

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **The Celts Through Classical Eyes**

Name of Author: **Rankin, D.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Celts and Christians. Atherton, M.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Cardiff University Press**

Pages scanned: **21 - 33**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Conceptualising the Celts from Prehistory to the Modern Era CYCS7020**

Name of Designated Person
authorising scanning:

E. L. Harris

Date authorised: 25.04.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

CHAPTER THREE

THE CELTS THROUGH CLASSICAL EYES

— ♦ —
David Rankin

Visual evidence in ancient art is scarce but striking. The well-known statues of the dying Gaul and his wife and that of the wounded Gaulish warrior are widely photographed and most poignant: the former is in the Terme Museum in Rome, the latter in the Capitoline. In seeing them, we see how the Roman and probably the Hellenistic world saw the Celts: giants of violent pathos, survivors of a heroic age long past, but still dangerous. The Terme group shows a man in the act of killing himself with his sword. His wife, whom he supports with one hand, is sinking in death, for he has killed her, we presume, so that she may avoid capture and defilement. The Capitoline warrior wears a torque, an unmistakable ethnic marker. He sits, awaiting death from a body-wound. He is heroically naked, and at his side is a curved war-horn. From a Mediterranean viewpoint, the faces of the men are alien. The profiles are concave, facial bones high, and the orbits narrow. The warriors have moustaches but no beards, and their hair is thick and wild.

The statues are probably copies of Hellenistic originals. They may be copies of statues commissioned by Attalus, king of Pergamon (reigned 241–197 BC), in honour of his victories over the Tolistobogii, a subgroup of the Galatians, a Celtic people who had been troublesome to his and other Hellenistic kingdoms since their arrival in Asia Minor several decades earlier (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* XXXIV.38; Pollitt 1986: 65, 84–5). They were part of a great outpouring of Celtic invaders through Italy, the Balkans and Greece, which made its first terrible impact early in the fourth century BC in the devastation of Etruria and the partial destruction of Rome (391–390 BC). In 278 BC their invasion of Greece threatened the destruction of peninsular Greek civilization and presented an analogy with the Persian invasions two hundred years earlier. The Celts defeated by Attalus became the Galatian tetrarchy. In time this was a composite, partly Hellenized nation, and it was to the Greek portion, most likely, that Saint Paul addressed his epistle. The Celtic element, which still preserved some of the traits of a warrior aristocracy, would scarcely have appreciated his tone. The Galatians still retained some traces of Celtic identity down to the fifth century AD.

The ethos of high classical art allows little representation of emotion, but at the time when the putative originals of these statues were made, individual feeling and character could be shown. The strong features are contorted in the agony of death. They are

individual as well as being ethnically typical. There is no racial disrespect, but an animadversion on wild, emotional and tragic human nature. Other representations of the Celts are those on the Cales seals and the frieze from Civit'Alba. These also commemorate victories over the Celts. Fierce-looking warriors are seen being expelled from temples by presiding deities. In some cases they appear only to be approaching the precinct (Bienkowski 1908). They are also depicted on pottery, not dignified like the marble moribund heroes, but satyr-like, denizens of the wilderness.

The Celts left a lasting impression of their sheer physical bulk and power. In the second century BC, when Dio Cassius describes Boudica, he refers to her size, fierce expression of countenance, and harshness of voice (LXII.2.3). It seemed unnatural to the Greeks and Romans that the women of the Celts should be as big and aggressive as the men. Poseidonios, the Stoic philosopher and anthropologist of the time of Cicero, also noted this (Diodorus V.30). They were a race of Titans: Callimachus, the distinguished Greek poet who was librarian at Alexandria (c. 260–240 BC), describes them as such in his Delian Hymn. Elsewhere he calls them a mindless people, mindful himself of the barbarian impetuosity which during his lifetime had almost enabled them to destroy Greece. Likening Celts to Titans was happily in tune with the deeply rooted Greek mythopoeic custom of assimilating the terrifying and the unknown to Greek notions of a prehistoric past. The name Galatea, which belonged to a heroine of Greek mythology, strikingly resembles Galatai, the familiar ethnic term for Celts in the Hellenistic world. This soon ceased to be a coincidence. The Greeks equipped the Celts with an eponymous heroic ancestor called Galatos, who was the son of the Cyclops Polyphemus and Galatea (*Etymologicum Magnum*). Polyphemus was the savage, repulsive, cannibalistic, one-eyed giant whom Odysseus bested in the *Odyssey*, and he was seen as an archetype of primitive wildness, ignorant of civic and civilized living. What better ancestor could be found for a people who behaved in so cyclopean a fashion? Callimachus wrote a poem called 'Galatea' which may have included this story. It appears also in a fragment of the work of the Greek historian Timaeus (*Fragmenta Graecorum Historicorum* I 200), who was in Athens during the Celtic emergency of 279/8 BC. He also mentions an ancestry stemming from Keltos. Another version tells how Heracles begat Keltos or Galatos (Diodorus X.24; Ammianus XV.9.36). He is also supposed to have fathered Iberos, the ancestor of the Iberians, on the nymph Asterope. In the first century BC, Parthenius of Apamea transmits these two versions in his Love Stories (*Erotika Pathemata*).

