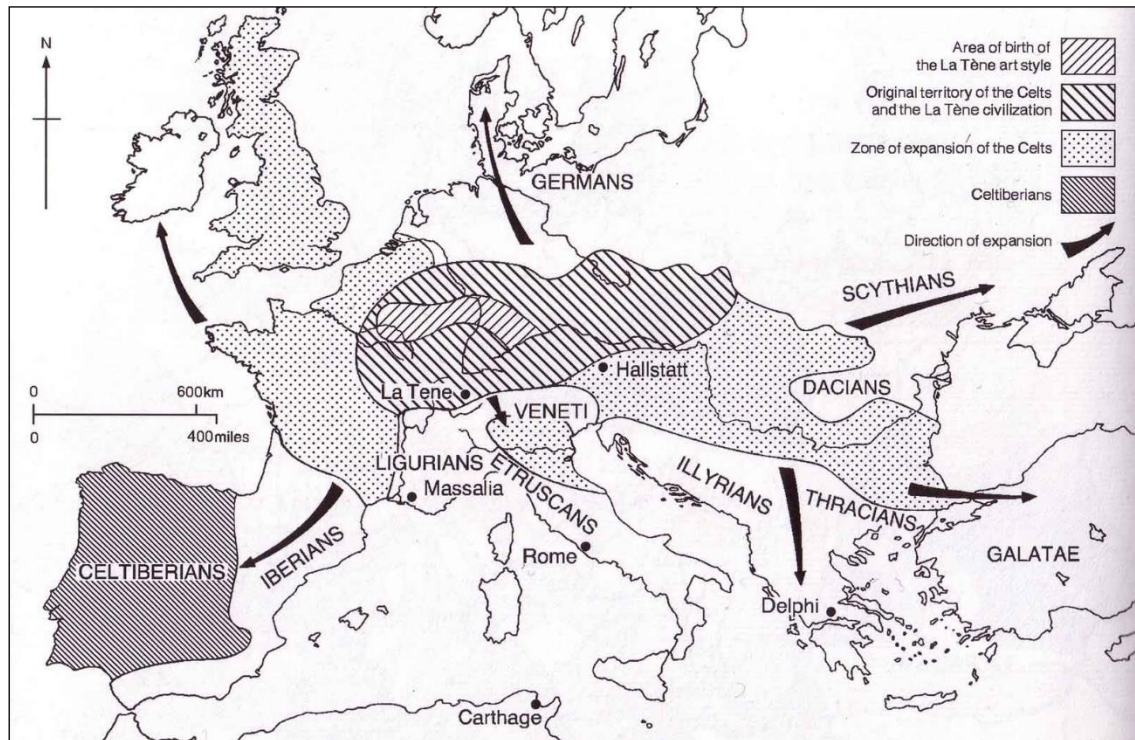


2. ANCIENT CELTS

The linguistic spread of the Celts in ancient Europe has been fairly well established by the distribution of personal- and place-names and is shown in the map below to which we should add Ireland and the area north of Massalia.

Figure 2: Distribution of Ancient Celts



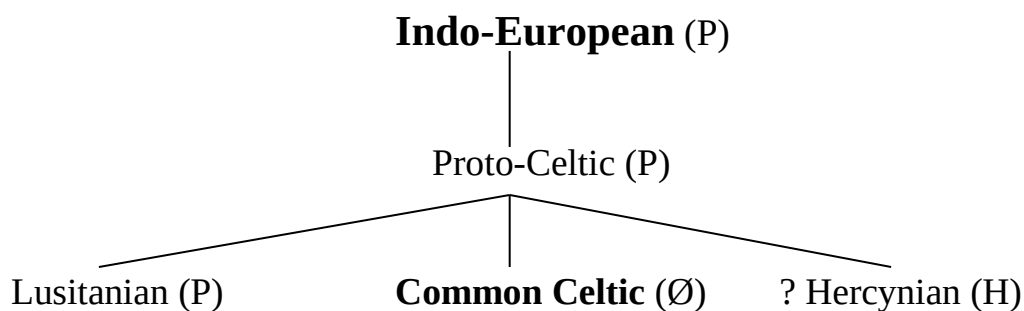
[map from Collis 2003]

