

Solomatin Assignment 2 Early Celts and Celtosceptism

by Kate Catherine Solomatin

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Unfair Scrutiny:

Celtosceptism and the Politics of Ancient Identity

Even in the twenty-first century, there is often a great deal of debate and confusion around the cultural, ethnic, and social identification of peoples. Questions such as ‘what makes a society or cultural group distinct from other, surrounding groups?’ and ‘what merits inclusion or exclusion from a particular society?’ are foundational to the academic study and understanding of society and culture. These are the questions that lie at the heart of what Patrick Sims Williams calls the *Celtomania* ‘Celtomaia/Celtosceptism’ or ‘Celicist/post-Celticist’ debate.¹ The practical expression of these questions is: ‘is it appropriate to use the term “Celt” in relation to any of the ancient people currently considered “Celtic” by popular academia? (And, by extension, to any other group currently or historically labelled as “Celtic.”)’ While the debate does raise a number of important questions about how those peoples came to be called Celtic by various scholars through the ages, and it does make some necessary points regarding the methodologies of academics in the early days of Celtic studies, and European studies in general, it is curious that the debate is largely limited to Celtic peoples, when the very same questions could be asked of other ancient peoples, such as the oft-cited Celtic neighbours, the Germanii. Some consider this discrepancy to be a symptom of prejudice against a minority population,² an accusation that, while somewhat misleading, demonstrates a cognizance of how the conception of ancient peoples continues to impact modern political and racial ideologies. Thus, the reasons and the validity of the Celtic debate are fundamental not only to the field of Celtic Studies, but to the study of Ancient Europe

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

² *Ibid*, p. 4.

as a whole; whether the Celts are a minority population or not, the points and conclusions raised by this debate may yet change the way ancient populations are classified and studied in the future of academia, which, in turn, could have a significant impact on modern perceptions of ethnic and racial belonging.

Culture and Society

It is tempting to look at Ancient Europe through the lens of culture: the Celtic culture, the Germanic culture, the Roman culture, and the many conflicts and occasional alliances between these groups. Aside from generalising and oversimplifying the complex relations of peoples in this period, perpetrators of this view, such as Sims Williams' much abhorred coffee table books,³ tend not to discuss the actual nature of culture. This allow such books to make generalised claims such as 'Celts spread across Europe from the Atlantic coasts to the Danube basin, and even into Asia Minor. Over such a large area, regional variations in their culture were inevitable, but a distinctive "Celticness" can still be discerned.'⁴ Without explaining what definition of culture is being used, the claim, while clearly using a judgement of what constitutes 'Celticness' or 'Celtic culture,' cannot be meaningfully supported or disproven. Thus, it is important for any study of culture to explicitly define what culture actually is. Of course, it would be easiest if a single definition of culture could simply be agreed upon by academics, but the field of cultural anthropology has been attempting to do so since the late nineteenth century, and has merely succeeded in identifying a variety of different types of culture, including interpretive culture,

³ Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism', p. 1.

⁴ Martin J. Dougherty, *Celts: The History and Legacy of one of the Oldest Cultures in Europe* (Amber Books: 2015), p.6.

material culture, local culture, and macroculture, to name a few.⁵ The one aspect of the definition of culture that has remained constant is that culture is a ‘complex whole’ which may, or may not, include: ‘knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a person] as a member of society.’⁶ There are two important things to note here: first, that culture is a combination of both behavioural patterns (sometimes studied as ‘material culture’) and beliefs or ideas about the world (or ‘interpretive culture’), and, second, that culture is the living, practiced way of life for a particular society.⁷ In the case of the peoples of Ancient Europe, much of the interpretive culture has been lost, and must be re-interpreted based on archaeological remains and historical documentation, much of which was written by Romans or Romanised people. And then there is the question of society: if culture is tied to societal groupings, it then becomes necessary to also define society.

As with culture in cultural anthropology, society has a varying definitions in the field of sociology. *The Modern Dictionary of Sociology* defines it as ‘[a] group of people with a common and at least somewhat distinct culture who occupy a particular territorial area, have a feeling of unity, and regard themselves as a distinguishable entity.’⁸ Setting aside, for the moment, the circular relationship between society and culture, this seems rather clear, as a broad definition. However, there are also a number of caveats that disrupt the usual academic approach to the study of social groups. For example, many tribes of the Canadian North ‘regard themselves as a distinguishable entity’ from other tribes in the same region, and yet almost all would be included in a broad study of the ‘Inuit’ peoples on the grounds that their cultures are largely

⁵ Barbara D. Miller, Penny Van Esterik, and John Van Esteric, *Cultural Anthropology: Canadian Edition*, (Pearson Education: 2001), p. 15.

