

Solomatin Assignment 1

Medieval Celts

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Britain
The Celticity of Briton in the Early Medieval Period

Under what circumstances can 'Celtic' be considered an appropriate label for the Britons, Gaels
and Picts of early medieval Britain and Ireland?

There is no evidence that the people of medieval Britain considered themselves Celtic, nor were they referred to as being Celtic by the Romans who conquered much of the British Isles in the early common era. In the ancient world, 'the people of Britain were always Britannia and never Celtae.'¹ Thus, using the term 'Celtic' to refer to these people is anachronistic at best, and misleading at worst, as it implies an awareness of Celtic heritage that may or may not have existed. However, the languages spoken by the native peoples during this time of conquest were Celtic languages, which implies at least some level of Celticity among these peoples. Moreover, just because the people were apparently unaware of their Celtic heritage does not erase the existence of that heritage: the question, then, is how much of their culture, society, and ethnicity did, in fact, have Celtic roots? Since language is the sum of neither ethnicity nor culture, and self-identification is not always possible when discussing the cultural origins of any given peoples, determining the 'Celticity' (if such a thing exists at all) of the peoples of medieval Britain must establish a migration narrative for if, how, and when a Celtic culture came to be on the island. This narrative needs to address key questions, such as: whether it was people (an ethnicity) that came to the isles, or merely cultural artefacts such as language, art, and societal

¹ Jonathan M. Wooding, 'The Idea of the Celt', in *Celts and Christians*, edited by Mark Atherton, University of Wales Press (2002), 39-59, p. 49.

structure that may have been imported and adopted through trade with a Celtic cultural entity from mainland Europe; to what extent, if at all, any pre-existing ethnic or cultural group(s) may have influenced the incoming Celtic culture, both within the British Isles and through exportation or emigration back to Continental Europe; and, most difficult of all, to what extent ^{were} the peoples concerned aware of the cultural links to other peoples now classified as 'Celtic.' None of these questions ^{has} have easy answers, but all must be taken into consideration when seeking to determine the Celticity of the peoples of Britain in early medieval Europe, and the extent to which they or aspects of their culture can be called 'Celtic' by scholars seeking to uncover the ambiguous history of the medieval inhabitants of Britain.

Due to the complex and multidisciplinary nature of cultural studies, it is first essential to establish certain parameters and definitions of commonly used and often debated terms. For the purposes of this analysis, 'culture' will be used in two contexts: material culture, which is the art, tools, laws, and behaviour of a particular society, and interpretive culture, which is the beliefs, symbols, and, if applicable or available, motivations of a particular society. Society, in turn, will be used in both a broad sense to refer to the networks of trade and war relations that characterised early medieval Britain as well as in a more narrow sense to discuss societal hierarchy within a tribe, clan, or other social unit. The principles expressed by these terms are designed to allow objective comparison of the cultural expression of the medieval British peoples with appropriate cultural expressions that have previously been identified as 'Celtic.' By contrast, ethnicity will be used to refer to 'a sense of group affiliation based on a distinct heritage or worldview as a "people."' ² This term relies on a sense of belonging which transcends individual cultural expressions, and will be examined further in due course. Language, which is

² Barbara D. Miller, Penny Van Esterik, and John Van Esterik, *Cultural Anthropology: Canadian Edition*, (Pearson Education: 2001), p. 22.

an aspect of material culture, but is the most reliable source for interpretive culture, and is a primary means through which societies and ethnicities are bound together, will be discussed separately.