So far we have been discussing impressions left by the Celts in Graeco-Roman visual art and in an assimilative mythopoeic tradition. Let us now turn to more rationalized evidence of ancient awareness of the Celtic peoples. Our earliest notices are of Greek origin, though some of them are transmitted by Latin authors. This information tends to be geographical rather than a commentary on the way of life or national character of peoples who had not yet become a threat. By a paradox, the earliest information of all may come from Avienus, a Latin writer of the fourth century AD. A didactic geographical poet, he claims to have at his command material going back to the sixth century BC. His *Ora Maritima* refers to Albion and Hibernia, and also to islands called Oestrymnides, which may possibly be a reference to Cornwall. A really old source, which may be Skylax, who wrote in the sixth century

BC in the time of Dareios the Great, may have enabled Avienus to tell of a people whom he calls Ligurians, who were being pushed southwards into Spain from their north European homeland by the Celts (vv. 130ff.). Celts are by this account not yet in Spain. At the end of the sixth century BC the geographer Hecataeus of Miletus says in his work *Europe* that Massalia (Marseilles) is in Ligurian territory which is close to land occupied by Celts (Timaeus LVI). Celts had not in his account arrived at the Mediterranean coast at the time of which he speaks, which is not the time in which he is writing. Hecataeus is aware of differences in language and culture between Ligurians and Celts. *Europe* also has a reference to a Celtic city called Nyra. A reasonable guess is that this settlement is Noreia in Austria, where there seems to have been a concentration of Celtic peoples. Hecataeus would not have been in a position, nor would his sources, to know that the Celts did not construct cities in the sense of city-states. Celtic lack of interest in city-states would strike the Greeks forcibly when they met Celtic peoples face to face. When the 'father of history', Herodotus (fifth century BC), refers to Celts, his comments are geographical in character (II.33): the Danube rises in Celtic territory and the city of Pyrene and flows through Europe dividing it in two. Without going into delicate speculations about the identity of Pyrene, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the passage refers in a shadowed way to the coming of Celts into Iberia. I recommend John Hind's interesting article on the question of Pyrene (1972). The Herodotean passage may be an extension of Hecataeus or based on some such earlier writer as Skylax. We know that Hecataeus was a source used by Herodotus (IV.42). We may regret that Herodotus's remarks are so austere geographically. So must his sources have been. If information about cultural peculiarities of the Celts had been available to him, we may depend upon it that Herodotus would certainly have imparted it to us. There are several other geographical references, but I shall mention only one more. Pytheas of Massilia (the Latin spelling of Massalia), who lived in the late fourth century BC and was the author of the famous *Periplus*, seems actually to have circumnavigated the British Isles (Fr 6a Mette). He distinguishes Celts from Germans, and thinks that Britain lies to the north of the Celtic lands (Fr 11 Mette). However, this need not be taken to mean that there were no Celtic people in Britain at the time of which he speaks.

Celts appear as mercenary soldiers in the Greek world in the second quarter of the fourth century BC. Xenophon tells us that Dionysius I of Syracuse lent 2,000 of these to the Spartans to help them against Thebes in 369 BC (Hellenica VII.1.20). We note that this force also contained Iberes (VII.1.31). Diodorus (XV.10) also refers to this transaction. In his *Laws* (637dff.), Plato comments on the national character of the Celts, classifying them with Scythians, Persians and Carthaginians as hard-drinking and belligerent people. This is the first culturally descriptive comment we have on the Celts in ancient literature. Aristotle thinks that the peculiar temperament of the Celts enables them to show courage whatever the situation: this is absence of fear rather than true courage. In his view a person is mad or completely insensitive who fears nothing, neither earthquake nor wave of the sea. This, he says, is reputed of the Celts (*Ethica Nicomachea* 1115b.28ff.). Some people know how dangerous thunder and lightning can be, but like the Celts, face it *dia thymon* (*Eudemian Ethics* 1229b.28). *Thymos* is the spirit of aggressive fearlessness, a distinguishing quality in both Homeric heroes and the soldier 'guardians' who protect the state from enemies

