

S.Nardone Assignment 1

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The Question of the Celts Geography

The agreed upon geographical location and origin of the Celts is a multifaceted question as the classification of who the Celts are or were, is not easily reconciled resulting in the narrative of the Celts to constantly be questioned and disputed, often times with a specific bias in mind for the outcome. The discrepancies come from the disconnect between the historical analysis of the Celts, the philosophical analysis which largely includes linguistics and its links to culture, and the archaeological findings associated with whom they deem the Celts. The most reliable source that we have for information about the ancient Celts comes from the ancient Greco-Roman people, so while it is not our first hand knowledge, information from the ancient Greco-Romans is widely accepted as the most factual information that we can learn from for this time period for many different groups of people. The use of this information with the ability to correlate modern time peoples with the ancient Celts allows a more specific, not 100 percent accurate picture to be drawn of the geographic location of the ancient Celts. If we look at the three disciplines around the study of Celtic Studies we can determine the attested location of the Celts according to each then discuss how they may overlap or differ.

While there is no doubt that the Celts did ^{exist} exist, there is controversy over who they were, what the term 'Celts' included or excluded and where these people were geographically. For the purposes of this paper ~~Del.~~ we will refer to each of the three different groups of study around the Celts as historical Celts, linguistic Celts and archaeological Celts as they each group who they

say are Celts in different ways under different premises. The historical Celts were first mentioned by the Greek's around c. 2500 years ago coining the term the Celts. The linguistic Celts was a classification that was given ^{to} those who were speakers of the Brittonic, ^{Goidelic} Geoidelic and Gaulish languages but this term was not used until the eighteenth century, finally the archaeological Celts were the group of people that were determined to have used and left behind the Hallstatt and La Tene artifacts or material culture which was discovered around the nineteenth century (Currie). The geographical locations that were associated with each classification overlap to some degree but also contradict each other slightly.

TROUBLE IN DEFINING CELTIC

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien is a well-known English writer, poet, philologist, and academic with his most know works being that of fantasy, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of The Rings* Series. J. R. R. Tolkien also was a known academic in the field of Celtic Studies, in which he drew inspiration for his stories from Celtic folklores. J. R. R. Tolkien says, "to many, perhaps to most people outside the small company of the great scholars, past and present, 'Celtic' of any sort is a magic bag, into which anything may be put, and out of which almost anything may come," (J. R. R. Tolkien, 1963) (. This statement is attesting to the ability of the term or label of 'Celtic' to have a fluid meaning in efforts to fit different scenarios in-order to fit varying agendas. Matthew Arnold quotes Henri Martin in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1867) saying, "The Celt is...always ready to react against the despotism of fact." This mere statement confirms the idea that the term "Celtic" is a malleable magic bag term that can be contorted to fit the needs of individual situations. The idea around the malleability of the term Celtic is an idea that needs to be revered while studying Celtic Studies as many scholars may have misused the label so that their research would fit into their intended outcome. With much

of the Celtic World remaining a question, it would be easy to want to accept any idea that labels a people or a culture as Celtic to fill in the gaps but with the study of historical Celts, archeological Celts, and linguistic Celts it is hopefully going to head a more accurate rendition of the geographical location of the ancient Celtic people whomever they may have been.

HISTORICAL CELTS

Historical Celts are classified by a historian giving the label of celts to those who were referred to as Celts in a historical source and in most cases this information came from the ancient Greeks. Plato and Aristotle both refer to the Celts in some of their works and they described the Celts as warlike and barbaric peoples and that they would regularly partake in outright drunkenness which is really a classification that is given to any who simply did not speak Greek. From the Polybius history, the Celts are recorded as being warlike, going into battle naked, making loud intimidating noises as they charge and if they were to meet defeat, they would commit suicide. Many of the Britons would dye their skin with woad giving themselves a blue color which would be known and recognized as their battle regalia (Currie). According to Strabo, the early Celts occupied areas from Iberia to Anatolia. And historical sources have credited Hecataeus of Miletus to placing three main Celtic cities as Narbone which is modern day Narbonne as a trading centre, Massalia, modern day Marseille as a city of the Liguarian, near Celtica and finally Nyrax as an important Celtic city. The first two, Narbone and Massalia are undoubtedly known locations in modern day France, on the southern coast on the Mediterranean Sea ^{whereas} where as the exact location of Nyrax has been more problematic in nailing down the exact location. Some historians argue that Nyrax is modern day Nyons and others argue that it is Noreia. If it were Noreia that would place the third location in the mountainous region of Austria near the Danube river while the other two are sea side cities.

