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VI

The Nature and History of the Druids

WE must now make some attempt to summarize the evidence of our sources, to estimate their relative value, and to draw some conclusions as to the nature of the druids and their origin and history.

Our study of the relevant passages of Strabo, Diodorus, Caesar, Lucan, and Mela have led to the conviction that an early and well-established tradition of the druids has been derived from Posidonius. This is, in fact, the earliest information which can be regarded as authoritative. In origin it appears to date from the early part of the first century B.C. Its prestige is high in its own right, for Posidonius is known to have visited Gaul; but we have no evidence that he had any first-hand contact with, or even direct information about, druids. In any case all our information goes to indicate that the *disciplina* of the druids was already on the decline in his day. How much earlier was the period of the highest power and prestige of the druids we do not know, but it is reasonable to surmise that it was most probably at the period of the height of the Gaulish independence. This at least is what we might deduce from the elaborate political organization with which Caesar credits them, and from the intellectual pretensions accorded to them by most of our authorities. There can be no doubt at all that this Posidonian tradition is the one which made the greatest impression on the writers of the first century B.C. It is evidently closely reproduced by Strabo and Diodorus, and has made a substantial contribution also to Caesar and Mela, apparently also to Lucan. We are especially indebted to it for the 'darker' side of the druids, notably their presence at human sacrifices, and also for the emphasis on the juridical functions of the druids, as well as

for many of the features which they share with the Stoics and the Pythagoreans. Posidonius is not, however, solely responsible for the information of the writers of the first century B.C. From the silence of Strabo and Diodorus on the druidical teaching of the young, which is so elaborately related by Caesar, we may assume that Caesar obtained this information elsewhere.

Where is this most likely to be? No certainty is possible for us. It is most improbable that it is from his own first-hand knowledge. Pichon and others have suggested that he derived his knowledge of the teaching given by the druids from his friend the druid Divitiacus, supplemented by his own observation; but for reasons given elsewhere (pp. 48 above and 108 below), this explanation is unacceptable. Pichon may possibly be right in his suggestion that both Lucan and Mela derived their knowledge of both the teaching and the human sacrifices from the lost books of Livy.¹ This again would seem unlikely, however, for it is unsupported by either internal or external evidence relating to Livy, and Mela's debt to Caesar or his source is verbally close.

Yet another difficult and much disputed question is how far were the heirs of Posidonian tradition directly indebted to Posidonius, how far was the debt incurred through an intermediary, perhaps Timagenes of the younger generation. Timagenes is, in fact, cited from time to time by Strabo, Diodorus, and Ammianus. We have seen that while it has been claimed that Strabo's debt to Posidonius was incurred through Timagenes, there are arguments to the contrary (cf. p. 24 above). Nevertheless it can be shown that Strabo knew and made use of Timagenes. Undoubtedly Timagenes was used as a source for the druids—apparently the chief source—and was in fact held in the highest estimation by Ammianus Marcellinus. Ammianus makes no reference to the darker side of druidism, and though his notice of the druids is relatively brief, the omission suggests that this unfavourable

¹ *Les Sources de Lucain* (Paris, 1912), pp. 33 f.

aspect was either unknown to, or at least not adopted by, Timagenes. This is, indeed, one of the strong arguments against his having been an intermediary between Posidonius and Strabo.

Incidentally it would seem probable from the rather vague and obscure wording of Ammianus that he was aware also of earlier authorities than Timagenes who had left some record of the Gauls. His words are:

Ancient writers, making investigations into the earliest origin of the Gauls, left our knowledge of the matter very imperfect; but at a later period Timagenes, a Greek both in diligence and language, collected from various writings matters which had long been unknown, and following his reliable guidance, we, dispelling all obscurity, will now propound them plainly and intelligibly.¹