Language and Origins

The original settlement of Britain dates back to prehistoric times — Earham, in Sussex, has yielded artefacts dating to 350,000 B.C.³ — and will not be examined here except to note that these people likely bore no connection to any of the peoples who would later be associated with the term ‘Celt,’ which was first used by the Romans no earlier than 500 BCE.⁴ The arrival of a Celtic or proto-Celtic language in Britain may have occurred as early as 2000 BCE (note that this is still 1500 years before anyone was demonstrably using the term ‘Celt’), with the rise or immigration of a peoples known as the Beaker Folk,⁵ or as late as 50 BCE.⁶ Colin Renfrew has even suggested that the language evolved on its own from Indo-European, which could have come to the island as early as 4500 BCE.⁷ Certainly, by the time of the Roman invasion in 43 CE, the peoples of southern Britain spoke and occasionally wrote a Celtic language known as Brittonic,⁸ but even at this time, the origins of the peoples living there was unclear. Caesar, who only had occasion to visit southern Britain, notes that:

The interior portion of Britain is inhabited by those of whom they say that it is handed down by tradition that they were born in the island itself: the maritime portion by those

³ John Davies, *A History of Wales*, London, The Penguin Press (1993), p. 2.

⁴ Davies, *Wales*, p. 21; see also John Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths and Inventions*, Tempus, Gloucestershire (2003), p. 16.

⁵ Davies, *Wales*, p. 13, 22.

⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

⁷ Patrick Sims Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtosceptism’, in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 36 (1998), 1-35, p. 21.

⁸ Davies, *Wales*, p. 21.

who had passed over from the country of the Belgae [Gaul] for the purpose of plunder and making war; almost all of whom are called by the names of those states from which being sprung they went thither, and having waged war, continued there and began to cultivate the lands.⁹

Tacitus likewise indicates a connection between the southern Britons and the Gauls, but also notes features of other peoples from lands further afield:

Who were the original inhabitants of Britain, whether they were indigenous or foreign, is, as usual among barbarians, little known. The red hair and large limbs of the inhabitants of Caledonia point clearly to a German origin. The dark complexion of the Silures, their usually curly hair, and the fact that Spain is the opposite shore to them, are an evidence that Iberians of a former date crossed over and occupied these parts. Those who are nearest to the Gauls are also like them, either from the permanent influence of original descent or, because in countries which run out so far to meet each other, climate has produced similar physical qualities.... The language differs but little.¹⁰

The comparison of the Britons to the Gauls, and Belgae (who both lived in Gaul) is most relevant here because it is from the Celticae of central Gaul that the term 'Celt' is derived.¹¹

Note, however, that, though a close similarity between Gaulish and Brittonic was noted even at this time, physical characteristics appear more relevant in regards to determining the origins of the inhabitants, and no guess is put forward as to how long ago these peoples may have arrived on the isle by either commentator.

⁹ Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, translated by Translated by W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn, MIT Classics, 5.12.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *The Life of Cnæus Julius Agricola*, in *The Agricola and Germany of Tacitus and The Dialogue on Oratory*, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, Macmillan (1877), pp 1-46, Chap. XI.

¹¹ Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania', p. 16.

The uncertain dating of the language's arrival in Britain casts parallel uncertainties as to the Celticity of the people who spoke the language. Davies notes that 'it would no doubt be a matter of satisfaction to Welsh-speakers of today to be able to believe that their language and the ancestors of their language have been present in their land for four thousand years,'¹² however, ironically, the longer the language was present in the land, the more unlikely it is that the people who spoke it had any additional cultural or ethnic ties to the mainland peoples called Celts. That is: if the language arrived fifteen hundred years before the Celts became a peoples, it was likely brought there by a pre-Celtic peoples. However, if the language arrived later, possibly through the arrival of actual Celts migrating north in the wake of the Roman invasion of Gaul, they are likely to have brought other aspects of their culture with them. Moreover, the survival and evolution of Brittonic into Cornish and Welsh in the wake of the Roman invasion and the influx of Latin does not indicate the extent to which any other expressions of Celticity might have survived.