2.1 LINGUISTIC DEFINITION OF THE CELTS

Celtic is of Indo-European origin and so is related to other language groups such as Germanic to its north and Italic to its south. It evolved as they did to become separate groups of languages. If we are not able to date the split (lexichronology being unreliable) we nevertheless can define what constituted Celtic as opposed to other Indo-European languages. The oldest diagnostic feature which reveals a language to be Celtic is the loss of the Indo-European <p>, as in Ir. *athair* vs. Lat. *pater* & E. *father*; Ir. *iasc* vs. Lat. *piscis* & E. *fish*; W. *rhyd* vs. Lat. *portus* & E. *ford*. A Lusitanian inscription in western Iberia (Spain/Portugal) which has *porcom* ‘pig’ – in contrast with Ir. *orc* – suggests that we here have evidence of proto-Celtic, a form of Indo-European immediately preceding Celtic (since we cannot call a language that lacks the diagnostic feature

above Celtic). The furthest attestation west of an Indo-European language, Lusitanian's only known Indo-European neighbour was Celtiberian. In Bohemia, on the eastern borders of the Celtic lands, the classical authors knew of the celebrated Hercynian Forest (L. *Hercynia Silua*) whose <h> is a reflex of the Indo-European <p> as it is derived from a postulated **perkwunjā* cognate with Lat. *quercus* & E. *fir* (Delamarre 2001: 139). The preservation of a trace of the Indo-European <p>, again, on the edges of the ancient Celtic-speaking lands suggests that the loss of Indo-European <p> was a 'centre-periphery diffusion' of a linguistic feature (like the ripples caused by a stone cast into in a pond spreading outwards).

Figure 3: The first split (Indo-European <p> is lost)



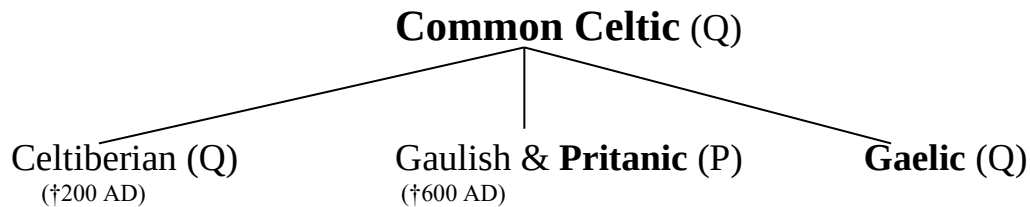
The loss of Indo-European <p> is likely to have spread among the Indo-Europeans of western Europe to 'create' Celts. This loss is likely to have first occurred in a more central location between Portugal and Czechia (Bohemia), most probably southern Germany through eastern France, so that the linguistic evidence agrees with the archaeological evidence of the spread of technical and artistic crafts from an area of central Europe over large areas of western Europe in the first millennium BC (700–450BC Hallstatt Culture, named after Hallstatt near Salzburg, Austria; 450–50BC La Tène Culture, named after La Tène near Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

A second diagnostic feature of significance is the development of an original Celtic <q> to <p>, which divided Celtic languages into the well-known P-Celtic and Q-Celtic varieties. Modern Welsh is a P-variety whilst Modern Irish is a Q-variety as can be demonstrated by W. *pen* vs. I. *ceann*; W. *pawb* vs. Ir. *cách*; W. *pedwar* vs. Ir. *ceathair*. Gaulish (with its Galatian offshoot in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey) as well as Pritanic developed <p> whereas Celtiberian in Iberia (Spain) and Gaelic (Ireland) preserved <q>.

