities that remain to be explained are not limited to the material culture, but appear in many other kinds of sources, that tell us about communities that, if we would take only the archaeological evidence into account, would seem fundamentally different from each other.

Are the Celts back?

So, what about these similarities? Are the Celts back? Yes and no, to a certain extent. I will try to show in two short case studies, based on the Viennese approach to Celtic Studies (Karl 2002b), that, and why, it is necessary to use the full amount of available sources to gain a better understanding of Iron Age and Early Medieval “Celtic” societies.

To start with, however, it has to be stated explicitly that the “Celts” I will be talking about neither are uniform nor monolithic nor unchanging nor essentially “Celtic”, and not at all one unified, common entity, related by one racial, genetic, religious, political, ethnic or any other genetic relationship and/or identity (Karl 2002b). They are doubtlessly considerably different from each other in many aspects, not least material culture in many cases – but all the while also are similar in many aspects, enough to necessitate the use of all sources to gain a better understanding of them (for a discussion of how such similarities develop, see Karl 2002a; 2002c: 3-28). Thus, should you dislike the term Celt and its derivations, you are free to replace it by any other of your liking, for instance *Cwehabimas* (Central and Western European Hallstatt to British and Irish Middle Age Societies) if you enjoy tongue-twisters - it doesn't really matter to me.

Testosterone-driven young men in fast vehicles

A lot has been written on Iron Age chariots, and more than once have these vehicles been related to the chariots described in Irish literature, for instance in the arguments of Kenneth H. Jackson (1964), who thought of the earliest Irish tradition as a “*Window on the Iron Age*” – a position that, in Irish literature Studies, has long been discredited, and a biblical or classical origin of the chariots as described in Irish literature has been proposed (McCone 1990). Raftery (1994: 104-7) has cast doubt on the existence of chariots in Iron Age Ireland bearing any similarity to those of the European Iron Age, a position well fitting with the reconstruction of very basic “carts” put forward by the linguist David Greene (1972) based on Irish texts. The existence of such chariots in the Irish early Medieval period has not even remotely been considered. As such, the conclusion arrived at as yet by disciplinary separatism has been that no connection can be drawn between the high-status burials with chariots in Iron Age Europe, and the vehicles described in Irish literature.

Yet, the term for the two-wheeled, high-status vehicle that was used by Celtic-speaking populations in almost all of Ancient Europe (though it only was put in the graves in some regions), *carpentum*, also attested in Gaulish as *carbanto*, is a clear cognate to *carpat*, the term for the vehicle used in the early Irish sources, with cognates in Welsh and Breton as well, derived from a Celtic **karbānto-* (Karl and Stifter 2002). That term is not the only term for vehicles in the Irish texts, the term used consistently throughout the Old Irish literature for the “ordinary” cart or wagon, i.e. the non-high-status transport, OIr. *fén*, finding a cognate in Gaulish *benna*. As such, if the Irish never, neither in the Iron Age or at any time later, had any of these high-status vehicles used at least by some of the Continental and British peoples, and if they had another term that they consistently used for non-high-status transports, how come that the term they used in their medieval literature for the high-status transports is a cognate of the one used for the high-status transports in Iron Age Europe and Britain?

As I have explained elsewhere in greater detail (Karl and Stifter 2002; Karl forthcoming b), the different uses of chariots in the European Iron Age as they can be reconstructed from archaeological, historical, numismatic and iconographic evidence are as civil and military transports, with the warrior getting off the vehicle to join close combat afoot, for status representation, for sport and as death biers. That these vehicles are open to the front and the rear and that both driver and passenger usually sit on it are two additional characteristic features. An analysis of the Irish evidence, including not only the literature but also the archaeological record, the pseudo-historical annals, the Old Irish lawtexts and the iconographic record on Irish High Crosses, allows to develop a similar model of attested uses of high-status chariots as they were depicted in early Medieval Ireland. Perhaps surprisingly the two thus developed models are perfect matches, while neither of the proposed “alternative” origins of the chariots in the Irish literature, the Greek epics or the Bible, allow to create models that, even though partially overlapping with the above models, fit as well. As far as the evidence thus allows us to tell, not only are the Iron Age chariots and the chariots described in early Irish literature called by a similar name in the respective local languages, they are also used in very similar ways, by similarly high-status individuals. It thus is likely that the chariots described in the early Irish literature were vehicles closely related to those of the European Iron Age of the same name, still used in a similar fashion, by a group of people of relatively similar social status in Ireland in or at least shortly before the time when the texts were written – even though we have virtually no archaeological evidence for their existence (some wooden pieces from the 7th-10th century AD Lough Faughan Crannog could be chariot parts, Collins 1956: 65-7, 70).