To further complicate the issue, the dates above are based on evidence found largely in southern Britain, and it does not necessarily follow that Celtic speech reached all of Britain at the same time, let alone lands further afield, such as Ireland. Even Tacitus's mention that the British language is similar to Gaulish is unclear how widely this language was actually spoken, as when he makes the point, he appears to be speaking only of 'those who are nearest to the Gauls.' In the same vein, Patrick Sims-Williams notes:

a non-Indo-European language does seem to be visible in the inscriptions of Pictland, which have never convincingly been interpreted as Celtic. The presence of such a language is supported by the ancient river names, so long as they are not emended. When

¹² Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania', p. 22.

Isaac analysed Ptolemy's river names in Britain, he found between thirty-four and forty-one Celtic ones and six non-Indo-European ones, and five of those six rivers turned out to be in north-east Scotland. This is indeed what one might expect on the far edge of an island on the far edge of Europe.¹³

While place-name evidence is unreliable as a means of dating the arrival or existence of any given language to any given area, Isaac's analysis does highlight the fact that there were non-Celtic peoples in Britain at one point, and it is important not to minimise the influence they might have had on the culture of Britain's early peoples, however much it may have been overshadowed by later linguistic or cultural developments, particularly by developments in the south, which may not be evidence of parallel developments further from the European mainland, and are certainly not representative of Ireland, and those areas of Britain that were (re?)colonised by the Irish in the wake of the Roman withdrawal; the language spoken in Ireland was so different from Brittonic and Gaulish that their common origins were not even guessed at until the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Therefore, is it not necessarily accurate or appropriate to assume that Brittonic was the only language or group of languages spoken in Britain and the surrounding territories simply because it was the dominant language in southern Britain at the time that written inscriptions begin to appear. Likewise, while it may be appropriate to refer to Brittonic as a Celtic language, it does not necessarily follow that the Britons were themselves Celtic: a Celtic-speaking people is not the same as a Celtic people. Thus, it is important to examine other aspects of Brittonic culture.

¹³ Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Bronze- and Iron-Age Celtic-Speakers: What Don't We Know, What Can't We Know, and What Could We Know? Language, Genetics and Archaeology in the Twenty-First Century', *Antiquaries Journal*, 92 (2012), 427–49, p. 431.

¹⁴ Sims-Williams, 'Celtoscepticism', p. 16; see also Wooding, 'The Idea of the Celt', p. 48.

Material Culture: art and artefacts

There are two primary difficulties of classifying cultures or ethnicities through their artefacts. First, many artefacts, such as tools and artwork, have an innate mobility to them: they can be carried with immigrants from distant lands, or sold through traders and merchants to lands even farther afield. Once even a single piece has been brought to a given area, its style might be so admired that local craftsmen might seek to imitate it without any additional knowledge or affinity to the people who first crafted it. Or crafters might bring their techniques with them as they move to regions where their styles are considered ‘exotic,’ thus ensuring their work has less competition than it might in their home regions. Secondly, the availability of materials or environmental demands of one region may be very different from the availability of materials and environmental demands of another, so even if the two areas are deliberately seeking to craft items of similar style and function, the quality may be affected by local materials, or the styles may need to be adjusted for the environment. This makes it difficult to determine ethnicity based on the presence of particular styles of artefacts. However, as Celticity is often tied to the production of particular styles of artefacts, a brief analysis of the in the British context is necessary here.

Firstly, it is important to note that the first British artefacts to be called ‘Celtic’ were so named *after* the Celtic connection between modern Welsh, Irish, and Gaelic was made known. The term Celtic was perfunctorily applied to such artefacts, largely because they were not overtly Roman, nor Saxon, nor Viking.¹⁵ These artefacts occasionally bear some stylistic resemblance to the La Tène or Hallstatt stylings, however neither the La Tène and Hallstatt peoples have been unequivocally linked to the Celts, and both cover regions that were populated by both Celtic- and

¹⁵ John Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths, and Inventions*, (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2003), p. 82.