external and within society in Plato's *Republic*. A state of mind in which *thymos* predominates without the restraints of reason is not approved either by Plato or Aristotle. Under its influence, Aristotle tells us, Celts have been known to take arms against the sea. This practice, which remains enshrined in one version of the death of Cú Chulainn, is not fully understood to this day, but it may have had a ritual significance (Rankin 1987: 58). The fourth-century BC historian Ephorus attributes like behaviour to the Cimbri and Teutones (*Timaeus* XLVI). These were northern tribes, not definitively Celtic, who troubled the Romans considerably in the second century BC. Aristotle's student Alexander of Macedon (reigned 336–323 BC) was told by a Celtic delegation that they feared nothing except that the sky might fall (Arrian, *Anabasis* I.4.6; Strabo VII.83). He thought they were empty boasters, but felt that they were worth treating politely, since he wanted to avoid Celtic incursions from the Balkans while he was engaged in the conquest of Asia. His attitude exemplifies Greek cultural misapprehension. What they said was probably a formula of apotropaic prayer rather than heroic assertiveness. The Celts seemed to think that sooner or later the world as they knew it would come to an end (Livy XL.58.4–6). Aristotle mentions the prevalence of homosexual attachments amongst the Celts, in contrast to the female dominance usual amongst barbarians (*Politics* 1269b.27). Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistai* 603a) echoes this view. If it is a true report this may refer to the achievement of a ritual distance from females as a preparation for battle in some primitive warrior groups (Tiger and Fox 1972: 110). In contrast to writers who criticize Celtic lack of stamina, Aristotle regards the Celts as a tough people who condition their children early to the endurance of cold (*Politics* 1336a). The object of Celtic society is warfare, as it is in the case of Scythians, Persians and Thracians (*Politics* 1324b).

The Romans had already experienced the warlike qualities of the Celts (whom they called Galli: Rhys 1905–6) in 390 BC when their city had almost been eliminated by an invading horde. Further incursions occurred in 367, 360, 350 and 348 BC. Aristotle may have known of an invasion in 322 BC (Plutarch, *Camillus* XXII.44). Roman resources and capacity for organization, which increased as the city grew to be the dominant power in the peninsula, rendered each subsequent attack less dangerous to the existence of the Roman state, but the Romans never cast aside the memory of their early terror, and even the passage of centuries did not dissolve the prejudice into which it crystallized. It is fair to say that growth of Roman power was stimulated by the Celtic threat. A large tract of northern, transpadane Italy became Celtic land as a result of these early assaults, and the Etruscan culture in that area was virtually overwhelmed. The power of the Etruscan cities in peninsular Italy was broken, and Rome, although she was a beneficiary of this development, feared a similar fate for herself. A special word, *tumultus*, was deployed to designate the Gallic threat. It can reasonably be translated as 'emergency'. We may understand that Roman attitudes towards foreign peoples, never from the outset notably tender, were hardened by these experiences. Fear of Celts at least partially explains the savage treachery of Roman policies towards the Celts and Celtiberians of Spain. There were several more Celtic threats to the security of Italy subsequent to those which have been mentioned. Nor can we omit to mention the participation of Celts in Hannibal's invasion of Italy in 218 BC. For many years after this the Gauls of northern Italy

were capable of disturbing Roman peace of mind. Rome was strategically vulnerable from the north. Julius Caesar knew this as well as anybody. In 49 BC he led into Italy an army which had been trained, developed and hardened in Gaul.

Celtic peoples spread over the eastern alpine zone towards the end of the fifth century BC. We have encountered them negotiating with Alexander in 335 BC. They seem to have advanced into Thrace about 281 BC. Macedonian military power, which had subdued the Greek world as well as considerable portions of Asia, failed to impress them. The Macedonian king Ptolemy Keraunos was killed by them in 281 BC. He was the first leader of a Greek or near-Greek people to be killed by Celts. His tenure as successor to Alexander was short. In any case it had been obtained by ruthless chicanery and murder. In 279 BC a Celtic war-horde under the leadership of Brennus and Achichorius was in a position to invade Greece itself. After the defeat of 278 BC, remnants of this group occupied south-eastern Thrace and formed a kingdom which had its capital at Tulis, until in 213 BC the original inhabitants rose against them successfully. Three tribes had already made their way to Asia Minor and become the Galatians. According to Polybius (IV.65) some settled in Egypt. They were greatly in demand as mercenaries throughout the Greek and Near Eastern world. An inscription on a temple wall in Upper Egypt tells us that some mercenaries caught a fox (presumably a jackal). The names, with a possible exception, are Greek, but they describe themselves as Galatians (Hubert 1934: 53).

The Celtic attack on peninsular Greece was in fact a most serious threat to Greek civilization, especially since the invaders seemed interested only in destruction and robbery. The Persians, whose invasions early in the fifth century BC were predictably compared to this attack, had wanted to assert suzerainty as well as uprooting the bases of Greek resistance.

The Celtic incursion was in no respect so large or so organized as the Persian invasions of 490 and 480-79 BC. It was more like the irruption of a large raiding party than a systematic campaign. On an individual or local level it would appear no less terrifying. Peninsular Greece was a less energetic and confident congeries of states than it had been at the beginning of the fifth century BC. For nearly half a century the heavy burden of Macedonian overlordship had lain upon it. Continuous wars before that had destroyed men and prevented the birth of a national spirit. The defeat of the Celtic invaders, in which Athens, as if by tradition and right, played so prominent a part, raised Greek confidence and ushered in a period of renewed freedom which Rome ultimately crushed. Freedom was now regained not only by the defeat of the Celts and the exhilaration this inspired but also because the Celts had so significantly weakened the strength of Macedon.