⁶ Edward Taylor (1871), quoted in Miller, Van Esterik, and Van Esteric, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 15.

⁷ Miller, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 15.

⁸ George Theodorson and Achilles Theodorson, *A Modern Dictionary of Sociology*, (New York: 1969), p. 398, quoted in Murray Knuttila, *Introducing Sociology*, (OUP: 1996), p. 56.

indistinguishable to the academic eye.⁹ Similarly, there is the difficulty of applying this definition to peoples and cultures of ancient days (such as the Celts): when a society's culture is largely defined by the artefacts left behind and what other people have written about them, and territory can only be guessed at by comparing languages and archaeological remains, and the culture in question left few to no written records for use in determining 'unity' within or self-identification as members of a particular cultural group, it^{is} unreasonable to expect such groups to satisfy all requirements of this definition before they can be studied as a 'society,' or even a 'cultural group' (which implies a less cohesive organisation). Moreover, if culture is defined as existing within a society, and society is defined as having a distinct culture, the two words become more or less interchangeable, and then either the nuances of local cultures or the organisational collaboration between societal groups is lost.

Murray Knuttila suggests a far more generalised definition for his book *Introducing Sociology*: 'the totality of social relationships and interactions among a collectivity of people occupying a territory who, over time, survive by meeting their needs and solving their problems.'¹⁰ This definition has the advantage that it does not rely on self-identification, nor on a (potentially arbitrary) distinction of cultural identity, bypassing the circular logic of the previous definition, but it also lacks precision, which can lead to over-generalisation. Moreover, the caveat that societies must survive by meeting their (own) needs and solving their (own) problems adds confusion to situations where two formerly distinct societal groups, for example a Celtic and a Germanic tribe, might ally against a common problem, for example the Roman conquest: it is unclear if these groups should then be studied as a single organised society, or remain separate. If both tribes happened to have the same cultural or linguistic roots, that is, if both were Celtic,

⁹ Victor F. Valentine and Frank G. Vallee, *Eskimo of the Canadian Arctic*, Carleton Library (1968), p. x.

¹⁰ Knuttila, *Introducing Sociology*, p. 56.

or both were Germanic, the issue becomes even less clear. Based on the complex relationship of culture and society, both should, ideally, be studied individually (the local culture), but within the context of their alliance (the macroculture, which is the 'shared ways of behaving and thinking that cross local boundaries'¹¹); due to the close proximity, general trends of cultural mingling and overlap, and the scarcity of information in many such cases, it is not always possible to determine where one group begins and the other ends, leading to generalisation and misconstrued views of a much larger and unified society than might have actually existed.

Alternatively, society might be considered the primary aspect of material culture: society is limited by the tools available to it, both in terms of concrete, physical tools such as hammers and the availability of resources as well as the legal and political tools of custom and formality. These are concrete manifestations of behaviour, and tend to be shaped collectively by all peoples interacting within a given region, which leads to a certain degree of uniformity and unity within a given territory. The other aspect of culture, the beliefs, worldview, and motivation behind these behavioural manifestations, that is, the interpretive culture, is much harder to identify with any degree of certainty when studying an ancient culture that recorded so few of its own thoughts.

Celtosceptics

The Celtosceptics and the Celticists

These two views of society, and their accompanying cultural implications, are not naturally cohesive, but both are equally valid, in the right circumstances, to the field of sociology.

Nonetheless, the Celticist/post-Celticist debate places these definitions in direct opposition to each other. The Celtosceptics or post-Celticists subscribe more to the strict caveats of the first definition and place priority with the concrete, demonstrable material culture that remains of the

¹¹ Miller, Van Esterik, and Van Esterik, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 15.

societies in question. These academics point out that there is no evidence that all of the groups currently studied as ‘Celtic’ thought of themselves as being a part of a larger societal structure, or even a cohesive cultural group,¹² while the Celtomania or Celticist approach tends to romanticise the European past, seeing in the elusive Celtic peoples an idealised way of life that contrasts the modern disjunction of European society. This approach, by using the second definition of society presented above, and a potentially mis-interpreted reconstruction of the interpretive culture of the peoples in question, paints the Celts as a cohesive civilisation that rivalled the colonising Roman Empire.¹³ The two are diametrically opposed, but, as with sociological and anthropological studies, both approaches have their advantages and drawbacks.