Such a geographical distribution, again, suggests a 'centre-periphery' diffusion model with, again, a novel feature spreading from a central location – again most likely central western Europe – but not attaining the most peripheral locations which preserve an archaic realisation of the sound. Though Celtiberian and Gaelic are both Q-varieties of Celtic it is important to realise that

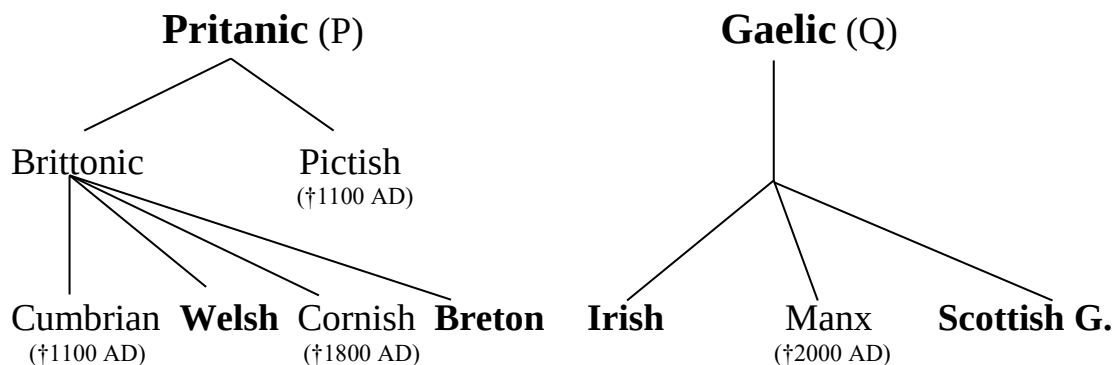
the preservation of an archaic feature does not entail any kind of common development or any specific relationship between them.

Figure 4: The second split (Common Celtic <q> /kw/ becomes <p>)



The only two varieties of Celtic to survive the ancient period were Pritanic and Gaelic in the British Isles (again on the periphery of the Latin-speaking Roman Empire). These varieties were to develop into separate languages and dialects over the centuries to give the well-known modern Celtic languages.

Figure 5: From Ancient Celtic to Neo-Celtic.



Significant internal developments in Pritanic and Gaelic which had established themselves by 600AD at the beginning of the Middle Ages distinguished Neo-Celtic from Ancient Celtic. Ancient Celtic was characterised by case endings whereas Neo-Celtic was characterised by lack of case endings, e.g. Gaul. *māros* vs. W. *mawr* & Ir. *mór*; Gaul. *lica* vs. W. *llech* & Ir. *leac*; Gaul. *dūnon* vs. W. *din* & Ir. *dún*. Unvoiced fricatives such as <ph, ch, th> and grammatical mutation of initial consonants are only attested in Neo-Celtic.

Thus we see that the Celtic languages demonstrate a great deal of variety, both geographically and in time, so much so, in fact, that generalisation of what is a ‘Celtic’ trait is quite hazardous. In linguistic terms – as in many other branches of learning where it is applied – ‘Celtic’ can constitute a useful generic or umbrella term as long as its limitations are recognised.

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2.2 THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CONTINENTAL CELTS (5C BC–1C AD)

Apart from some preceding ethnographical notices relating to remote regions of the then known world of the Classical peoples (Greek and Romans), the Celts make their dramatic appearance in written history with the Great Celtic invasion of Italy in the 390s BC when early Rome was sacked by Brennos. The result of the invasion was that northern Celtic peoples such as the Cenomani, Senones and Boii occupied much of the plain of the Po. The Celtic Insubres around present-day Milan appear to have been somewhat different representing an even earlier Celtic body of settlement in the region which had adapted itself to the urban Mediterranean environment. Their language Lepontic, constitute the oldest attested inscriptions in a Celtic language dating to around 550BC, whether this language was significantly different from transalpine Celtic (Gaulish) or whether the early date of attestation makes it simply an archaic version of Gaulish remains a matter of debate amongst linguists. Following this invasion, for over a century, there was an uneasy peace between the Celts and the Romans, and the territory south of the Alps where the Celts settled came to be known as Cisalpine Gaul (*Gallia Cisalpina*).