We shall not narrate blow by blow this apparent replay of the Persian Wars. Yet the Celtic war contained all the requisite elements of myth: instant and inexplicable panic on the part of the attackers; their sudden speaking in tongues and killing each other in a frenzy of misunderstanding; divine apparitions to the advantage of the Greeks: thunderbolts, oracles and unexpected snowstorms. Delphi seems to have been attacked and may well have been looted. Brennus is said to have mocked the anthropomorphic statues of the gods he saw in Delphi (Dio XXII.97). The Cos inscription commemorating the cessation of the Celtic threat maintains that the Celts never reached Delphi. On the other hand, Callimachus, in his *Hymn to Delos*, has

Apollo speaking of the Celts as 'already amongst my tripods'. Whatever way the matter stands, Greek sources knew that it was against Celtic sentiments to make naturalistic likenesses of the gods. There had been another battle of Thermopylae, as the Celts made their way towards Delphi and its wealth, but this time the defenders were taken off by ship when the invaders took the same path to circumvent the position that had been pointed out to the Persians in 480 BC (Pausanias I.35). Brennus's army was weary as it came towards Delphi, and was almost ready to break. He himself was wounded, and many of his comrades had been killed by guerrilla warfare on the part of the Phocians. A depleted Celtic horde withdrew from Greece leaving the victors to quarrel over the honours of a victory they were to commemorate with a Panhellenic ceremony called *Soteria*, 'Salvation' (Nachtergaele 1977).

The history of the war was written by Hieronymus of Cardia (third century BC), and by Timaeus, who was resident in Athens during the war. They seem to have been the main sources of the account of the war we have from Pausanias, who lived in the Antonine period. This writer of travel narrative decided to imitate Herodotus's epic history of the Persian invasions. Like Herodotus, he glorified the part played by Athens. In his time many relics of the Celtic war were still to be seen in Athens. Pausanias even attributes to the Celts an atrocity identical to one which, according to Herodotus, was perpetrated by the Persians, namely the murder by multiple rape of a number of women in Phocis (VIII.33).

Polybius (II.19) writes that after their defeat in Greece there was an outbreak of fights at feasts amongst the Celts due to recriminations and reproaches about responsibility for the disaster. He thinks excess of food and drink was the cause of this. Clearly a warriors' ritual feast would be a time when heated exchanges in a time of stress would be likely to lead to violence, as each individual anxiously tried to shift his share of the dishonour on to somebody else. The Greeks learned how to manipulate this Titanic fighting temperament of the Celts to their own advantage. Ptolemy Philadelphus (reigned 283–246 BC) got rid of unwanted Celtic mercenaries by hemming them in an island where he could be sure that shortage of supplies would soon prompt them to find excuses for fighting each other. We also learn from Polybius (III.62) that Hannibal set up bouts of personal combat between Celtic warriors to entertain his troops who were weary from their long march over the Alps into Italy. It appears that single combat, according to Celtic custom, could be a substitute for the usual determination of a war in open battle. Notable illustrations of this are the victories won over Gallic chieftains by Messala Corvinus and Manlius Torquatus. Apparently the Romans, with their small stature and short up-thrusting swords, had some advantage over their heroic challengers.

We may be reminded by some of this evidence of scenes from the *Táin* or *Fled Bricrend*. To the Greeks, the Celts seemed to resemble the Cyclopes of the *Odyssey* in their uncouthness and ferocity, their ignorance of the ways of the *polis*, their pastoral life-style (more apparent than actual in wandering tribes) and their corresponding contempt for agriculture. On the other hand, Herodotus takes the view that the absence of a civic market-place in the way of life of any people leaves less room for the growth of dishonesty. The classical and Hellenistic Greeks, and after them the Romans, believed in an age of primal innocence, now lost to them, but perhaps still surviving amongst the barbarians (Lovejoy and Boas 1935). Cleitarchus (c.280 BC)

took this view of the inhabitants of India. Later, Julius Caesar says it of the Galli (*De Bello Gallico* VI.19.3). Poseidonios, whose lectures had once been attended by Cicero, followed this line of opinion by adapting to a description of the Celts what Herodotus had said of the Scythians. And this distinguished Stoic had actually visited Celtic lands. However, the theme of primitive simplicity had become a rhetorical *topos* too powerful to resist. Caesar was influenced by Poseidonios. Tacitus (*Germania* XVIII.19.21) applied a similar template to his account of the German tribes in his *Germania*.

