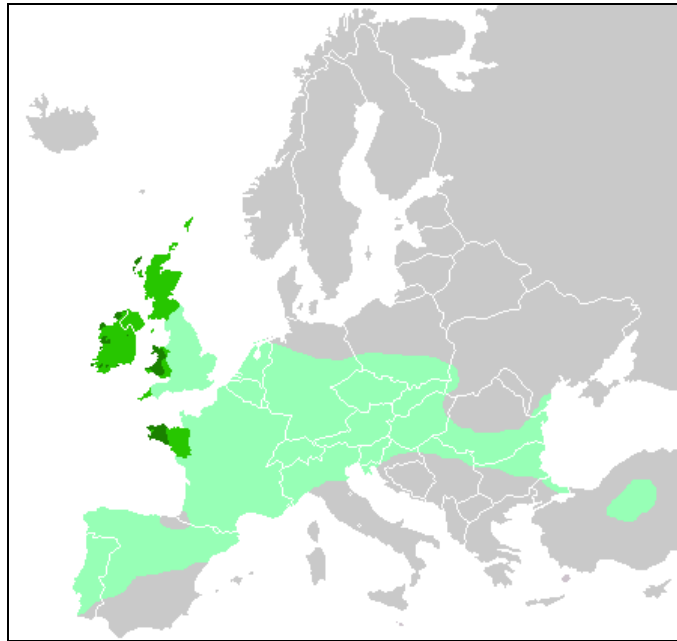


## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term Celt (originally *Keltoi* in the plural) was originally applied by the Greeks to the native population inland from their colony of Massalia (Marseille in southern France), a colony founded about 600BC. And though later it was applied by them to the inhabitants of northern France as well as in the form Celtiberian (*Celtiberii* in the plural), to the mixed populations of Celts and Iberians of Spain, the term Celts did not monopolise the terminology referring to these native peoples. The term Gauls was given by the Romans to those barbarians who sacked Rome in 390BC whereas those who invaded Greece and Asia Minor in 280BC were termed Galatians (originally *Galatai* in the plural) by the Greeks. Various etymologies have been suggested to explain the ethnonyms *Celtae*, *Galli*, *Galati* – to give their Latin forms – with attempts to show them to be versions of the same word. There is no consensus, but what is clear to generations of linguists who have studied the language of personal-names, place-names, as well as the few historical statements concerning the language of the peoples named Celts, Gauls, Galatians, is that their speech was related and forms a distinct branch of Indo-European (see Section 2). Arguments that the ancient Britons (*Britanni* in the Latin plural) were not Celts as they were never described thus by ancient sources (James 1999) fail to notice the far more important fact that the language of the ancient Britons was practically identical to that of the Gauls of neighbouring France.

By the time the Romans under Julius Caesar conquered the Gauls in the 50s BC, they preferred the term *Galli* for these peoples and the derivative *Gallia* was the name they applied to present-day France. The term Celts practically disappeared from Roman sources except – like many Greek words in Latin – as an archaic learned word. Their conquest and incorporation within the Roman Empire led most speakers of these languages to switch over to Latin, so that when that Empire receded in 5C AD, the only substantial body of speakers of languages left related to the ancient Celts, Gauls, Galatians were found on the outer fringes of the Roman Empire in the British Isles (indeed Ireland and northern Scotland were never conquered by the Romans). Two distinct language branches, Brittonic and Gaelic, survived into the Middle Ages which in time evolved to give the Breton, Cornish and Welsh languages (Brittonic) and the Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic languages (Gaelic). For many centuries the term Celt was overlooked and quite obsolete, its link to those peoples who spoke its descendant languages unknown. Indeed medieval sources do not even seem aware of a relationship between the two contemporary branches Brittonic and Gaelic.

Figure 1: Distribution of Celts, Ancient and Modern



[map from Wikipedia]

The re-emergence of the term Celt occurred when Renaissance scholars began noticing similarities between the contemporary speech of Wales and Brittany on the one hand with the speech of Ireland and Scotland. It was the Scottish historian George Buchanan who in his 1582 *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* first recognised a link between the Scottish and Irish Gaels and the ancient Gauls (to whom the ancient Britons were related). The Breton priest Paul-Yves Pezron in his 1703 *L'Antiquité de la Nation Celtique* recognised the link between the Breton and Welsh languages and ancient Gaulish and first described these languages as Celtic. Comforted by Pezron's stance, the Welsh scholar Edward Lhuyd, in his monumental *Archaeologia Britannica* of 1707, established beyond doubt the relationship between the modern Celtic languages which he linked to the ancient Gaulish and Brittonic languages.

There was a slackness in the development of Celtic comparative linguistics after Lhuyd's pioneering demonstration of the links between these languages and progress was not made until early 19C with the works of James Cowles Prichard 1831 *Eastern Origin of the Celtic Nations*, Adolphe Pictet 1834 *De l'Affinité des Langues Celtiques avec le Sanscrit*, and Franz Bopp 1837 *Die celtischen Sprachen* established beyond doubt that the Celtic language family was Indo-European. But it is Johann Caspar Zeuss's 1853 *Grammatica Celtica* which established the modern historical study of Celtic languages, an achievement of continental scholars such as the Germans Kuno Meyer, Rudolf Thurneysen and the Breton Joseph Loth which was transmitted to almost every Irish and Welsh scholar of early 20C.

By late 19C the historical development of the modern Neo-Celtic languages was well-known and has not since been substantially changed. However, the continuing discoveries of ancient

inscriptions has meant that the view of ancient Celtic has evolved. Once only the P-Celtic Gaulish was recognised, but since that time dialectal variants have been discovered most clearly in the case of the Celtiberian of Spain which turned out to be a Q-Celtic language like Irish (see Section 2).

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