Herodotus notes that the Celts lived beyond the Pillars of Hercules and border on the Cynetes, the western most Europeans he also implied that the Celts lived in the area where the Danube got its source and thought that was Iberia (which is not correct) but this way of thinking, supports the later “claims that the Celts lived at the true source of the Danube, which lies to the north of the Alps in southern Germany and Austria, an area often labelled as the ‘Celtic Homeland’ for precisely this reason. It is of particular importance to the identification of Hallstatt as a Celtic site,” (Currie). So if these historians were correct in their claims, it would mean that the Celts geographic origin is the land of Europe that is between southern France and southern Germany/Austria but also as far east as the south of Spain at the strait of Gibraltar, which is what the pillars of Hercules refers to.

The idea that the Celts territory or just the geographic location that they inhabited was as far reaching as the southwest of Spain (Iberia and Cadiz) all the way to Austria would mean that the Celts had been very wide reaching but there were also accounts of there being a group of Celts, the Asian Galatae inhabiting areas in the Far East. This was reported from Ptolemy who lived in the fourth century BCE and served as one of Alexander the Great’s generals so he had the ability to actually encounter this group of Celts first hand adding some validity to his claims. Historical Celts were classified as the group that began to expand their territory from this area around the Mediterranean up and inland more. These Celts were said to have come into contact with the Romans and Greeks of the fourth and third centuries BCE and would have entered into battle with them over territory thus making their historical information more credible.

The timeline that historical evidence gives in reference to geographic location of the Celts starts in c.525 BC with the Celts inhabiting the Massalia area on the coastline of modern day France with it being a trading center for the Greeks and Celts. Then in c. 450 BC Herodotus

places the Celts in modern southern Germany and France where it would have classically been referred to as Gaul as well as a group of Celts being places in what is modern day Gibraltar, classically the 'Pillars of Hercules' (Currie). Moving on to c. 390 BC the Celts invade northern Italy and encounter the Romans. From this point in time to around 9 BC the Celts territory is extended all over Europe and the near East however, the Romans conquer many of their areas which could be the push that drove the Celts to migrate further north which would land them into the areas that we deem Celtic Nations today; Brittany, England, Scotland, Cornwall, Wales, the Manx, and Ireland. From this time into the early first century AD the Celts of this time and the Romans would struggle over power in the modern day Celtic Nations. And according to the historical Celts classification this is geographically where the Celts ended up.

LINGUISTIC/PHILOSOPHICAL CELTS

Linguistics may be the most difficult area of study to utilize to pin point the geographical locations of the Celts because of how many different actual languages were and are classified as celtic as well as how each can adapt like dialects. Tacitus was recorded saying that the language between Britain and Gaul was different but by very little, this was in the year 98 CE (Currie).

"According to John Collis "...it is clear from both Caesar himself and other sources that the Belgae and Celtae, and indeed the Britanni, spoke dialects of the same language, or closely related languages" (JC 45).

This idea is strengthened by his remark in *De Bello Gallico* (6.14) about Druids from Gaul being trained in Britain," (Currie). This is significant for the fact that if the languages of the different Celtic peoples of this time was similar enough for each other to be able to understand, then it means that most likely the Celts all did come from the same general geographical origin.