Following the expansion of Greek colonies and trade around the inland seas in the period 600–450BC, we find substantial quantities of objects arriving in Central Europe from Mediterranean from the early 6C (500s BC onwards). These Mediterranean objects were luxury goods or any number of vessels pertaining to wine drinking, e.g. amphorae, cauldrons, and this period of acceleration of trade between the Mediterranean and central Europe seems to coincide with the spectacular spread of the distinctive La Tène material culture from 450BC onwards from a central European heartland just north of the Alps and centering around the upper Danube and eastern France. The expansion of La Tène material culture seems intimately linked to the Great Gaulish invasion of Italy and the spread of this archaeological culture in other directions suggests perhaps that there were other undocumented conquests over fellow Celts and other peoples in northern Europe.

The increasing contact between Celts and Mediterranean cultures in 4C BC led to the development of a trade in mercenary Celtic soldiers all over the Mediterranean. These were paid in coins and the first coins minted by the Celts in their homelands were based on the Greek coins of Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great (359–23BC). The first attestations of writing among the Celts north of the Alps are Greek characters marked on pottery. A growing population in the Celtic homelands appears to have made war a way of life for many young men among the Celts. In 280–76BC occurred the Great Celtic invasion of the Balkans, that saw the sack of the great shrine of Delphi (Greece), the establishment of the Galatians in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and the roving of groups of Celts as far east as the plains of the Ukraine. Apart from the Galatians, many of the participants of the great invasion appear to have returned to their homelands in central Europe, and Venceslas Kruta (2000) has hypothesised plausibly, on the basis of archaeological evidence, that it is remnants from the Great Celtic invasion of the Balkans who formed the later Belgae who dominated the north-east of the Celtic lands, using their warlike skills to subjugate kingdoms for themselves.

The Romans finally conquered the Cisalpine Gauls in Italy between 225–191BC and precipitating a return of the powerful Boii to their homeland in southern Bohemia (Czech Republic). Again it has been convincingly demonstrated archaeologically that the large fortified towns (L. *oppida*) of Bohemia date to this period and can be connected to the subjugation of the lands by the returned Boii. The spread of *oppida* in the Celtic world in the first two centuries before Christ demonstrates the adaptation of the Mediterranean urban by the Celts to northern Europe. Each *oppidum* tended to be the centre of a developing political state, a centre of governance, commerce and coin minting. The conquest of the Mediterranean fringe of France in 125–23BC gave the Romans a springboard from which to reach a vast northern hinterland using the Rhone valley and the growth of commerce was palpable as was the growth of native urbanisation in eastern Gaul, as exemplified by Bibracte (present-day Mont Beuvray).

The epic six-year conquest of Gaul (modern-day France) by Julius Caesar and his eight legions constitutes the most dramatic overthrow of Celts by the Romans. An initial period of four years was needed to conquer Gaul (58–54BC), but a great revolt by the Belgae in 53BC and a final revolt by the Gauls under Vercingetorix in 52BC defeated at Alesia (present-day Alise-Sainte-Reine) was needed before Roman domination was established. It has been estimated that Caesar's campaigns were so destructive that over a million people of the six million population of Gaul perished through war, famine or pestilence. The conquest of Gaul established Julius Caesar's subsequent historical reputation as well as political success in Rome which led, almost directly, to the creation of the Roman Empire by Caesar's heir, his great nephew, who became the Emperor Augustus in 27BC. Caesar had conducted short-lived campaigns in 55BC and 54BC