With this connection established it not only becomes possible to explain why the Old Irish used the same word for a very similar vehicle, but we can, by using the Iron Age archaeological record, also gain a better understanding of how the vehicles described in these texts actually looked like and worked, allowing to explain ‘heroic feats’ like jumping across fallen trees, which might actually be possible with a vehicle that has its platform set in a spring suspension (Furger-Gunti 1991; 1993, see also the 2002 Wetwang chariot reconstruction in the British Museum). On the other hand, the Irish texts allow us to gain many more insights in the terminology that might already have been used for Iron Age chariots. Even more, there are quite a number of additional insights on chariot-related aspects of material and immaterial culture that can be gained by comparing Irish textual evidence with archaeological and historical sources for the European Iron Age, like the road network, road construction and upkeep, but also accommodation and sustenance for travellers, even traffic regulations, as I have discussed in greater detail in another study (Karl forthcoming c).

Touta, contrebria, druid, rix, or: a short story of social similarities

One of the central arguments of Celtosceptics is that archaeology tells us that the different societies of the European Iron Age lived in many fundamentally different forms of social organisation, ranging from almost completely unstratified groups living in decentralised local communities to highly stratified, urbanised societies (Collis 1994: 32; less specifically James 1999: 78-9). Apart from the most questionable assumption that archaeology is at all able to tell us about social organisation based on this with sufficient certainty to exclude all other possible lines of enquiry out of hand, given that it is not even clear how any such ‘society’ is defined (as this is nowhere clearly expressed; societies, as well as the possibility to unquestionably distinguish them in the archaeological record, is seemingly accepted as a given), is this assumption justified at all? Were social organisations in the west and central European Iron Age really that fundamentally different from one another as we are expected to believe?

Again, let us look at a few similarities in non-archaeological sources. Strabon tells us (Geographika 4.4.4.) that “the Celts” held some men in special honour, the bards, the vates and the druids (,....Βόρδοι τε καὶ Οὐάτεις καὶ Δρυΐδαι...“). Of course, everyone knows that the cognates to the above terms, OIr. *druid*, *fáithi* and *báird* (Birkhan 1997: 896) are terms well known from the early Irish sources, and that the roles of *dryw* and *bardd* appear in the early Welsh sources as well, cognate terms yet again being known from many Celtic languages (Holder 1896: 347-8, 1321-30). It will hardly come as a surprise that the druids in all cases are depicted as some sort of priest/magician/prophet, and that they are seen as having been held in especially high regard in descriptions of both Gaulish and early Irish society, even though it is clear from the Irish lawtexts that they had been reduced to mere wizards in the times the texts were actually written. Nonetheless, in the monk’s paintings of the Irish past, the druids feature in a role that is very close to that described for the

same class of people in the ancient sources. Similar applies to the bards, described as singers of praise by Strabon, which fulfil precisely the same function in both Irish and Welsh literature as ascribed to them in classical sources. Of course this could, theoretically, have been knowledge imported by educated Christian monks, who knew Caesar and the other classical authors and simply applied what these had written to an Irish and Welsh context. But on the other hand, this does not solve the question why they used indigenous terms rather than loanwords from Latin or Greek, to describe these functions, terms specific enough that they should not have existed had these societies no such social functions, nor does it explain why these monks should have done so in the first place, if, as Celtosceptics have correctly observed (e.g. Collis 1994: 32; James 1999: 43-66), no one living in the British Isles ever self-identified as a Celt before the 17th century AD. If we don't want to resort to simple ad hoc explanations and believe in an almost incredible coincidence, the best explanation is that these functions existed in both societies in roughly similar form.

It might be unnecessary, but nonetheless worthwhile, to mention that the term for "king", as in Gaulish *rix*, as well as their "female counterpart", *rigani*, yet again finds cognates in other Celtic languages, as in OIr. *rí* and *rígan*, Welsh *rhî* and *rhiaîn*, MCorn. *ruy*, *ruif*, and well beyond them, the most prominent probably being Latin *rex* and *regina* (Holder 1904: 1185, 1197-8). Germanic **rikos*, as in Gothic *reiks*, Old Norse *ríkr*, OHGerm. *rih*, *rih* and Frankish *-ricus* is an early loan from Celtic, before the first German sound shift, probably in or before the 4th century BC (Holder 1904: 1197). Needless to mention that all these terms refer to the ruler of a socio-political unit, or to a unit led by such a ruler. I assume we can basically agree that the terms mentioned as yet are those for social roles, for some kind of professional specialisation on the one hand, and social hierarchy on the other.