Germanic-speaking peoples.¹⁶ Thus, despite the popularity of so-called ‘Celtic art,’ it is the most ambiguous aspect of Celticity; ‘in fact, specialists have used the term “Celtic art” in a woolly, almost meaningless way, as if it were axiomatic that art is a manifestation of ethnicity.’¹⁷ As noted above, the connection of artefacts to ethnicity is far from being so obvious as to be ‘axiomatic,’ and yet the misrepresentation continues. While a detailed analysis of artistic styles and motifs is beyond the scope of this paper, it is evident that great care should be taken if referring to any art, regardless of its place of origin, as being ‘Celtic.’ At the very least, an explicit explanation of what criteria allow such a definition to apply would be necessary.

Social structure: druids, warchiefs, and gods

There is a distinctive aspect of Gaulish society that is of particular importance here: that is the role and nature of the famous druids. Though the British druids were largely wiped out in 60CE, and druidism itself was subsequently replaced by Roman rhetoric and the conversion of most of Britain to Christianity,¹⁸ the role of the druid within British society appears to have continued. ‘Much of the power of the druids arose from their control over the calendar... [and] the magical powers were propitiated by ritual in which the figure three had occult significance and the human head a key role.’¹⁹ As Christianity replaced traditional ritual practice, the control of the calendar, the significance of the figure three, and any council over matters of spirituality or divine law all shifted to Christian liturgy and doctrine, allowing educated monks to take the place of the druids. Thus, the social structure that surrounded the role of the druid, whether that role was filled by an

¹⁶ Collis, *The Celts*, p. 90.

¹⁷ Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania’, p. 4.

¹⁸ David Rankin, ‘The Celts through Classical Eyes’, in *Celts and Christians* edited by Mark Atherton, University of Wales Press (2002) 21-33, p 30.

¹⁹ John Davies, *Wales*, p. 24.

actual druid or by a Christian monk, is one of the most tangible expressions of both the material and interpretive culture of the Britons, and, as such, the Celticity of this role merits examination here.

Druidism was a key aspect of both British and Gaulish society prior to the Roman conquests. Druids have since become an iconic, even stereotypical, aspect of the modern image of the Celtic world, and indeed they were important pillars of the social hierarchy in both Britain and Gaul.²⁰ Their exact role is a subject of much debate, but it does appear that ‘they operated in a supra-‘tribal’ level within society,’²¹ acting as advisors, arbitrators, and ambassadors to chieftains and tribes.²² According to Caesar, druidism was native to Britain,²³ and Gaulish druids would travel to Britain to receive training. This demonstrates a close, ongoing, and two-way connection between Gaul and Britain from an early date. It also indicates that the Gaulish and British peoples were aware of a certain amount of cultural similarity and solidarity, as the priest-like druidic advisors to the clan and tribal chiefs all had the same training, meaning they shared a common material culture through their understanding and administration of societal laws, as well as a common interpretive culture in their understanding and explanation of the natural world and cosmos. It is also important to remember that, while the druids and their Christian successors may have been neutral ‘supra-“tribal”’ entities, this does not mean that the various tribes who relied on their council and guidance felt any particular loyalty or unity with one another.

Furthermore, it is unclear whether or not druidism was not a feature of society elsewhere in Europe. The Roman commentaries do not mention druids in relation to tribes found outside of

²⁰ John Davies *Wales*, p. 24; Nora K. Chadwick, *The Druids*, New edition. University of Wales Press (1997), p. 97.

²¹ David Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire*, Penguin Books (2006), p. 51.

²² Chadwick, *The Druids*, p. 97.

²³ Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, 6.12.