The Celtosceptics or post-Celticists subscribe more to the first definition of society, the one that requires self-identification and collective sense of unity. They argue that ‘[w]e know virtually nothing of the internal implications of being a Celt... in the ancient world.’¹⁴ Collis admits:

there is likely to have been some feeling of common identity across Europe, at the level of a shared language, difficult though mutual comprehension may have been... and probably other aspects of culture may have been shared in common (e.g. religious practices).¹⁵

However, he also stresses that membership in a tribe was the primary source of ethnic identity, and that Caesar’s Celtae were a specific group located exclusively in central Gaul.¹⁶ Only later did Caesar determine that all the peoples east of the Rhine were Germanic, while all the peoples

¹² John Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths and Inventions*, Gloucestershire, Tempus (2003), p.195.

¹³ Jacqueline Borsie, ‘The Secret of the Celts Revisited’, in *Religion & Theology*, 24.1-2 (2017), 130–55, p. 130;

¹⁴ Collis, *The Celts*, p.195.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.195-6.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 195.

to the west were Celtic.¹⁷ Thus, to the Celtosceptics, it is inappropriate to use the term ‘Celt’ in any broad sense, because there is no evidence that groups outside of central Gaul identified as Celtic, or, if they did, what that meant to them. That is to say, there is no evidence that the macroculture of ancient Europe was thought of as being Celtic by anyone other than Caesar, who was an outsider. These are, of course, valid points that raise important avenues of study and discourse for Celtic studies academics. However, the Celtosceptics further argue that the term ‘Celt’ has been so polluted and muddled by its use in inappropriate contexts over the years that it is no longer a valid academic term to use in most situations, if at all,¹⁸ an argument that effectively removes the Celtic ethnicity, which most certainly did exist, from the historical record.¹⁹ Thus, while this approach recognises that the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic maps of ancient Europe are more nuanced and complex than earlier scholars assumed, and challenges the stereotypes identified by the Romans and perpetuated by early academia and its successors, it also highlights the differences among the people, focusing on local cultures, to the exclusion of macroculture or intercultural intersections, thereby erasing the Celts and their influence on the ancient European cultural landscape.

Celtosceptics apply the term ‘Celtomania’ to the Celticist view, which includes most older studies as well as newer studies that are founded in the methodologies and conclusions of the early academics in the field of Celtic studies.²⁰ These studies, which tend to generalise information from across Western Europe, are popular (and profitable) outside the academic sphere, to judge from Sims-Williams’ list of coffee table books,²¹ but they lose ground in

¹⁷ Collis, *The Celts*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism’, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 2-3.

²¹ Ibid, p. 1.

academic fields, where Celtosceptics such as John Collis accuse their conclusions of being nothing but ‘a mishmash of information from different times and different places which is often of little value for understanding the societies being described.’²² The tendency for Celticists to ‘borrow’ evidence from neighbouring territories to fill gaps in the reconstructed narrative of a given group — a practice that is particularly popular in the fields of comparative and reconstructive folklore, where, for example, Irish stories are often used to supplement fragmented or ‘corrupted’ Welsh literature — undoubtedly contributes to this view of the Celticists as being ‘less academic’ than the Celtosceptics, which is not necessarily true. The Celticist approach recognises that, despite the regional, tribal, or cultural differences that existed between distinct groups of people, there were also many linguistic, tribal, and cultural similarities among them, and each group existed within a complex network of trade relations, alliances, enmities, and other aspects of resource management. These studies focus on the macroculture of Ancient Europe, sometimes to the exclusion of local cultures.

The debate has important and tangible repercussions to modern ethnic identification. The adherence to definitions of culture and society that require self identification among groups that left little to no record to convey the sense of their intra- and inter-cultural belonging, means that many modern peoples with a claim to Celticity, though language, customs, art, world-view, or political alliance, must produce additional proof of their Celtic self-identity. As Siân Jones said in relation to this requirement of homogenous identity, ‘many will inevitably fail such a requirement.’²³ Moreover, the term ‘Celtomania’ is inherently derogatory (mania being a form of

²² John Collis, ‘States without Centers? The Middle La Tene Period in Temperate Europe’, in *Celtic Chieftdom, Celtic State: The Evolution of Complex Social Systems in Prehistoric Europe*, edited by Bettina Arnold and D. Blair Gibson (Cambridge, 1995), 75-80, pp. 76-77, Quoted in Sims Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism’, p. 3.