Celtic religion, in being apparently an imprecise and abstract worship of natural forces with no seeming emphasis on one prominent god, had a certain philosophical attraction for Greeks, especially Stoics. The complexities of this aspect of Celtic life would come home to the Romans in due course when they encountered the druids, particularly those of Britain. The Greeks in all of this were harking back to their own traditions about their early ancestry who, according to Thucydides (I.5), lived very much as the barbarians lived in his own time (fifth century BC), pursuing a life of rapine.

The Romans had more continuous contact with Celtic peoples than had the Greeks. Greek sources are flavoured with philosophical and anthropological preconceptions, which tend to see elements of a universal philosophy in the customs and ideas of the people studied. Stoics like Poseidonios are representative of this line of thought. In the historian Polybius we see a Greek intellectual whose wonder at the growth of Roman power certainly does not lead him to underestimate the menace of the Celts, since the Celts were capable of spreading alarm amongst Romans, who, after all, had themselves been able to dominate Greece. The Romans came to see the Celts as having a coherent culture, with some similarities to their own, but marked by a violent primitivism which was entirely alien and a temper of mind which they could not understand.

Polybius was a leading citizen of Megalopolis and a prominent person in the Achaean League Greek city-states. He was forcibly removed to Rome after the Battle of Pydna (168 BC), which brought an end to Greek hopes of a renewal of their former glory and influence. He was the son of one of the League's generals, Lycortes, and a friend of Philopoemen, who has been described as the last great Greek leader. Polybius was treated honourably, in accordance with his status. Friendship with the family of Aemilius Paullus, his captor, gave him not only personal security, but intimate knowledge of Roman government and acquaintance with members of leading families. Rome was to him a social, political and military phenomenon. His history attempts to explain its remarkable growth to world power. He sees the Celtic threat, which was urgent in 226 BC, and was to revive again and again, as an important stimulus of Rome's military development over the centuries. Its recurrence itself was a shaping influence. He never forgets his national origins. His description of Celtic incursions into Italy is intended to inform and alert those who are responsible for defending Greece. More advanced elements of Celtic culture receive little attention from him. He is more concerned with its sharp end, its war-making capacity, which has been, and still may be, directed at Rome, and possibly Greece.

In contrasting the cultures of Rome and the Celts, he mentions that Celts are ineffective planners, volatile in mentality, and lacking in cohesion. This volatility

(*athesia*) is their greatest defect, and is connected with their being a nomadic people, without organized political or social basis, and having little cultural or intellectual tradition. Where they are settled, they live in straw-roofed cottages. Their main property is portable, cattle and gold rather than land and buildings, and friendship is the moral quality on which they set the highest value (II.17, 18). According to Polybius, this *athesia* made the Romans unwilling to use the help of an allied tribe, the Cenomani, against the Insubres in 223 BC (II.31). It is understandable that he should attribute to a whole culture characteristics which the invaded particularly notice in an invading horde. The historian Livy, no warm friend of the Celts, adopts Polybius's skewed perspective. Yet Polybius could appreciate that, while the Celts were lacking both in the steadfastness that characterized Rome and the rational intellect (*logismos*) of civilized Greece, they represented an ancient spirit of warlike aggressiveness, the *thymos* of antique heroism (II.22). This is illustrated by the noise, impetus and colour of the Celtic battle-charge, and the frenzy of the warrior group called *gaisatai*, who fling themselves naked into the fight (II.27). The nakedness he rationalizes as the warrior's means of preventing himself from being impeded by thorns and brambles which could catch on his clothes. This must surely be some Roman legionary's yarn. In his opinion the Celtic shield is inadequate, and the sword (possibly an ancestor of the *cleideamh mor*) unwieldy in battle conditions. He acutely observes that the unreliability of Celtic mercenaries was connected with their old raiding habits (II.7).

The Romans remained basically terrified by the prospect of Celtic *tumultus*, which they had experienced so often. Preoccupation with the Celtic threat diverted the attention of the Romans from the more serious menace represented by the accumulation of Carthaginian power in Spain (II.22). They thought that in the Celts they faced a superpower of unlimited resources. In reality, as Polybius saw, it was they who were the superpower. Yet he seems to realize that the Galli might have succeeded in extinguishing Rome at an early stage of her development. Polybius's history from 145 BC to 82 BC is continued by Poseidonios. We possess his work only in fragments. Polybius visited Celtic territory. So did Poseidonios, but he observed with the investigative eye of the philosopher and anthropologist. Not only was he in Gaul, he also visited Spain, and may possibly have gone to Britain. Julius Caesar's famous account of his wars in Gaul (*De Bello Gallico*) makes use of Poseidonios's histories. The fact that Poseidonios did not regard the Celts as mere primitives was grist to Caesar's propagandist mill, since he could represent himself as the conqueror of no mean people.