For linguistic Celts the term Celtic is used to refer to the languages of England, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Mann, Ireland, and Brittany which all today still have their languages but also that of the ancient Celts of Gaul, northern Italy, Iberia and Anatolia. It is, however, important to note that the label of Celtic language was not used until around the eighteenth century in reference to the ancient celt who spoke these languages. In modern times, it is often argued that language and culture are synonymous, meaning that if you share a language you share similar cultures. However, this is not true for the ancient Celts and quite frankly, is not even true today. Linguistics is also a very difficult field to study for ancient peoples because unlike physical artifacts, you cannot unearth language that has not been preserved in writing nor can you discern how ancient people used the words or how they were spoken verbally. It is also difficult to use linguistics as a determinant for geographical location of a group of people simply because being a part of a specific ethnic group does not automatically equate to speaking a specific language just the same as speaking a language does not make one a part of a specific ethnic group which means that saying a certain group of people were Celts and lived in a specific area solely for the reason of them speaking a 'Celtic' language could be a false accusation. As John Collis shares, "it was not their language which places them in an ethnic group which then dictates their social constructions, but their technology, their relationship to core- periphery structures, their settlement patterns, power structures and ideology" (P214).

The Celtic languages are thought to have gone through splits to get them from the language that the ancient celts would have spoken to the languages that we associate with Celtic in modern day. The first split went from Indo-European language to three groups the Lusitanian, Common Celtic, and Hercynian. From this the Common Celtic branch split into three more sub-groups: Celtiberian, Gaulish & Pritanic, and Gaelic. Then the latter two sub-groups split more

which give us the modern-day Celtic languages. Brittonic and Pictish from the Pritanic sub-group which is referred to as P Celtic and Irish Gaelic, Manx, and Scottish Gaelic from the Gaelic sub-group which is referenced as the Q Celtic.

The way that the language groups split does offer some insight into the geographical locations of the Celts at the time however, it is not as concrete as the other two classification groups may be. The split of the Indo-European language group supports the claim that the Celts may have been geographically central to Europe and then as the groups split it is when the Celts migrated and spread out across Europe more inland and eventually up to the modern-day Celtic Nations.

ARCHEOLOGICAL CELTS

According to the archeological Celts classification, there are traditionally two subgroups associated with the ancient Celts: Hallstatt and La Tene. The archeological Celts are centered around central Europe just above the Alps in what would today be Switzerland, Austria, Bohemia and areas of Germany and France. This area is commonly referred to as the “Celtic Homeland” because this is where the majority of physical artifacts were unearthed.

Hallstatt is broken into the west and the east with the western side being associated with the Celts. On this side of Hallstatt, there are many fortresses and ‘princely’ burial tombs which would have consisted of many artifacts that the Celts deemed important enough to send to the afterlife with their important members once they died. “The finds at these sites date from the fifth and sixth centuries BCE, and show evidence of links with the Mediterranean world,” (Currie) however, why were locations such as this ^{not} one found closer to modern day Marseille where historical Celts were theorized to be?

The Hallstatt period is divided into four phases HaA, HaB, HaC, HaD with C and D being in the iron age and associated with the ancient Celts. During this time in history, we see these princely burial sites for the first time from the Celts however they do not leave this specific area into the rest of the Celtic world. So, if the archeological information from the Hallstatt site was to be solely used to geolocate the ancient Celts it would place them around the Alps in more temperate Europe.

The La Tene, geographically is above the Hallstatt area and stretches from Champagne to Bohemia covering that large span of Europe. The La Tene area Del. has similar burials to that of the Hallstatt area with many of the sites overlooking rivers, which is an important geographical feature for the Celts. There are differences in the burials though which helps differentiate the two archeological areas. The La Tene burials had two horse chariots for the elite being buried whereas the Hallstatt had wagons. The weapons and tools that were found in La Tene are meant for more warlike action compared to that on the practical use of the Hallstatt tools, showing the emergence of a more warlike society. This would match with the accounts of the Celts from the Greek and Roman's perspective and narratives. Evidence of La Tene's influence was found later in Britain which would also add more evidence behind the claims that the Celts originated from central Europe and migrated eventually to the areas where modern-day classifies as the Celtic Nations.