in Britain to quell allies of his Gaulish enemies but were subsequently left in peace by the Romans. These Celtic peoples in lowland Britain, like their continental kinsmen, many of them Belgae, had already adopted oppida and coinage and were incipient states. There had been plans under Augustus to conquer Britain (in 34BC, 27BC and 26BC encouraged by ousted British leaders who wished restitution to power and revenge on their political enemies) but it was 43AD when the Emperor Claudius finally set about the Roman conquest of Britain with four legions (again invited by a discontented ousted ruler). The Romans quickly succeeded in controlling the south-eastern lowlands south-east of a line connecting Exeter and Lincoln. The British leader Caratacus fled to continue the resistance in the hilly country adjoining Wales but he made his last stand in 51AD (having fled to northern England he was promptly handed to the Romans by the queen of the Brigantes). The Romans succeeded a smuch by exploiting divisions among the Britains as by their technological and organisational superiority. The British of northern England were conquered between 68–74AD and between 80–85AD an energetic governor Agricola succeeded in conquering most of southern Scotland to the Highland line (the Romans would subsequently retreat to the erect Hadrian's Wall in the 120s AD and – apart from the period 140–80AD when the Antonine Wall was built between Forth and Clyde – the original wall between Newcastle and Carlisle was the boundary of the Roman province of Britain (north of which the independent Celts were to become the Picts of the earluy medieval times). Intriguingly, during his campaigns, Agricola met a petty Irish king who had been forced to flee his home because of political enemies, he was kept “to be of use on some future occasion”. About 82AD Agricola's legions faced thew Irish coast in preparation for an invasion but a serious rebellion by the northern British leader Calgacus which was defeated at ‘Mons Graupius’ (though to be present-day Bennachie nera Inverurie).

The conquest of the Celts of central Europe north of the Alps is not as well documented as the conquests of Gaul and Britain. Noricum (a federal state), a long-time ally of Rome, located in present-day eastern Austria, was conquered in 16BC and shortly afterwards Rhaetia (western Austria, southern Bavaria) in 15BC and Pannonia (the present-day Hungary) in 9BC were also conquered. These areas were all the easier to conquer as they were beginning to feel the incursions of the Germans. The Germanic Suebi by the 50s BC had moved to present-day south-western Germany and had been pressurising the Gauls before Caesar intervened with his conquest. The area of southern central Germany up to the Main river had been covered by oppida (otherwise unknown in the Germanic world) which suggests that Germans had at some stage overrun Celtic territories (from the existence of Celtic loanwords in early Germanic, linguists posit a preceding period when the technologically superior Celts dominated the Germans). The final nail in the coffin was the conquest in 9BC of the Boii by the Germanic Marcomanni (‘Marcher Men’).

The Celtic peoples of Iberia (present-day Spain and Portugal) were both separated geographically from the northern Celts and lived in a very different Mediterranean ecological environment. The Celtiberians, as they were called, are attested quite early in Classical sources and as neither La Tène influences nor the innovative phonological change <q> to <p> did not reach them, their settlement in Spain is assumed to have been a result of a movement of Celtic expansion earlier than the historical record. They were distributed in the dry upland inland areas of Iberia away from the Mediterranean where they practised pastoralism. In contact with the non-Indo-European Iberians of the Mediterranean coastlands, these inland Celts adopted many features of Iberian culture, not least their writing system derived from the Semitic Phoenicians (who had preceded the Greeks as the traders of the Mediterranean). Urban settlements did not develop until after 200BC and in the contact period they are found divided into myriad separate peoples and states. Roman expansion along the Mediterranean coast was followed in 154–32BC by the conquest of the powerful Celtiberians of central Spain with the last stand being the siege of their capital Numantia. Lusitanians (who may have been para-Celts, see Section 2.1 above) and Celts lived in much of western Iberia and these were later conquered by the Romans with Asturias in the north-west being the last district conquered in 19BC.