In addition to the Posidonian tradition there is another and an earlier writer who possibly comes in for consideration. This is Timaeus. It is very difficult to gauge the part that he may have played. Certain scholars of the last generation, notably J. B. Bury,² attached much importance to his authority and influence on later tradition, especially through the medium of quotation in the later writings of Alexander Cornelius Polyhistor and those of other Greek scholars of Alexandria. Unquestionably Timaeus gave important information to Diodorus³ who frequently refers to his authority. Strabo also knew his work. Is it possible that Timaeus was in some way responsible for Caesar's information on the teaching of the young Gauls by the druids? Perhaps such a suggestion is favoured by the fact that this part of Caesar's account would seem to represent the druids at the height of their prestige, and this would be consistent with the fact that Timaeus was writing during the first half of the third century B.C. On the other hand, it would be rash to press this very tenuous hypothesis. Caesar's account of the druids' education of

¹ xv. 9. 2.

² *The Ancient Greek Historians* (London, 1909), p. 168.

³ *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. vi (Cambridge, 1927). Cf. Bury, p. 108, n.

the young Gauls, for which he is our only authority, may have come from quite other sources, possibly connected with events preceding the foundation of the Roman school at Augustodunum. Moreover Diodorus never cites Timaeus when speaking of the druids, though he makes extensive use of him as his source of information on Celtic matters generally, and it would be strange that he should omit such striking information as that of the druids' educational practices referred to by Caesar, if they were known already to Timaeus.

The most important authority on Timaeus in recent years is Richard Laqueur.¹ Towards the close of his detailed study of the historical and mythological elements in the work of Timaeus he claims that the greatness of the debt of Posidonius to Timaeus is generally recognized, and that it often amounts to verbal quotation, as he has sought to demonstrate in the earlier sections of his article. Laqueur then goes on to give it as his opinion that on the other hand the influence of Timagenes on later literature has been much overrated in recent times, and that Timaeus was the chief original authority of the authors who followed, and of those who made reference to Timagenes.

In what is now the standard edition of the extant fragments of Timaeus, Felix Jacoby has made a complete corpus of the surviving fragments of his writings, and an authoritative study.² In addition to these known and accepted fragments, Laqueur, in his detailed study referred to above, has attempted to isolate and attribute to Timaeus on linguistic grounds and other data a large amount of additional material in the work of later authors, notably Diodorus Siculus. The result of Laqueur's scholarly and exhaustive analysis has not added certainty to all the passages which he claims to be derived from Timaeus; and despite the heavy

¹ See his learned and comprehensive article in Pauly-Wissowa, *R.-E.*, 2nd series, vol. vi. 2 (1936), cols. 1076 ff., s.v.

² See *F. Gr. Hist.* III B. i (Leiden, 1955), no. 566, pp. 527 ff. For the texts see especially pp. 592 ff.; III B. ii (Leiden, 1955), no. 566, pp. 311 ff.

debt which Diodorus himself acknowledges to Timaeus, there were of course other historians of Sicily prior to Timaeus, and Diodorus, a Sicilian and a historian himself, could not have been ignorant of these.¹

The great influence of the Sicilian histories of Timaeus on later writers, and on Diodorus in particular, is never in question however. His interest in general ethnographical matters, including some of the Celtic peoples, is also recognized; but it does not appear either from the extant fragments or from any specific reference of Diodorus that Timaeus had interest in, or even knowledge of the druids. Of course our knowledge of his work is only fragmentary. He may have written on the druids and the passages may have been lost. Yet if this were so it is again surprising that no hint of this should have been given, especially by Diodorus, who writes at length and in detail on the Celts, and who made liberal use of the work of Timaeus in other respects. Druids are the kind of subject in which we might expect that Timaeus might have had some superficial interest. In fact, however, we are without evidence that he made any reference to them. The question as to the possibility of his authority for the druids behind the work of Posidonius or Timagenes must be left a matter of doubt. Pliny makes frequent reference to Timaeus, especially in connexion with geographical matters (cf. p. 33 above), but never in connexion with druids.

An insuperable difficulty confronts the student working in these earliest sources, now available to us chiefly in fragments, and in the analyses made by modern scholars tracing lost texts in writings of the successors of these early authorities no longer extant. This difficulty lies in the fact that the most reliable specialists in the field are not in agreement on the nature and extent of the contribution of the earliest authorities.