Poseidonios's distaste for Celtic drinking, boasting, superstition and human sacrifice is only to be expected in a member of the Hellenistic intellectual élite (Strabo V.28). We may admire him for drawing a parallel between the custom of the champion's portion in Celtic feasts and a similar custom in the *Iliad* (Strabo VII.21; Tierney 1960: 221). The custom of headhunting also gave him pause, but after a time he became accustomed to the sight of heads nailed up on the doors of houses. His hosts made it a point of politeness to draw his attention to those which had belonged to special enemies (Strabo IV.98). Livy records that the Boii took the head of Postumius (XXIII.24.11). We have mentioned that the head of Ptolemy Keraunos ended on the tip of a Celtic spear. Both Poseidonios and the *Fled Bricrend* mention

the champion's contract whereby a man may agree to be killed for some price or reward (Mac Cana 1972: 89–90). Possibly both Poseidonios and the *Fled Bricrend* represent a state of affairs current in some parts of the Celtic domain in the first century BC. Some of his descriptions may be based on hearsay rather than autopsy. The custom of fighting from chariots reminds Poseidonios of the Trojan War. Chariots were not used by the Celts on the European mainland at this time, though we know they were still in use in Britain. Poseidonios was aware of the crucial importance of the first wild charge of a Celtic host: if that failed, all was lost (Strabo IV.43). This feature of Celtic war-culture was still practised at Culloden, and perhaps also on the part of Confederate forces in the American Civil War, many of whom were of Scots or Scots Irish derivation.

Poseidonios also remarks on the hospitality of the Celts. A feature of this was their reluctance to ask questions of a newly arrived guest, which may remind us of the tact shown by King Alcinous to Odysseus in Book VII of the *Odyssey*. Poseidonios tells us that the Celts ate and drank in a leonine fashion, but were clean in their table manners. Armed men were in attendance at the feasts, and a distinct order of precedence was observed amongst the guests. Wine was drunk, and only seldom blended with water. The native drink was mead (*korma*). Hospitality could assume the form of conspicuous consumption for political purposes (Athenaeus 151e–152f). In a bid for leadership, an Arvernian chief, Louernius, scattered gold and silver to crowds of people with extraordinary lavishness, and set up enormous feasts.

There is evidence (Diodorus V.31) that Poseidonios respected the intellectual quickness and imagination of the Celts. He mentions the learned orders of druids, bards and seers. In a lost work Aristotle or one of the Peripatetics may have mentioned druids and another priestly class (Diogenes Laertius I.1). The druids take the auspices and divine from the inspection of entrails. Another method of divination is the observation of the dying twitches of human sacrifices. Druids are present at such ceremonies, but are not mentioned as conducting them. Poseidonios gives the still largely honourable name of *philosophos* to the druids, whom he sees as having a learned understanding of the universe as well as mediating between the world of the gods and that of men. Their view of the nature of the world seemed sympathetic to that of the Stoics: the cosmos was animate, animated and purposed. Celtic hardihood, amounting to indifference in the face of death, impressed both Greeks and Romans and was attributed to druidic teachings (Strabo IV.1.97). Poseidonios may have overemphasized the philosophical aspects of druidism. Caesar may have exaggerated its political influence, at least in mainland Gaul. Julius Caesar did not come into contact with Celtic life as it was lived. His purpose was to dominate Gaul and exploit it for his own purposes, not to comprehend Celtic society in any greater depth than seemed conformable to the achievement of his ends. His propagandist intent did not require him to see the Celt as natural man unaffected by any vice but that which was inborn. The druids were preoccupied with secrecy and, like the Pythagoreans, committed nothing to writing. We recall that in his lifetime there was a resurgence of Pythagoreanism in Rome, and several prominent intellectuals were tried for belonging to this potentially subversive secret society. Later writers such as Hippolytus (fifth century AD) compare druidic teaching with that of the Pythagoreans. This tradition would appear to be separate from that which derives from Poseidonios (Chadwick

1966: 6off.). Its origins cannot be traced back sufficiently to allow the hypothesis that Caesar was aware of it. Yet the similarities were obvious. Julius Caesar initiated a policy which eventually would destroy the druids and other learned orders. At the same time, we must remember that Divitiacus, a druid of the Aedui, and brother of that tribe's leader Dumnorix, was a friend of Julius Caesar and stayed with him in his headquarters for a number of years.

Octavian took steps against the druids. Tiberius suppressed them and the other orders (Tacitus, *Annales* III.40). Claudius abolished their order (Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25). Most of the druids of Britain (according to Caesar the home of druidism) perished in the massacre at Anglesey in AD 60 (Tacitus, *Annales* XIV.29). No doubt the druids increasingly gave cohesion to a supra-tribal 'national' opposition to Roman encroachments. No doubt also they were a cultural and ideological nuisance on a local level. The destruction of learned orders became a matter of policy (Chadwick 1966: 4-5; Ross 1967: 462). Ruthless conquest involves the excision of the intellectual leadership of the conquered. Spreading information about human sacrifice was a useful instrument towards this end, and Roman authors make use of it (*De Bello Gallico* VI.16; Lucan I.151; VIII.445; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25). They were able to dissociate their ideas on this subject from the cruel acts of human sacrifice which constituted their own gladiatorial games. What remained of druidism was undermined by classical education, which produced a new intellectual class into which members of druidic families were sometimes absorbed (Ausonius, *Praefatiunculae* IV.10; X.27).