The Galatians, initially a part of the Great Celtic invasion of the Balkans had settled in the upland inland areas of Anatolia (present-day Turkey) in the 270s BC. Here they practised pastoralism and regularly raided the urban Greek communities of the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts. In 232BC King Attalus of Pergamon on the Aegean coast defeated the Galatians which led to a statue widely copied in the Classical world ‘The Dying Gaul’ (Gaul and Galatian were synonyms). Confined to the interior the Galatians became another of the many states of Anatolia involved in many local wars (albeit one that preserved its Celtic speech for many centuries). In 2C–1C BC Galatia was dominated either by the Romans or the Pontic state to the north, before being finally conquered and made a client-state of Rome in 64BC. In 25BC Galatia was incorporated as a province of the Roman Empire. Saint Jerome (†420) reported that the Galatians still spoke the same language as the Celtic Treveri of eastern Gaul, which is an astounding example of the preservation of a language in a foreign environment, but it is thought the Galatians were ultimately absorbed into the Greek-speaking eastern half of the Roman Empire.

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2.3 THE ROMANISATION OF THE NORTHERN CELTS (1C BC–5C AD)

In the light of the insufficiency of sources, the romanisation of the Celtic peoples it absorbed into its Empire is a difficult subject. Caesar had certainly conquered Gaul, but it is under the reign of his successor Augustus, after 27BC, that romanisation and the organisation of a Roman province is seen. Planned reorganisation of some official administrative capitals is seen in the removal of the population of the oppidum of Bibracte, which stood on a nearby mountain, to the newly established Roman town Augustodunum (present-day Autun) on the plain. The same

phenomenon is seen in the abandonment of the hilltop settlements of Gergovia, capital of the Arverni and Maiden Castle, capital of the Durotriges, to nearby Roman establishments of Augustonemeton (present-day Clermont-Ferrand) and Durnovaria (Present-day Dorchester) situated on plains. The erstwhile Gaulish peoples or states were transformed by Augustus into civitates (administrative units with some local self-government) and the process of incorporating the Gauls into Latin life was underway. Augustodunum's function, in particular, was to school the sons of Gaulish nobles in Roman (and Latin) ways. A Gaulish rising occurred in 21AD, led by Sacrovir and Florus, but it failed. The assimilation of the Gallic aristocracy was secured when the emperor Claudius (41–54 AD) made them eligible for seats in the Roman Senate and appointed them to governing posts in Gaul. Claudius also ordered the suppression of the druids, the Celtic priests. Native deities were amalgamated with Roman counterparts, and emperor worship was encouraged. The road network was largely completed by 41–68 AD under Claudius and Nero's reigns and this opened what might be termed a 'golden age' of Roman Gaul that lasted until the end of the 2C AD. Thereafter, though the Empire was shaken by forays by Germanic barbarians, internal revolts which in some cases led to splits in the Empire, and widespread peasant revolts, the urban and trade-nexus structure survived and its language was Latin. It seems likely that while Latin was always the language of urban Roman settlements, the countryside remained obdurately Celtic speaking. This changed from the late 4C and is associated with the Christianisation of north-west Gaul by Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours (†397). Christianity had been decreed the official religion of the Empire by Emperor Constantine in 312 but many rural areas remained untouched which explains why the term 'pagan' (L. *paganus*) is derived from the word meaning 'country' (L. *pagus*, F. *pays*, and its derivative *peasants*). Martin by his many preaching and conversion campaigns became the apostle of Gaul and when he died he was buried in the monastery of *Marmoutier* (which is the Latin *monasterium* 'monastery' preceded by the Celtic adjective *māros* 'big' which demonstrates how alive Gaulish was in 4C).

The fact that Celtic speech seems to have succumbed in Gaul in 4C–5C whereas it survived among the Welsh, Cornish and Bretons, descendants of the Roman Britons, suggests a different linguistic scenario in Britain to that which occurred in Gaul. However, it is probably more correctly to see the preservation of Celtic speech at this time the function of remoteness of areas from urban which were centres of latinisation and the centre of gravity of Latin towards the Mediterranean. If this is the case then we should expect a fairly effective latinisation of lowland south-eastern Britain which was concealed by the subsequent Germanic conquest of these lands, the Germanic conquest of England having stopped the latinisation of the remaining British Celtic speakers of the west and north.

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