¹ Cf. T. S. Brown, *Timaeus of Tauromenium* (University of California Press, 1958). See especially pp. 21. and 117, note 5. See further F. Jacoby, *F. Gr. Hist.* III B. i, no. 566, pp. 526 ff.

As already stated above, Laqueur, whose study of Timaeus is still the most authoritative—however other scholars may differ from him in certain details of interpretation—assures us categorically in his concluding remarks that the greatness of the debt of Posidonius to Timaeus is generally recognized, and that in fact—so Laqueur claims to have demonstrated—this debt is often obviously a verbal one.

Tierney, on the other hand, in his study of Posidonius, pays hardly any attention to Timaeus. In referring (p. 192) to ethnographers who preceded Posidonius he refers to Trüdinger's analysis of the ethnographic remains of Timaeus, and of Agatharchides, in which he says Trüdinger has shown that their methods are not unlike those of Posidonius, and that, in fact, Posidonius was influenced by both. But in fact Trüdinger's discussion of the work of Timaeus in this passage¹ is very brief and general. Tierney himself mentions Timaeus once later in his thesis (p. 196), and here Timaeus is only referred to as the earliest ethnographer who accepted the geographical work of Pytheas on the North Sea and its islands. Elsewhere Tierney gives it as his opinion (p. 198) that 'There is very little ethnographic material in later writers on the Celts which does not come ultimately from Posidonius.' On the whole our evidence suggests that the scope and interests of Timaeus in relation to western Europe were primarily geographical, and lay rather outside such specialized local ethnographical developments as druidism.

It would seem that Tierney is probably right in claiming (p. 219) that the sketch of Gaulish origins and ethnography quoted from Timagenes by Ammianus, 'or at least the passage concerning the learned classes of the Gauls', was 'obviously taken by Timagenes from Posidonius'. We have seen, however (p. 24 above), that Tierney has given good reasons for his agreement with Laqueur—as against Klotz—that Timagenes has not been an intermediary between Strabo and Posidonius. On the whole the relationship of our earliest

¹ *Studien zur Geschichte der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie* (Basel, 1918), pp. 108f.

sources on the ethnography of the Gauls must remain to some extent an open question. It would seem, however, that leaving aside the difficult question of Pliny's sources, our sources for knowledge of the druids as represented in our earliest extant authorities go back to two or at most three authors—Posidonius, Timagenes, and possibly Timaeus.

When, however, we turn to examine the traditions of the druids which have come down to us from the Alexandrian school we obtain a totally different picture from that of the authorities demonstrably indebted to Posidonius. In the Alexandrian tradition the entire emphasis is different. The juridical side is not emphasized, their association with the human sacrifices of the Gauls is never referred to. Druids are referred to with respect, the accent is not on their practices but on their beliefs and their philosophy and its relationship to the current Mediterranean beliefs of their day. The druids are assigned a dignified status among the classified philosophical schools of the great systems of the world. This exaltation is sometimes exaggerated beyond what a critical scrutiny will allow, as, for example, in passages where it is stated (cf. p. 61 above) that classical philosophy had its origin among the barbarian nations; or in the estimate of the precise relationship of the tenets of the druids to the Pythagoreans. Nevertheless, these Alexandrian traditions are in their general outline consistent and credible. The druids are represented as philosophers, and as such entitled to respect.

None of the Alexandrian traditions represent the work of eye-witnesses. They are the work of scholars who are making use of written records. They represent the research and compilations of the Alexandrian school of trained scholars, and though the method of presentation and the critical treatment of the sources leaves much to be desired according to the standards of modern scholarship, they represent the responsible standard of their time in regard to the collection

and selection of facts, whatever the value of the conclusions which the compilers may draw from their facts. We may refer again to the scholarly instinct which led Diogenes Laertius to go back to the earliest available sources for the Pythagoreans, by-passing the large body of later literature which had developed on the subject in the intervening period (cf. p. 66 above).