Gaul. This indicates that Caesar is likely correct in noting that druidism was native to Britain,²⁴ and was exported to Gaul at some point prior to the Roman commentaries; further evidence of this is Tacitus' note that the Gauls' 'religious belief may be traced in the strongly-marked British superstition.'²⁵ Because this feature appears to be Britannic in origin, it does not prove that the peoples in Britain were either ethnically or culturally Celtic – that is to say, this link does not indicate that the peoples of Britain considered their heritage to be ethnically connected to the heritage of the Gauls, nor does it imply that other aspects of the Britannic culture(s) were necessarily Celtic. Most importantly, it indicates that referring to the Druids, and the societal structure that surrounded them, as Celtic is possibly misleading. On the other hand, if the ancient Celtic peoples were indeed limited to Gaul, then the Celticity of regions that did not have a druidic presence comes into question, and the Celticity of the social structure that surrounded the druidical orders becomes more ingrained. This would indicate that the Britons, at least those southern Britons who spoke a similar language and shared a key social class with the continental Gauls, were, indeed, more culturally united with the Celtic Gauls than they were with any other ethnicity. The same cannot necessarily be said for peoples who lived farther afield, especially not the Picts and Scotti north of the Roman borders, whose language differed, and who may or may not have had a druidic presence in their society.

It is tempting at this point to draw attention to other similarities between the social structure of the Gauls, Britons, and other supposedly Celtic tribes. Ideas about kings or chieftains being elected by the land, or by 'a combination of popular acclaim and general acceptance of a satisfactory situation'²⁶ or images of a broad-shouldered chieftain gathering together a warband

²⁴ Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, 6.12.

²⁵ Tacitus, *Agricola*, Chap. XI.

²⁶ Martin J. Dougherty, *Celts: The History and Legacy of One of the Oldest Cultures in Europe*, (Amber Books: 2015), p.48.

of skilled men²⁷ might come to mind. These stereotypes are, like the notion of the Celtic Druid, somewhat misleading, and neither the elected chieftain nor the iconic warband are uniquely Celtic conceptions. In fact, the overall image of the heroic Celt derives from the Greek and Roman commentaries. Peter Wells notes:

Descriptions of the Celts by Greek and Roman writers tell of a heroic, warrior-based society, with chiefs and followers eager for battle and just as enthusiastic about feasting and drinking when they were not fighting. Their courage has been described as reckless, and their politics as volatile.... [Germans] were represented *in similar terms*, but with the frequent observation...that they were less civilized than the Celts, lived in smaller communities, and had less highly developed religious practices [emphasis added].²⁸

Similarly, the society portrayed in Irish and Welsh literature is remarkably similar to the society found in Anglo-Saxon poetry: both are ‘dominated by the same loyalties and with the same emphasis on treasure, gift-giving, and the fellowship of warriors in their chieftain’s hall.’²⁹ As the Anglo-Saxons are Germanic and Teutonic in origin, these stereotypes (whether they are a true reflection of the people or not) cannot be used in seeking to determine the Celticity of a peoples.

Similarly, it might be tempting to note that the pre-Christian gods who were worshiped and honoured by the Britons are the same gods worshiped and honoured by the mainland Celts. However, this is not, in fact, the case. This assumption is largely based on similarities between the names of early Welsh literary figures in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi and names of continental deities —sometimes requiring the intermediary of an Irish figure to demonstrate the

²⁷ Dougherty, *Celts*, p. 45.

²⁸ Peter S. Wells and American Council of Learned Societies, *The Barbarians Speak: How the Conquered Peoples Shaped Roman Europe* (Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 103.

²⁹ John Blair, *The Anglo-Saxon Age: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press (2000), p. 12.

derivation, and the majority of these characters ‘do not derive from mythological antecedents,’³⁰ while those that do are not ‘necessarily rehearsing their original roles when we meet them in the Four Branches.’³¹

There are indeed characters and episodes which derive from pre-Christian beliefs — probably not directly from memories of the native religious tradition in its original form, but perhaps via early medieval fairy folklore and the more formalized stories of heroic deeds preserved by the professional poets.³²

This is an important note, as by the time these stories were written down, the Normans had conquered England, so any similarities between the folklore and mythology of the Mabinogi and continental folklore or mythology could potentially have been imported by the Normans.