OVERLAP OF GEOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE

With the help of these three different Celtic classifications, we are about to draw a larger, more detailed picture surrounding the question of where are the ancient Celts from? Historical Celts, which most of the information came from, now notable, Greco-Roman historians like

Julius Cesar, Plato, Aristotle, Hecataeus of Miletus, and Strabo, are theorized in occupying the areas along the coastline from the strait of Gibraltar in Spain all the way to modern-day Marseille in the south of France. Archeological Celts rely on the study of artifacts found that can be dated and identified with the Celts of the Iron Age. With the use of the artifacts found in the Hallstatt and La Tene areas we have the ability to identify the area in Europe, north of the Alpes that the Celt would have occupied for a period of time. We are able to identify parts of their culture as well by the manner in which they ^{bury} burry their elite members of society and track how this method evolves or is carried to other parts of the Celtic world. From the archeological Celts the princely burials that the Celts participated in across central Europe were identified as well as their later influence on Britain, thus linking the two locations. Linguistic Celts have a more difficult time of being placed because of how much the Celtic languages changed and split over time as well as you cannot simply search for language as a physical artifact that would allow you to place the society who utilized it. However, linguistic Celts can be placed and followed along their migration paths due to studying the different language splits that occurred. The split of the Indo-European language group supports the claim that the Celts may have been geographically central to Europe and then as the groups split it is when the Celts migrated and spread out across Europe more inland and eventually up to the modern-day Celtic Nations. This agrees with the claims of both the historical Celts and archeological Celts allowing us in modern-day to trace the origins and migration patterns of the ancient Celts to a larger degree of accuracy. While the historical, archeological, and linguistic Celts all place the ancient Celts in relatively the same locations we must not forget that the term Celtic was used at will to fit the agenda of the scholar and like Tolkien mentions, because there are still so many questions surrounding who the Celts were, it is easy for the term Celtic to be used in a way that fits the individuals' desires.

Works Cited

Currie, Andrew. The Celts. HPCS 7003, University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Course Notes.

Kaminski-Jones, Rhys, "Pagan Revivals, Celtic Fantasies." HPCS 7007, University of Wales
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S.Nardone Assignment 1

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

54/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

This essay outlines aspects of the Celts from the three disciplines concerned. It is rather short and includes no bibliography other than course notes provided by university staff (which are not publications *per se* in any case). Despite this, numerous other works are referred to, (e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien, Matthew Arnold, John Collis), and these should be properly referenced in a bibliography at the end.

The points on page 2 about the malleability of the Celtic label are well made, and on page 3, it should be noted that *Barbarians* was the term used to refer to non-Greeks (not those who *partake in outright drunkenness*). With reference to the *Asian Galatae* on page 4, it should be stressed that they did not inhabit the *Far East* (e.g. China), but Asia Minor (i.e., Anatolia in modern Turkey). They are known to have migrated there and so this area is not a candidate for the Celtic homeland.

The point on pages 4 and 5 that Herodotus *places the Celts in modern southern Germany* is debatable (and of great importance to this assignment), as he may have thought that the source of the Danube was in Iberia. Consequently, it may be modern scholars who have placed the Celts in southern Germany.

Turning to page 6, the term Celtic is *not* used to refer to the languages of England, and in the case of the other places mentioned, only to those languages placed in the Celtic branch (e.g. Gaelic in Scotland, but not English). However, the point about language and culture not being synonymous is well made.

With regard to using language to identify locations, place-names are useful for this, as they are invariably made by people who once inhabited them, and are more static than items of technology such as shields and pots. As for John Collis' statement about what places people in ethnic groups, there are plenty of examples of peoples being labelled by the language they speak (e.g. what makes someone a Slav, an Arab or a Basque? why is Latin America so called?) - indeed, there are probably more of these than there are peoples named after their technology!

The paragraphs on the Celtic languages at the bottom of page 6 and top of page 7 have clearly been based on information gleaned from reading, and it would be interesting to note the source, The section on archaeology (p 8) is largely descriptive, however, it is worth noting that evidence of a particular style in a given location does not necessarily imply migration.

Moving finally to the concluding section on pages 8 and 9, care should similarly be taken not to equate the spread of languages with migration, as there are plenty of examples of people changing language while staying in the same place (e.g. language shift from Irish to English in Ireland).

Overall, this work contains a number of factual inaccuracies and could have benefited from a more in-depth analysis. It is nevertheless an attempt at undertaking the task as set.

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