These Alexandrian traditions of the philosophical, and more especially the Pythagorean, tenets of the druids, then, are worthy of our serious consideration as among our earlier druidical traditions. The uniform respect of their tone precludes their derivation from the Posidonian tradition, which is, indeed, out of the question on general grounds. Is it possible that Bury was right in attributing the origin of the tradition to Timaeus, transmitted through Timagenes? How, we must ask, are we to explain the wide discrepancies in the two principal streams of tradition which have come down to us about the druids, both the consistent 'dark' picture of the Posidonian tradition and the equally consistent more exalted intellectual picture presented in the Alexandrian tradition? What is the evidence for the age and authenticity of the Alexandrian tradition?

One of these traditions is traced back to Alexander Cornelius Polyhistor, a younger contemporary of Posidonius, but unlike him having, so far as is known, no previous experience as a traveller in Gaul, being on the contrary a scholar and compiler of earlier traditions from written sources. He is cited by name as an authority for the description of the druids of Gaul as philosophers by Clement of Alexandria, and by Origen—who may well be simply quoting Clement; and also much later by Cyril of Alexandria. His authority is claimed by these writers for bringing the teaching of the druids into relation with the Pythagoreans, whose notebooks, dating from the fourth century, Polyhistor claims to be citing (cf. p. 66 above). Apart from these incidental references to Polyhistor as an authority on the Pythagorean

tenets of the druids, we have the important witness of Diogenes Laertius (cf. p. 64 above) who is our chief ancient authority on Polyhistor, but who cites as authorities on the druids Sotion of Alexandria of the early second century B.C. and another anonymous writer of the same century who quotes the *Magicus* of Pseudo-Aristotle. Apparently Diogenes is largely indebted to the work of Sotion for his information, though not at first hand; but how far he made direct use of the sources which he cites, how far he is using sources avowedly derived from them, is of relatively little importance for our purposes. The important fact for us is that the tradition which he is recording is in origin no later, and is, in fact, evidently earlier than that of Posidonius.

Alexander Polyhistor is then a direct source of the tradition of some at least of the Alexandrian Greeks. Of him Tierney says little, but would seem to attach no importance to him as a source, apparently identifying him with the Pythagorean tradition of which he regards Posidonius as the chief exponent, and the original source of the traditions of the druids. It would, however, be less than just to Tierney to stress his reserve on Polyhistor and the Alexandrian debt, since Tierney's main thesis is a reconstruction of the general Celtic ethnography of Posidonius himself, and he is concerned with the evidence for druids chiefly in so far as this is directly relevant to his main theme.

It would seem that both Timagenes and Polyhistor, younger contemporaries of Posidonius, and in addition to them the still earlier Sotion, must have given a different picture of the druids from that of Posidonius. This earlier tradition was responsible for the conception of the druids as philosophers who shared the views of the Pythagoreans. Polyhistor held them in veneration for their lofty intellectual views, which Caesar, Ammianus, and Lucan also reported, though with less emphasis. Perhaps both Caesar and Timagenes also owed their information on the national philosophy of the druidical teaching to this tradition. It is a striking

fact that Polyhistor's teaching on the druids appears to have been actually at variance with that of his older contemporary Posidonius—even contrary to it. Have we unwittingly stumbled on a forgotten controversy? Did Caesar and Ammianus, and possibly Lucan, know of the work of Polyhistor, perhaps through the intermediary Timagenes?