²³ Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, 1997), p. 142, as quoted in Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism,’ p. 4.

obsessive madness), contrasting with the ‘healthy scepticism’ implicit in the term ‘Celtosceptic.’ This serves to cast doubt on the Celticist approaches, analyses, and conclusions that is not explicitly founded in a critique or analysis of the methodology or principles of the studies in question. This, combined with the fact that this demand for self-identification among ancient groups is not present in the discourse of other fields that study ancient cultures, not even the equally ambiguous Germanic peoples. In fact, many of the reasons there is so much debate around who was and was not considered a Celt in ancient times stems from the ambivalent and amorphous use of the term ‘Celt’ by the ancient Romans, who were equally ambivalent in regards to the Germanic tribes.

The Political Nature of Cultural Definitions, Then and Now

The Greeks and Romans are largely responsible for the modern view of ancient Europe, particularly western and central Europe. The problem with this is that the people who shaped this view were not always reliable witnesses: the earliest mentions of the Celts, their culture, and their land are full of mis-conceptions and uncertainties surrounding the geography of mainland Europe,²⁴ and Caesar’s unambiguous declaration that the Celts lived to the west of the Rhine and the Germans to the east had more to do with his colonising designs than any legitimate cultural division. This has caused confusion and disagreement over the nature of both the ancient Celts and the ancient Germans. As Peter Wells puts it:

The Greek and Roman writers defined the categories Celt and German, associated them with particular regions of temperate Europe, and ascribed specific characteristics to the peoples so designated. There is no reason for us to think that all of the groups whom the

²⁴ John Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths, and Inventions*, OUP: 2003.

Classical writers referred to as Celts ever felt that they belonged to a common people, nor that those Caesar and Tacitus called Germans saw themselves as members of a distinct, super-regional population.²⁵

The Romans applied these imposed definitions to both the Celtic and German tribes, so it would be reasonable to expect to find the same territorial and cultural confusion in the field of Germanic studies, but this is not the case.

Germanic studies arose from the highly political agendas of Germany's Third Reich. The earliest contribution to the field of Germanic studies, Tacitus' *Germania*, was used as a foundational text in Germany's National Socialism regime.²⁶ This is not uncommon; a number of fascist dictatorships have used historical studies as a basis for their actions: 'through their attempts to legitimize current abuses of power, they anchor the present as a logical inheritor and descendent of a medieval precursor.'²⁷ Since then, Germanic studies has faced the same political challenges as Medievalism: as white supremacist groups have sought to use the past to justify modern oppressions or dominance, the challenge now is to separate fact from propaganda, and the study of ancient Germanic peoples has become a study of the cultural panoply of peoples who inhabited the region Caesar named Germanic. O'Hara notes that:

To the North German, Scandinavian, and Suebic tribes the term Germani would have designated the people along the Rhine and northern Gallia, but to them it would have had no specific meaning. To these north German Teutonic tribes the territory they inhabited was not Germania, but Suebia, Angrivaria or Cheruscia. The name Germania as a term to

²⁵ 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. 102.

²⁶ Richard Warren, 'C. Krebs, a Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus' *Germania* from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 103 (2013), 346–47, p. 347.

²⁷ Andrew Elliott, 'Internet Medievalism and the White Middle Ages', *History Compass*, 16.3 (2018), e12441–n/a, p. 3.

define all the territory east of the Rhine was a Roman designation. The concept of all the territory east of the Rhine, as one region, could only be a hypothesis developed west of the Rhine.²⁸

Thus, faced with a mythic heritage that was more actively pernicious, if not innately more insidious, than the Celticist's construction, scholars of Germanic studies have worked diligently to uncover the truth of German cultural and ethnic heritage, and the implicit need to prove the multi-ethnic nature of the German past — and counter the supremacist mythos — means that the grand generalisations that characterise the Celticist approach were opposed earlier, and with more impetus than existed in the history of Celtic studies.