Furthermore, as the peoples of Britain had by this time been firmly converted to Christianity, and the concept of ‘Celtic Christianity’ — another term which was not used in the medieval period but is a popular anachronism — implies a unity of thought and a standardisation of practice throughout the regions occupied by Celtic-speaking peoples that certainly did not exist at the time.³³ Therefore, the use of ‘Celtic’ to describe the religious beliefs and practices of the Britons either pre or post Christian conversion is not helpful for anyone seeking to understand the actual nature of religion in early medieval Britain, and so ‘Celtic’ should not be used in this context regardless of the Celticity of other aspects of these peoples’ cultures.

³⁰ Jessica Henning, ‘Ancient Tradition or Authorial Invention: the “Mythological” Names in the Four Branches’ in *Myth in Celtic Literatures*, edited by Joseph Falaky Nagy, Dublin: Four Courts Press (2007), 83-104, p. 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³³ Wendy Davies, ‘The Myth of the Celtic Church’ in *The Early Church in Wales and the West* edited by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane, Oxbow books (1992) 12-21, p. 12.

Interpretive culture

With all the apparent lack of connections to mainland Celtic culture, it would seem that it is little to merit the use of the term 'Celtic' in reference to the medieval Britons. However, the aspects examined thus far have been limited to material culture. The interpretive culture, which is more internal and ingrained, is less clear. It is this aspect of culture, the reasons behind behaviour and material expression, that is most prevalent in a ^{people} peoples: tools and art styles may change as technology and skill evolve, the types of prayers said, even the name of the god(s) prayed to may shift as language, religion, or scientific understanding are exposed to new ideas or paradigms, but the reasons behind these expressions, remain, on some level or other, unchanged.

There is a woeful lack of concrete information about the interpretive culture of the mainland Celts, and though there is somewhat more in regard to the early medieval Britons, this tends to be couched and buried within the assumptions that the material culture was Celtic to begin with. All that is certain at this point is that there was undoubtedly some ingrained cultural practices that were distinctly *other* in respect to the indigenous peoples of the British isles: something that, despite apparent cultural similarities to the Anglo-Saxons, continued to set them apart from the dominant immigrants all the way into modern times. Whether or not this 'other' can be called Celtic is the key question, and one that, at this time, has no clear answers. There is a need at this time for studies to analyse these aspects of early insular culture apart from the assumed Celticity or non-Celticity of the material culture. In the meantime, when explaining the interpretive culture of the medieval Britons, particularly in comparison to other so-called Celtic peoples and in contrast to the Germanic Saxons and the French Normans, 'Celtic' seems as useful a term as any other. However, until Celticity among the ancient Celts can be more firmly understood, it is difficult to draw comprehensive or irrefutable comparison between the

interpretive cultures of medieval Britons and the ancient Celtic peoples, so any use of the term 'Celtic' in this context must be used with caution, and with full acknowledgement that it may be inaccurate.

Conclusion

In the vast majority of concrete, material context, the term 'Celtic' is misleading and inappropriate when discussing the culture of the medieval Britons, and is even more so when discussing peoples who lived further from the continental Gauls. When analysing features of Brittonic culture that were shared with the ancient Gauls, these features can only be called Celtic if it is clear that Celtic is equal to Gaulish or Gaulic, not to the full extent of the 'Celtic' territory as defined by Caesar, or by Archeologists using the Hallstatt or La Tène styles as a reference for the spread of Celticity. However, when analysing interpretive culture, if seeking to link the interpretive culture of the Britons and their descendants with interpretive cultures of mainland Europe, Celtic and Celticity may be the most appropriate term. Overall, the term must be used with caution, and with a clear understanding of what its use denotes. This may mean taking time to define the term within the context of the study in order to avoid any undue confusion or unintentional associations with popular 'Celtic' imagery or stereotypes.

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Solomatin Assignment 1 Medieval Celts

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

70/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

Unfortunately, there is very little treatment of the Britons, Gaels and Picts of early medieval Britain and Ireland in this essay. The first sentence neatly sums up what could have formed the basis of this work, but it then progresses to answer a somewhat different question about them, namely: "*how much of their culture, society and ethnicity did, in fact, have Celtic roots?*" This, of course, actually moves the focus from the medieval to earlier periods. Nevertheless, as the link has some relevance, it will be examined accordingly.