Be this as it may, we have now found the Alexandrian tradition as well attested as the Posidonian. In view of this ancient and well attested tradition it would be unscientific to dismiss this Alexandrian view as wholly due to the love of the Alexandrians for the strange and exotic wisdom of barbarian peoples. Bias there may well be, in both the Posidonian and the Alexandrian traditions. Unfortunately the immediate sources are lost, but the later Alexandrian writers were Christians, and are not likely to have seriously falsified the tradition of the heathen druids to their advantage. Indeed the Alexandrian Christians welcomed the idea that Greek philosophy was nothing but the 'wisdom' of the barbarians. More probably the bias here, as in the Posidonian tradition, is one of emphasis and selection. Questions of debate, following on the new knowledge of barbaric peoples acquired, first after Alexander's conquests in the East, and later after Caesar's conquest of Gaul, would inevitably relate to the proper treatment of subject populations as a result of the expansion of the Roman empire. What value was to be attached to the spiritual ideas and institutions of the peoples beyond the old frontiers of the Greco-Roman world, and what was the proper attitude to, and treatment suitable for them? Sources of exact information were few, and from these selection would naturally be made according to the political bias of the author making the extract.

Now Ammianus emphasizes the exalted philosophy of the druids and their Pythagorean tenets no less than the Alexandrians, referring to the druids as the chief civilizing influence of the Gauls (xv. 9. 8), and citing Timagenes as his authority for the statement. Timagenes was evidently Ammianus' chief

source of information on the druids. We have no reason to suppose that he was an observer at first hand, and indeed as we have seen (p. 55 above) Ammianus tells us specifically that he was a scholar researching in written authorities.

From this it is abundantly clear that Ammianus claimed no first-hand contact with the druids either on his own behalf, or on behalf of Timagenes. Timagenes is himself evidently drawing on other writers—probably on Posidonius for the threefold division of the intellectual classes of Gaul, probably on Polyhistor or one of his sources for the exalted conception of the druids; possibly even on an earlier authority such as Timaeus, though as already stated, we are without any indication that Timaeus has left any direct evidence on the druids.

In seeking to estimate the truth about the druids from our multitude of varied sources and their interdependence it is of the first importance to watch the bias, or the climate in which the facts have been recorded. We have every reason to believe that Posidonius was directly responsible for the forbidding aspect of druidism which in some measure connected it with the widespread human sacrifices of the Gauls as recorded by our earliest extant authorities and recently emphasized by Professor Last. It is, as we have already remarked, significant that neither Strabo nor Diodorus mentions the teaching of the Gaulish youths as a function of the druids. It is clear that Posidonius is writing consistently with a general attitude in support of Roman imperialism and the Roman Empire, 'embracing', it was claimed, 'all the peoples of the known world in the commonwealth of God'.¹

Now we know that Timagenes was a contemporary of Augustus at whose request he probably wrote his *Histories*. We are told also (cf. p. 71 above) that Augustus issued an edict which reflected unfavourably on the druids. A quarrel is known to have arisen between Augustus and Timagenes,

¹ Piero Treves, in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1950), s.v. *Posidonius*.

as a result of which Timagenes burnt his Histories. Have we again stumbled on a later phase of the same controversy, which might explain why Timagenes, perhaps on the authority of Polyhistor or his source, gives a favourable picture of the druids whom Augustus viewed with disfavour? Is it possible that the two opposing streams of tradition relating to the druids, the darker one Posidonian, the lighter one Alexandrian, represent opposing political attitudes in regard to the foreign policy of the Romans to subject peoples? Has political controversy conditioned the bias and governed the selection of our reports on the druids from an earlier source or sources?

We have seen that the two strains of tradition of the druids—the darker side associating them with the ‘cruel practices’, and the fairer or intellectual side—meet in the accounts of Caesar, and after him Lucan and Mela, who stress the immortality of the soul. Though the passage in Caesar is obscure, it seems to imply that the soul passed into another state; and though this does not necessarily imply Pythagoreanism, we have seen that Caesar’s contemporary Polyhistor is held by some later writers to be responsible for attributing Pythagorean doctrines to the druids. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are dealing here with a common source used by Caesar and Polyhistor. The frequent mention of Timaeus as an authority in the work of Diodorus and his known interest in Celtic matters, together with his high prestige among Alexandrian writers, has suggested to some scholars (see pp. 86 f. above) that he may have been the chief ultimate source of our information on the teaching, and possibly even on the practices, of the druids. If we endorse this view we should have to suppose that later writers, through various intermediaries, have stressed such aspects of his account as accorded with their political bias, especially in regard to the foreign policy of Rome towards the conquered barbarian peoples. Whatever view we take as to Caesar’s source for the teaching and philosophy of the druids,