Another strange property of the Celts was that the women were as large as the men and as strong. Diodorus Siculus, following Poseidonios, is probably our earliest authority for this fact. Diodorus lived in the time of Julius Caesar. When Cassius Dio (praetor c. AD 194) wants to give us an impression of Boudica, he refers to her great size, her grimness of expression, and her harsh voice (LXII.2.3). The ferocity and aggressiveness of Celtic women is confirmed four centuries later by Ammianus Marcellinus (XV.12.1). This information, agreeing with the Poseidonian report, seems also to be based on eyewitness accounts (Thompson 1949: 4). We cannot be entirely sure how far the needs of rhetoric preserved this view as a commonplace.

On the whole, Poseidonios's account of the Celts is rational and scientific, even though he is to some extent influenced by primitivistic notions about a past golden age. He could understand that the differences between peoples were possible reflections of differing environmental factors. This was a line of thinking which had its origins in the fifth century BC and the Hippocratic treatise on *Airs, Waters, and Places*. Julius Caesar is prepared to set up Ariovistus as a vicious and primitive, though politically shrewd, Cyclops (*De Bello Gallico* I.44; II.15), but he speaks with some respect of his most formidable enemy Vercingetorix (VII.89). He presents another leader, Critognatus, making a comparison between the methodical exploitation inflicted on the Gauls by Roman tax-officials and the transient plague of invading raiders like the Cimbri and Teutones (VII.77). Tacitus similarly allows Calgacus, the leader of the Caledones (*Agricola* 30-3), to put his case; and also the famous Caratacus. Boudica too expounds her wrongs (*Annales* XIV.35). There are other examples and their speeches are presented in the style of Roman oratory. The traditions of ancient rhetoric encouraged such antiphony, and authorial openness of mind should not be exaggerated. It may be said that there is no flavour of a biologically

racist contempt. If Celts were inferior, it was in their social organization and culture, not natural talent.

Yet Romans at large preserved an inherited fear of the Celts. Cicero was quite capable of playing the anti-Celtic card in his *Pro Fonteio*, a speech he made in defence of a Roman official accused of extortion by the people of Narbonese Gaul, where he was praetor in 75–73 BC. He speaks of the Gauls as wild men, potential invaders of Italy, useless at finance, and not even at their best to be considered on the same level as the lowest Roman (27). They almost destroyed Rome in 390 BC. They attacked Delphi; they wear trousers, their speech is uncouth. In his accusation of Piso, he mentions the defendant's Insubrian grandfather as if it were a point of legal relevance, and there is another derogatory reference to trousers. Yet he speaks of Divitiacus as a civilized expert on natural philosophy (*De Divinatione* 1.90). He is prepared to make a speech before Julius Caesar in order to reconcile the dictator to Deiotarus, the wicked and wily old king of Galatia who had chosen the wrong side in the civil war of 49–45 BC. Nor does he show hostility to the Allobroges, whom the conspirator Catiline tried to recruit: after all they chose the loyalist side. Sallust (86–55 BC), who wrote an account of the conspiracy, has these Gauls speaking with the egotistic overbearingness of ancient heroes. Cicero, by the way, has no good to say of the Celtic accent (*Brutus* 171).

In his long rhetorical history of Rome from its foundation, Livy (69/54 BC–AD 17/12) loses no opportunity of proclaiming Roman superiority (VI.42). He has contempt for their barbarous warfare, colourful clothes, boasting, gold ornaments, and noisy clashing of arms before battle. Much of his material on the Celts is adapted from Poseidonios. He relishes accounts of single combat in which Celtic leaders are bested by Romans, quiet in the face of spells and vainglory (VII.9), which he is not concerned to understand. He recalls their ferocity, their instability in battle (LIX.77), their lack of stamina. They are essentially soft (XXII.2). Their temper is over-aggressive (*fervidum ingenium* XXVIII.17). They are unpredictable (XXI.39, 52; XXII.1). As a people they are born to create ineffectual emergencies (*vanos tumultus* V.37–9; XXXVIII.17).