Given that social structures develop through individual interaction, starting (for the individual) in his immediate individual social environment (Karl 2002c: 3-23, 54), and that individual behaviour is structured by the habitus (Bourdieu 1977: 78-87) resulting in self-similar social expressions, it might also seem relevant that quite a number of terms that relate to this immediate social environment exist, as for instance in Gaulish *cenetl*, which has its cognates in OCymr. *cededl*, OIr. *cenél*, OCorn. *kinethel*, OBret. *chenetdl* (Vendryes 1987: C 64), for the biological descendants of a common ancestor, more or less describing the same kind of group (even though the terms in non-Celtic languages are not cognates of the Celtic terms) that Greek *γένος*, Latin *gens* and OGerm. *kindi-* are (Pokorny 1959: 374). Similarly, the terms for the settlement unit are quite similar, Gaulish *trebā* (Holder 1904: 1908-9) having cognates in OCymr. *tref*, OIr. *treb*, Corn. *tre*, OBret. *treb*, also found in OGerm. *þorpa-*, Old Norse *þorp* „small farm“, OEngl. *þorp* „small village“ and OHGerm. *dorf* „village“ (Holder 1904: 1909), as well as Latin *tribus*, „settlement community, extended descent group“ (Benveniste 1969: 293-319). Similar is true for the terminology for larger communities consisting of several such settlement units, as attested in Celtiberian *Contrebia* “dwelling together, community” (Holder 1896: 1109-1111), with cognates in Ir. *coitreb* “community” and Corn. *kentrevak* “neighbour” (Holder 1896: 1109-11; Vendryes 1978: T 126-8), maybe also OCymr. *cantref*, usually explained as “hundred settlements”, to the latter also OIr. *cét treb*, “hundred settlements”. Similar forms can be found in *Atrebat* (from Gaul. *ad-treba*, “dwelling together”) and *Ambitreibius* (Holder 1896: 1109). Hardly surprisingly any more, the land inhabited by the *Boii* in the *Gallia Cisalpina* was subdivided into 112 *tribus* according to Pliny (nat.hist. III, 116), which might well have been either such *trebia* or *contrebia*, small districts similar to the Welsh *cantrefydd* (Birkhan 1997: 95).

Even more widely distributed is the term for the (independent) socio-political group, Gaulish *toutā*, which has cognates in OIr. *túath*, OCymr. *tut*, Mbret. *tut*, *tud* (Holder 1904: 1804-19, 1896-1900), which also appears in Sabinian *touta*, *tôta*, Umbrian *tûtu*, Oskian *tauta*, Ogerm. *þeudo*, Gothic *þiuda*, Old Norse *þjóð*, OEngl. *ðeod*, Old Saxon *thiod*, *thioda*, OHGerm. *diot*, *diota* and Old Prussian *tauta*, all of them meaning “people”, still present in the modern German ethnonym “*Deutsche*” (from OHGerm. *diutisc*, “belonging to the people”, Holder 1904: 1804-5). This term is closely similar in meaning to Greek *ethnos* or *poleis*, and Latin *civitas* – the latter term the one used consequently by Caesar to describe the socio-political groups in which his enemies in Gaul were organised. There even seems to have been a widely used term for “rulers” of such a *toutā*, being *toutiorix* (Holder 1904: 1897), mirrored in such terms as OIr. *rí túaithe* and *rí túath*, and OCymr. *tudri*, OBret. *tuder*, but also in Welsh *Tudor*, like the very royal dynasty and Ogerm. **þiuðarík-*, as in the name of the famous king of the Goths, *Teodericus*. Given all this, it is hardly surprising that the probably 1st century BC Celtiberian inscription of Botorrita IV (= Contrebia Belaisca) starts with the words: *J tam : tirikantam : entorkue : toutam [] : sua kombal[ke]z : ...* (Villar et al. 2001: 75, 83), which has lately been argued

as being an equivalent formation to a Greek and Roman phrase that could be translated as “The senate and the people have decided...” (Stifter 1996: 100-4).