In fact, this search for truth has even cast doubt on whether the Germani, the very tribe that gave its name to Germanic and Germany, were originally German in the first place. The close proximity of the people living east of the Rhine would innately ensure that there were some cultural similarities, political alliances, trade relations, and linguistic borrowings between the various occupying tribes.²⁹ However, in regards to the Germani themselves, there is disagreement as to whether the tribe was, in origin, Celtic or Teutonic, with a general trend towards acknowledging that they were a mixture of the two, and whether they were more one than the other depends on whether the study in question favours linguistic, archaeological, or historical evidence.³⁰ Thus, Germanic studies is not free of controversy.

It is important to note that the debate itself is the same, though the circumstances make it appear otherwise. In both the Celtic and Germanic cases, the question is and was over the validity of generalisation and cultural unity. However, because the German construction of unity

²⁸ Charles Joseph O'Hara, 'Celts and Germans of the First Century BC-Second Century AD: An Old Question, a Modern Synthesis' (The University of Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 55-6.

²⁹ O'Hara, 'Celts and Germans', p. 232, 343.

³⁰ O'Hara, 'Celts and Germans,' p. 18-19.

was used by a majority population to suppress and eliminate minorities and people who were outside of that unity, while the Celtic construction was used by minority populations to rally and unite against colonial majority peoples, the question has been met with far different reactions in each field. The Celticists see the question as a ‘critical scrutiny of a minority group’s identity and history by the dominant society rather than vice versa, ultimately perpetuating the relations of power between groups,’³¹ and while this is not be the intent of the question itself, the use of the prejudicial term ‘Celtomania’ to describe the Celticist view, thus turning the Celticists themselves into ‘Celtomaniacs,’ is derogatory and dismissive of academics and studies that have genuinely attempted to discover something of an elusive and uncertain history. On the other hand, the ‘vice versa’ of the quote above, opponents of the multi-ethnic approach of Germanic studies — that is, proponents of the Supremacist world view — are likewise cast out from formal academic circles. However, they are not ridiculed in the same fashion; they do not need to be, as the methodologies that constructed the mythos of a pure, Germanic race, were genuinely flawed, being led by a desire to legitimise and support a modern political regime rather than discover any genuine truth of life in ancient Germany.

All of this indicates that the study of ancient cultures is perennially political. This is particularly evident in Germanic studies, where early conclusions were designed specifically to justify a fascist regime, but the fervour and occasional extremism of the Celticist debate is no less connected to modern politics. The fact is, there would not currently be a modern Celtic identity if Celtic studies academics had not first identified the Celtic origins of modern languages such as Welsh and Gaelic. It was this linguistic commonality that gave already oppressed and repressed minorities in Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and Cornwall a common history of power and

³¹ Sian Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, 1997), p. 142, quoted in Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism’ p. 4.

unity with which to rally against the dominant English society, even as their supposed ancestors once stood against Rome. Now, as cultural studies methodologies grow more sophisticated and less prone to generalisation, that common heritage is threatened, hence the accusation that the Celtosceptic 'attack' on the Celticist understanding of the Celtic peoples is merely another example of how dominant societies scrutinise the identity and history of minority groups, who 'are subjected to a relentless discourse which requires them... to possess a traditional homogenous culture and identity stretching back in a continuous and unilinear fashion into the past.'³² That is to say, by re-writing, or even erasing, the constructed mythos of an ancient heritage of Celticity from the European story, or by suggesting that the term 'Celtic' is inappropriate or invalid, people who have come to identify, culturally or ethnically or nationalistically, with the idea of Celticity feel that their identity is being threatened. This is especially salient as so many modern Celtic nations are the minority in their respective nations: *Bretons* the Gauls of France, or the Irish, Welsh, Cornish, and Scottish of the United Kingdom. The constructed mythos of a unified Celtic nation was not originally meant to unify modern peoples under a single ethnic brand, as the Germanic mythos was designed specifically to do, but the repercussions of removing that mythos from modern discourse may be no less damaging than when the Third Reich attempted to remove the cultural diversity from their view of the European past.

That being said, it now becomes important to note that the Celticists/Celtosceptics are not divided among ethnic or cultural lines: it is not, in the academic world, a Celt versus English debate.³³ However, even if the academics themselves have no specific political agenda, their

³² Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, 1997), p. 142, as quoted in Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism,' p. 4.

³³ Sims Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism,' p. 5.

conclusions, and in some cases merely their observations, taken out of context, can be repurposed as political rhetoric:³⁴ whatever culture or peoples are being studied, there are modern political ideologies that will see the studies as corroborative of or aggressive to their world view. Thus, as German studies must uncover and unpack the multiplicities of German ethnicity, Celtic studies must acknowledge its responsibility with regards to the modern Celtic peoples.