it is to be suspected that the political views of our authorities—the individual bias, prejudice, and policy—have dictated the selection of the facts which our extant writers have chosen to put before us from the mass of their earliest inherited information. Those who favoured the imperial policy of the repression of the druids—if, in fact, this is not to overstate the case—have emphasized the elements in druidical practices which could be used as propaganda to excuse the policy of suppression. The picture would seem to have been perhaps distorted by those favouring the imperial foreign policy towards subject peoples, and these writers have concentrated on the barbaric practices of the druids to the exclusion, or at least the prejudice of, their more important intellectual aspect.

It is clear that none of our informants had an extensive acquaintance with druidism at first hand, though Caesar and Cicero knew at least one druid in person, and Pliny may possibly have had some direct information. None of the information of the Alexandrians has independent value, and our information about the druids before their decline appears to be derived, with the possible exception of Pliny, from two or three lost sources—Posidonius, Timagenes, just possibly both originally indebted in whole or in part to Timaeus. But in fact we have no certain knowledge that even these lost sources had themselves first-hand information about the druids, even when they knew something at first hand about the Gauls.

It remains to inquire what positive information we can claim to have obtained about the druids by unpicking our sources at some length. Professor Tierney, the most recent investigator, concludes that the spiritual teaching of the druids is simply a superstructure of Stoic philosophy imposed on them by Posidonius himself, who claimed it as an historical picture of the druids. Posidonius, in Tierney's view, seems to have regarded the druids as comparable with other great

men of the past who were theologians and lawgivers, such as Moses, and Tierney further claims that Posidonius represents them as priests, philosophers, and theologians, possessed of the highest political authority, and in charge of divination and sacrifice. Posidonius pictures them as expounding to upper-class Gauls the study of theology, ethics, and natural science, including the physics of the earth and the stars, and as holding among their main tenets that the soul of man is immortal. This, says Tierney, is not an historical picture, but rather a rhetorical one, simply a reproduction of the programme of Stoic philosophy. It is, he claims, incompatible with our information of the Gauls as head-hunters, practising divination by human sacrifice, and with our picture of Gaulish religion as represented by recent writers such as Vendryes.¹ Finally, Tierney claims that 'this priesthood was not in any way a distinguished exception among the priest-hoods of the contemporary barbarian nations'.

Against this I would urge that the druids are nowhere—save perhaps in Pliny's bizarre account—represented as priests,² or as directly occupied with religion, and thus the characteristic features of Gaulish religion as defined by Vendryes,³ and stressed by Tierney (p. 223), have no bearing on the philosophical or scientific pretensions of the druids. The political functions ascribed to them and their lofty intellectual teaching are quite other than the routine of religious officials or functionaries localized in relation to specific sanctuaries. Again it may be urged that the cruelties and barbaric practices of the Roman arena show that such practices are not necessarily incompatible with a high civilization. As Tierney himself allows, Posidonius was a careful observer. In his account of the teaching of the druids

¹ See J. Vendryes, *La Religion des Celtes* (Paris, 1948), pp. 239 ff.

² The definition of druids as priests is a common assumption by modern scholars, e.g. W. E. Heitland, *The Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 1909), iii. 158. De Vries assumes at the outset, and throughout his article ('Die Druiden', *Kairos*, ii. 67 ff.) that the druids are a priesthood. Cf., however, pp. 2, 5 ff. above.

³ J. Vendryes, loc. cit.

he may exaggerate and even distort its tenor in accordance with his special interest in Stoicism; but he is unlikely to have given a fundamentally false presentation. Similarly Caesar may, and almost certainly does, colour his narrative for his political purpose; but he has much to tell us of interest which lies outside special pleading, whether by Caesar himself or by his source. The position of the druids may have been magnified in his accounts, as Tierney believes; but their philosophy is consistent with what we know of the so-called Pythagoreans of the Mediterranean countries of this time, and the political influence of the druids is vouched for by their later history.