One might explain all of this as pure coincidence, because people spoke similar – even though mutually unintelligible – languages, and that all those different peoples living across half of Europe just happened to call totally unrelated, fundamentally different social structures and forms of social organisations by very similar names for no apparent reason at all. But given James’ (1999: 67) claim that “*other people’s own views of their identity and affiliations should be given prominence*” rather than speaking about them in outsider’s terms, one should at least consider if it would not be worth to take a look at the linguistic evidence and, rather than talking about the various “ethnic groups” in Iron Age Britain and Ireland, take the term the Iron Age British and Irish would most likely have used for their own societies – *toutâ*. As all necessary information to do so is easily available, James’ own inability or unwillingness to find those easily recoverable terminology makes his claims rather seem as a hypocritical lip-service to a fashionable paradigm, in an attempt to sell us a very specific way of looking at archaeological sources, than as real interest in the peoples concerned.

But let us stay with the *toutâ*. The Irish early Medieval archaeological record shows us a society approximately as decentralised as that of the Middle Iron Age in the British Pennines. What do the Irish sources tell us about such a *túath*? Well, first and foremost, it might be worth mentioning that throughout the 7th-10th century AD, Ireland was inhabited by about 100 of them at any time, and each of them was expected to have, besides its king, (a) poet(s), (a) justice(s) and (a) priest(s). Each *túath* had what the Irish called *nemed* people (“privileged, holy”, also found in *nemeton*, the Gaulish term for sanctuary), to which the said persons, the “secular” nobility (OIr. *flaith*, “lord, noble”) and several expert craftsmen like the master wright (OIr. *ollam suad sairsi*) belonged, and ordinary freemen (OIr. *grád féne* or *aithech*), ordinary farmers, less respected craftsmen as well as simple musicians, and various grades of half- and unfree persons (Kelly 1988: 3-98). Current estimates assign an average of about 3000 persons to each such *túath* (Kelly 1988: 4), estimations for contemporary ruling kings based on the Irish annals range from between 80 (MacNeill 1935: 96) to about 150 (Byrne 1973: 7) at any given time between the 5th and 12th century AD. But what about those famous Irish High Kings, then? Well, while social organisation of up to *túath* level was relatively localised and stable, beyond that political organisation included at least two more “levels” of kings (at least at theoretical level), the *rí túath* or *ruiri*, king of several *túatha*, and above that the *rí cóicid* or *rí ruirech*, the “king over great kings” (Kelly 1988: 16). It is only at this level of organisation, that military power, diplomatic ability and thus overall political success led to larger political units, that were, for the greater part, much less stable than the localised *túatha*, but could become as large as to consist of half or more of the island of Ireland, that were under the control of a single king like *Brían Bóruma* or at least a single royal dynasty like the *Uí Néill* or the *Eóganacht* (Byrne 1973; Charles-Edwards 2000; Jaski 2000).

Of course, this does not necessarily explain quite similar shifting patterns in, for instance, Gaulish societies of the Late Iron Age, but it definitely fits well with such “confederations” as the *Regnum Noricum* obviously was with its at least 12 main “subgroups” (Dobesch 1980: 177-280), and easily explains such things as the independent actions of parts of greater *civitates*, like Caesar describes for the *Tigurini*, one of the 4 *pagi* of the *Helvetii* (DBG I, 12.4-6), deployment of military units based on to which *pagus* they belong (DBG VII, 19.2), kings of parts of *civitates* as *Catuvolcus* of the *Eburones* (DBG VI, 31.5), the frequent exchange of hostages as sureties for treaties (numerous examples in DBG, compare Kelly 1988: 167-76), combined military actions at levels above the *civitates* under the rule of a single leader, like that of the *Belgae* (DBG II, 4) or of all *Gaul* under the leadership of *Vercingetorix* (DBG VII) and the penultimate struggle between various Gaulish nobles for what seemingly was one of the highest goals a Gaulish noble could dream of, the *principatus totius Galliae* (again numerous references in DBG), the latter struggle almost perfectly mirroring the constant and almost never successful struggles of Irish early Medieval kings for the High Kingship of Ireland (Byrne 1973; Charles-Edwards 2000; Jaski 2000).

That all of this are mere coincidences seems hardly likely, especially given that it is only a small fraction of the total evidence (for a more concise treatment see Karl 2002c). People living across most of north-western Europe used similar terms for several specialised social professions, for a ruling elite, for their kin, the community in which they actually lived, for larger communities at organisational level, and for ruler of the socio-political unit and the unit themselves in which they lived, terms in Celtic languages partially overlapping with terms used by other peoples speaking related, but less

similar languages further abroad. Of course, all these societies that used these terms might still have had fundamentally different social systems. But, given all these similarities, how likely is that?