Conclusion

While it may appear unjust to scrutinise the ancient Celtic world and our current interpretations of it, the question is not, in fact, unique to Celtic studies; the general inclination to generalise in regards to ancient peoples has had push back in Germanic studies, as well. It is simply that the modern political situation of those who have adopted or inherited a Celtic ethnicity is very different from the political situation of those who have adopted or inherited German ethnicity. Because the modern Celts are a minority, and a minority whose cultures have been almost universally and consistently under attack from English and French majority populations since before they even knew they were Celtic, the apparent injustice of the Celtosceptic scrutiny is, politically and personally, very real. As such, it is unreasonable and irresponsible to remove the word Celtic from studies of the European world, past or present. Moreover, it is inappropriate for an academic approach to stress the importance of self-identification in the classification of ancient peoples and then insist, or even imply, that self-identification is not enough to qualify as a modern peoples. However, it is equally irresponsible to allow modern politics to define ancient societies. Use of the term in any given study or analysis must therefore be defined within the

³⁴ Elliott, 'Internet Medievalism', p. 1-2.

context of the study, and analyses need to be wary of carrying conclusions further than the evidence can support. The fact is that there are some things researchers may never really know about the peoples of ancient Europe, and that is, perhaps, part of the allure of these *disciplines*.

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Solomatin Assignment 2 Early Celts and Celtoscepticism

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

78/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

Looking firstly at the *content* of the essay, the point about the continuing impact of political ideologies (p. 1) is well made. As noted on page 2, "*culture*" (p. 2) is an extremely woolly and imprecisely defined term, and the plural "*cultures*" even more so. This lack of precision is often the cause of endless conflict across interdisciplinary fields like Celtic Studies, with the "*complex whole*" definition by Edward Tylor (not Taylor) one of the worst offenders. The implication that there will be some kind of correlation between, say, the language, artefacts and social practices of a given "culture" is one of the primary reasons for controversy and disagreement, when real world examples show that these cultural elements do *not* correlate, and can be spread independently of each other.

The point about the "Inuit" peoples of the Canadian North is very well made. As for the relationship between culture and "society" (p. 3), we here hit upon another poorly defined word, which does not allow us "*to determine where one group begins and the other ends*" (p. 5).

The "*concrete, demonstrable material culture*" referred to on page 5 may be subsequently subject to abstract speculation on what the *tangible* evidence tells us about the *intangible* aspects of social life such as power relations, beliefs and social structure. Collis' assertion that "*the tribe was the primary source of ethnic identity*" (p. 6) being a case in point. What aspects of "material culture" could have informed him of this, or also that "*there is likely to have been some feeling of common identity across Europe*"?

Although sometimes the case, there may also be Celticists, principally linguists, who are not romanticising the European past (p. 6), but rather highlighting continuity from past to present via the philological route. Very few, if any, sceptics deny the linguistic link between, say, Gaulish and Welsh. Their objections are based on something else,

usually using Celtic as an "*ethnic*" label, with "*ethnic*" yet another weakly defined term.

This brings us back to Collis' point about the "tribe" being the primary source of identity, and that Caesar's Celtae were a specific group located exclusively in central Gaul. This may indeed be the case. However, the Celtae (like the Belgae) were *not a tribe*! The Aedui, the Arverni, the Bellovaci, the Carnutes, the Senones - *these* were tribes, but also Celtae, as well as "part of some feeling of common identity across Europe" - so we have three different levels of identity at least. There may have been even more *within* individual tribes.

The contrast between the same points being made by a majority as opposed to a minority people, and the connection to politics, is clearly argued (pp 11-12), and the point about the debate not being Celt versus English (p. 13) is also valid. Following from the *Conclusion* (p. 14), it is indeed hard to believe that Edward Lhuyd is thought to have chosen the label "Celtic" as the name for his new branch of languages (rather than Brittonic or Gaulish) at least partially because he felt it was uncontroversial!

This essay is very well written in the main (but note the occasional error) and has approached a difficult topic in a comprehensive manner. It is also willing to express opinions on controversial subjects, and do so with conviction.

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Text Comment. is

PAGE 5

Text Comment. Celtosceptics

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Text Comment. versa

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