Establishing parameters and definitions is a good thing, and with regard to the introductory pages, it is suggested that *material culture* (p. 2) is more properly used to refer to tangible objects which are the product of *technology* (in the wider sense of that word, meaning the use of objects from the environment as tools), and so arts, crafts and weapons would be included, as well as settlement patterns such as homes and walled defences. However, *laws* belong in the other category, being an intrinsic example of a people's beliefs. *Language*, (unless tangibly stored in writing - which is a form of technology) is definitely *not* material culture, as we produce it by using our bodies, and with no external aid.

In the *Language and Origins* section, we can see the part played by (sometimes fanciful) speculation on these matters. When faced with a difference of some 4500 years, it may be wise to just admit that we don't know. However, the recording of the name *Prettanike* by Pytheas in his circumnavigation of the island in c. 325 BCE suggests that a P-Celtic language was present in Britain by then. As this is later than the (also P-Celtic) Lepontic inscriptions of northern Italy, it is not unreasonable to use the 4th century BCE as a *terminus ante quem* for the arrival in Britain of a "Celtic" language. We cannot know for definite whether this language of the *Pretani* was spoken all over the island at this time,

but it formed the basis for the language which would be spoken in an unbroken territory from southern Scotland to Cornwall (and not just southern Britain as suggested on page 6) *after the departure of the Romans*, with little opportunity for the arrival of a new language during Roman occupation.

Page 5 seems to equate the earliest known *reference* to the Celts with the earliest possible date that *"the Celts became a people"*. Moreover, if Renfrew is right (but he probably isn't) then how do we know that Gaul was not *"Celticised"* from Britain? Traffic does not necessarily flow only in the one direction. The point about pre-Celtic peoples on page 6 is fair enough but even further removed from the original period of this assignment than Celtic roots! .

In the *Material Culture* section (p. 7), the point about artefacts being imitated is very well made, as is the point about the environment's role. This is indeed an area where *"misrepresentation continues"*.

Moving on to the *Social Structure* description, we again see the *"close, ongoing and two-way connection between Gaul and Britain from an early date"* (p. 9) as well as the belief that druidism was native to Britain, which offers further evidence that the traffic was not all one way. If such an important aspect of life could move in that direction, then why not language also? With regard to the "Pictish" language, this is not necessarily the same language as the pre-Celtic river names. The Picts do not enter the historical record until 297 CE (and disappear from it some six centuries later). All of their main place-name elements have cognates in Brittonic.

The points about warrior society (p. 11) are again very well made as there is ample evidence to indicate that there is nothing particularly Celtic about it. Care should be taken, however, when using Irish and Welsh literature (none of which is

pre-medieval) as "*A Window on the Iron Age*" (as noted on page 12).

Turning now to *Interpretive Culture* (p. 13) it is rather risky to suggest that any aspect of this is "ingrained". As the saying goes, "*the past is a foreign country*" and cultural practices of all kinds will change over time. The "*French Normans*" offer us a good example of this, given that, only a few generations earlier, they would themselves have been "*Germanic Vikings*".

As for the *Conclusion* (p.14) Caesar's "Celtic" territory is actually smaller than all of Gaul, and only applies to those called by the Romans *Galli*, and in their own tongue *Celtae*. The cautious use of the term Celtic is, however, good advice.

All in all, this work is well written and shows a great deal of thought. It also has the courage to propose new and original ideas for older interpretations. Care should be taken, though, not to take this too far. As an essay it could (and probably should!) have contained far more detail about the Britons, Gaels and Picts of early medieval Britain and Ireland - what they had in common and what they did not, and to what extent they could be collectively distinguished from the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. That said, taken on its own terms, it shows plenty of potential for the future.

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