It rather is more likely that all or at least almost all of these societies were actually using very similar building blocks to create their social systems, blocks like *bardd*, *druid* and *rix* as social functions, and *cenetl*, *trebâ*, *contrebâ* and *toutâ* as social groups, and thus their social systems ended up as relatively similar. Of course, these systems still may have differed considerably in their size, number of members and level of complexity, hierarchy and heterarchy, depending on differing necessities arising from population numbers and settlement density, on resource availability, the location of main routes for travel and trade and whether they went close by or were far off, political and military success of individual leaders or influence groups, and plenty of other factors. But that they were so totally and fundamentally different that looking at the much wider but hardly better described ethnographic record, a record telling us of totally unrelated societies to those in question, should seem to be more promising than to look at the “...two or three ‘Celtic’ societies handed down on us...”, that “...African analogies may well be as relevant, perhaps more relevant, than the Irish sources of a millennium later...” as Collis (1994: 31) suspects, can only be attributed to total ignorance of the available evidence, and an even greater unwillingness to enter into any serious debate with other disciplines than archaeology.

Conclusions

The Celts, as a uniform, monolithic, unchanging people, as a *Volk* in the sense that Kossinna (1911) or the Nazis would have used it, are dead. Whether this is thanks to Celtoscepticism or not, the Celtosceptics at least can claim the credit that they made this very evident in British archaeology. But beyond that point, the paradigm that underlies most Celtosceptic arguments is highly questionable. Especially problematic is the disregard with which Celtosceptics treat non-archaeological sources. The utter conviction that we archaeologists know, better than anyone else, how things really were back then, that “*the ancient author’s understanding of how societies functioned, their knowledge is limited in comparison to our own, and cannot be used as a basis from which we can work*” (Collis 1994: 32), that “*linguistics ... still clings to established ideas ... which are actually based on earlier cultural assumptions embedded in scholarship...*” (James 1999: 82) is ridiculous and demonstrates almost incredible disciplinary arrogance due to ignorance, not our much better knowledge or understanding.

In fact, if I had to choose between Caesar’s (DBG VI, 11-20) description of the developed urbanised societies of Gaul, James’ (1999: 78-9; 87-100) description of the decentralised societies of the British and Irish Iron Age or the general theoretical models that Collis (1994: 32) would have us use for which provides us with the most fitting model for the decentralised societies of early Medieval Ireland, I would go for Caesar, as his description is not only incredibly more detailed than those of James and Collis, but also incredibly more accurate – and that even though Caesar did not at all intend to write a sociological study that could be applied to early Medieval Ireland, while James’ (1999: 78) “...general understanding of human behaviour and cultural formations...” should be equally applicable to “...the patterns observed in archaeological contexts such as the insular Iron Age...” and, even though not explicitly mentioned, the Irish early Medieval period, as should Collis general models.

In fact, as yet, Celtosceptics have provided us with little if any advances in our understanding of societies in the European past, and their dislike for the use and their ignorance of any sources other than those that comply with their very limited paradigm makes it unlikely that they will ever be able to do so. As Olivier Büchsenschütz has argued,

„The use of broad-brush models, such as „central place“ or „chiefdom“ or „archaic state“ ... is inappropriate for the delineation of European societies between 500 BC and 1000 AD. To apply the latest sociological theory to societies which are known not only from archaeology, but also from textual sources, their coinage and so on, may in the end allow that theory to be evaluated; but it does not help us in our knowledge of the period. The solution will rather be provided by juxtaposing the evidence obtained from different kinds of sources (archaeological, literary, and numismatic); ... More ambitious questions need to be tailored to take account of the nature and quantity of the data available, and of the complexity of the problems that require to be dealt with.“ (Büchsenschütz 1995: 63)

To knock down the “common ancient Celt” may have been valuable from a political point of view, as an attack at modern nationalist self-identities, on identities that have been modelled upon the old idea of one language, one culture, one nation, one people, unchanging in time and with an age-old

claim to land, world-domination or whatever else (given the time at which Celtoscepticism emerged in force, it might even have been nothing more than devolution), that have carried the most horrible atrocities in their wake in the past, and might well do so in the future again, and as such, we should to be thankful to the Celtosceptics for trying to educate us and our society about its dangers. But for improving our understanding of societies of central and western Europe between the Iron Age and the Early Medieval period, it is a complete failure. As such, it seems little more than a convenient excuse to ignore non-archaeological evidence.

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