It may even be conceded that not only are we practically without any first-hand information about the druids, but that all our traditional information has come to us through sources tinged with political bias. What we have been accustomed to dignify as a reliable account of the druids is a collection of facts selected according to the political views, or at best the limited outlook, environment, and opportunities of the narrator at a given time and place. Nevertheless a survey of the sum of information which has come to us, and an attempt at a critical analysis of the sources, have given us data for a tentative conclusion of some historical validity.

Our first conclusion is that in following the chronological order of our sources we are studying the druids during the period of their decline. The prestige and organization attributed to them by the earliest writers must have been built up in the period when the Gauls were a united people and before the Barbarian invasions or the Roman conquest. The military decline of the Gaulish nation, and the Roman influence on cultural matters must have inevitably and radically changed the picture. The Roman imperial edicts prejudicial to the druids as enacted by Augustus and his successors, following on the introduction of the Roman system of education among the young Gaulish nobility, could not fail to bring about a final disintegration of the

whole system and *disciplina* of the druids. Intellectual disintegration must inevitably have set in. Once the central organization had been dismembered and its educational system superseded the druids would lose the dignity of the earlier large assemblies and the coherence, together with the power, of a centrally organized body, while the earlier speculative philosophy would naturally degenerate, possibly into magical practices. Driven as fugitives to woodlands and caves, the druids could now only carry on their ancient calling enshrouded in increasing mystery in the eyes of their Roman conquerors on whom we are dependent for our information. The last we hear of so-called 'druidesses'—for what the information is worth (cf. p. 81 above)—resembles the modern gypsy fortune-teller, while the last of the druids of Brittany are drafted into the romanized university of Bordeaux.

That the druids were a subversive element in the Empire is certain.¹ Their strong conservatism, their devotion to the ancient Gaulish ways of thought, can be seen in the fanatical tenacity with which they devoted themselves and their pupils to oral learning, even while making use of Greek letters in almost all other matters. Their strong nationalism is emphasized by Tacitus, and was still a serious source of trouble to the Romans as late as A.D. 71. It is perhaps no accident that *Armorica*, which retained strong traditions of druidical families within the memory of Ausonius, was the most persistently rebellious of all the western provinces, and the stronghold of the mysterious and disaffected *Bagaudae*, throughout the greater part of the fifth century.

The Romans have found themselves obliged to take active measures for the suppression of the instigators of these nationalistic and separatist movements. Yet they must have been aware that to do so was to strike at the very heart of the Gaulish people whom they were most anxious to conciliate. Active propaganda was essential to justify the Romans to

¹ Cf., e.g., C. Jullian, *La Gaule*, iii. 373 ff. and the references there cited.

themselves and to their Gaulish subjects, and to this end, from the first century B.C. onwards, they have been concerned to seek justification for repressive treatment of a proud and independent people whom they were seeking to overpower. From the time of Augustus it was realized that the education of the young Gaulish nobility must be transferred from the teaching of the druids to that of the Roman schools. Augustus accordingly very naturally forbade those who were reckoned as 'Roman citizens'—i.e. those who had acquired the status of citizenship in the Empire—to practise druidism. Very naturally also those who, like Suetonius, were concerned to uphold the policy of the emperors sought to uphold it by selecting and emphasizing the traditions of the unfavourable aspects of druidism. Accordingly Suetonius assigns the highest motives of humanity to Augustus and Claudius in their measures unfavourable to druidism. He would hardly be in a position to contradict an imperial propaganda campaign, and writing with a *parti pris* he naturally, in his brief references to the legislative measures against the druids, assigns the Gaulish religion as the imperial justification for their suppression.