Livy may not have had Celtic connections himself but his origins were in northern Italy, and he would have had some knowledge of the Celts whom, in spite of considerable effort and subsequent self-deception on the matter, the Romans had not been able to eliminate (Chilver 1941: 71). Several distinguished Roman writers came from this region. Possibly some had Celtic roots in spite of their Roman names (Rhys 1905–6; Chevallier 1962). The poet Catullus (c.85–55 BC) may have been of Celtic origin, but he does not mention it: His family seems to have been prosperous, assimilated upper middle-class. He ridicules a Celtiberian called Egnatius for his permanent rictus (Poem 37) and the bad ethnic mannerism of washing his teeth in urine (Poem 39). Compatriots of Catullus and fellow members of the school of 'New Poets' were: Valerius Cato, Helvius Cinna, Furius Bibaculus and Caecilius. The philosopher-poet Lucretius (Holland 1979: 15, 48f.), who was about ten years older than Catullus and died c.54 BC, may have had some Cisalpine connections. Amongst later writers associated with this area were the elder (AD 23/4–79) and younger Pliny (AD 51–112) and possibly Tacitus (AD 56–c.115). The first writer to proclaim his Celticity was Martial (AD 40–c.104), who mentions the outlandish place-names of his

native Bilbilis in Spain and refers to himself as Celtiberian (IV.55). We may note that it was only by the persuasion of the emperor Claudius (emperor AD 51–54) that Celts from Gallia Comata were admitted to the senate in AD 48 (Tacitus, *Annales*, XI.24), a move which provoked some satire ([Seneca,] *Apocolocyntosis* 6). The advice he received against this essentially liberal move was in political terms not entirely misplaced. These new senators were princes in their own land, which suggested to some a danger which was abundantly realized a couple of decades later in the revolt of Vindex (Syme 1958: 450–64).

Celtic boorishness and insensitivity are mentioned by the Emperor Julian (emperor AD 360–363) in his *Misopogon* 342. Later, S. Jerome, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 26357), ridicules their incapacity to learn. Their wildness rather than their intelligence seems to be the point of his strictures. The reputation of Britons seems to have remained relatively unchanged from the time of Catullus, for whom they are remote, bristling barbarians (Poem 11 lines 10–11), to Ausonius in the fourth century AD, who questions the plausibility of a Briton having the name 'Bonus': he thinks 'Matus' (drunk) would be more suitable (Poem 11). Gaul was effectively the core of the Roman Empire of the West at this time, a development which would have seemed as remarkable to Julius Caesar as the Tarasque monster. Ausonius, a poet and academic working in Burdigala, saw Britons as wild Celts. Yet some of his friends traced their ancestry from druidic families.

There is a noteworthy consistency in the evidences we have for Graeco-Roman attitudes to the Celts, who remained archaic, heroic, *kataplektikoi*, 'terrific' (Poseidonios in Diodorus v.30), eloquent, volatile. No doubt one of the main factors which helped to crystallize this view was the persistence over the centuries of a rhetorical scheme of education. This placed great emphasis on the learning and deployment of *topoi* (*communes loci*), or common themes. Once the picture of the Celts had congealed, it would be difficult for detailed observation to modify it. The use of other commonplaces can be seen in the speeches given to Celtic leaders by such writers as Caesar, Sallust and Tacitus. The romantic view of the Celts and their culture owes much to these ancient attitudes. However, our attempts to see the Celts through classical eyes are focused through the lens of a literature written by an educated class whose understanding was in many ways shielded from the input of factual information by the influence of rhetorical training.

REFERENCES

- Bienkowski, P.R. von (1908) *Die Darstellungen der Gallier in der hellenistischen Kunst*, Vienna: A. Holder.
 Chadwick, N. (1966) *The Druids*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
 Chevallier, R. (1962) 'La Celtique du Po, position des problèmes', *Latomus* 21: 356–70.
 Chilver, G.E.F. (1941) *Cisalpine Gaul, a Social and Economic History from 49 BC to the Death of Trajan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Hind, John (1972) 'Pyrene and the date of the Massiliot sailing manual', *Rivista Storica dell'Antichità* 2: 39–52.
 Holland, L.A. (1979) *Lucretius and the Transpadanes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
 Hubert, H. (1934) *The Greatness and Decline of the Celts*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

— *The Celts Through Classical Eyes* —

- Lovejoy, Arthur O. and Boas, George (1935) *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Mac Cana, P. (1972) 'Conservation and innovation in early Celtic literature', *Etudes Celtiques* 13: 61-119.
- Mette, H.J. (1952) *Pytheas von Massilia*, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Nachtergaele, G. (1977) 'Les Galates en Grèce et les Sôteries de Delphes; recherches d'histoire et d'épigraphie hellénistiques', *Académie Royale de Belgique: Memoires de la Classe de Lettres* 63.1.
- Pollitt, J.J. (1986) *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rankin, H.D. (1987) *Celts and the Classical World*, London: Croom Helm.
- Rhys, J. (1905-6) 'Celtae and Galli', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 6: 71-133.
- Ross, Anne (1967) *Pagan Celtic Britain*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Syme, R. (1958) *Tacitus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thompson, E.A. (1949) *The Historical Works of Ammianus Marcellinus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tierney, J.J. (1960) 'The Celtic ethnography of Poseidonius', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 60: 189-246.
- Tiger, L. and Fox, Robin (1972) *The Imperial Animal*, New York: Delta.