Yet it is certain that it is the intellectual side of druidism which made the deepest and most lasting impression on the ancients, and which is in fact its most interesting feature. And here again we must stress the fact that it is this tradition of an intellectual class which has survived, while there is almost no evidence for ethical or moral teaching, and no hint of a system of punishments in a life after death. Similarly we would again stress the absence of local druid sanctuaries, of evidence of sacerdotal ritual or liturgy, of any interest in the known divinities of ancient Gaul. This negative evidence is important. It is the obverse of that druidical spiritual and intellectual teaching which is claimed to have had as its chief concern the nature of the physical universe (the *natura rerum*) and the nature and destiny of the human soul. These are not the characteristics of priests but of philosophers—and especially, I would add, of Greek philosophers.

The *outstanding* features of the druidical teaching may be summed up as natural philosophy and natural science—the nature of the physical universe and its relationship to mankind. This branch of human knowledge was characteristic of the early Greek philosophers of Ionia,¹ and it is probable that the druids and the seers of Gaul, representing the backward but not wholly uncultured peoples on the periphery of Greek civilization, have preserved and transmitted late echoes of early philosophy and knowledge derived from the common property of the ancient Greek world which probably penetrated Gaul in the first place through the Greek colony of Marseilles. The form of this knowledge and this philosophy which seems to have penetrated Gaul and inspired the philosophy and the teaching of the druids, was associated by the Alexandrian Greeks in particular with ‘Pythagoreanism’. It is of course inconceivable that any system of philosophy was adopted by them in a pure form or that it can be traced in the work of a single teacher. But the exact nature of the West Mediterranean form of philosophy current at the formative period of the thought and teaching of the druids must be left to specialists of Greek philosophy. They it is who hold the key.

On the whole it would seem reasonable to regard the druids as barbaric survivors of ancient Mediterranean systems of education and philosophical thought, rather than to look upon them as a priesthood which was not essentially different from that of the Germani and other barbaric peoples of ancient Europe. For the latter definition and identification I can see no valid evidence. Rather I would suggest that their ‘discipline’ represents a peripheral and remote survival of the brilliant speculative era which had achieved its highest expression in the great Ionian philosophers of the sixth century B.C. and which penetrated the

¹ For an interesting account of the two branches, see an article by the late Professor F. M. Cornford, ‘Was Ionian Philosophy Scientific?’ in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, lxii (1942), pp. 1 ff.

more remote countries of the West, transformed by many and varied superimpositions at a later date.

How otherwise can we account for druidism by any explanation consistent with the facts? It appears, by a consensus of the evidence, to be limited to the Celts of Gaul and, perhaps at a much later date, of Ireland. We know that all the early coins of Gaul were derived from Greek models. The art of the Iron Age, known as La Tène, in Gaul and in Ireland has been widely influenced by Greek motifs. The druids in almost all their public and private correspondence are said to make use of Greek letters (*Graecis litteris utantur*). A relationship between druidism and the Greek world such as I have suggested would be consistent with the use of the Greek alphabet by the druids to which Caesar refers, and with the Greek personal names in the family of Phoebeius of druidical ancestry, as reported by Ausonius (cf. p. 82 above). The Greek colony of Marseilles, founded from Phocaea in Asia Minor c. 600 B.C., cannot have been without a permanent effect on the interior of Gaul.¹ Indeed we are told by Strabo² that it was the chief channel by which Greek education and thought entered Gaul, and taught the Gauls within its sphere of influence to become 'Philhellenes'. I would suggest that perhaps the complex of culture which we call 'druidism' is a provincial peripheral survival of ancient Greek intellectual systems carried on more or less in isolation in Gaul, and combined with early native elements on the confines of the Ancient World. This strange and interesting development has left its traces in both Gaul and Ireland, and in Gaul was recorded in early times by one or more Greek writers from whose works later Greek and Roman writers have selected their information according to their own political theories and their own more immediate needs for political propaganda.

¹ On this subject see the linguistic evidence assembled by W. von Wartburg, 'Die griechische Kolonisation in Süd-Gallien und ihre sprachlichen Zeugen im Westromanischen', *Von Sprache und Mensch*. See also Jan Filip, *Celtic Civilization and its Heritage* (English translation), pp. 38, 51, 77, and *passim*.

² v. I. 15.