Celtici
The Celtici are classified as a Celtic tribe. They lived in present-day southern Portugal and southwestern Spain near the non-Celtic TARTESSIANS at least by the first century B.C.E.; they are discussed as CELTS or CELTIBERIANS. Their name indicates that they are classified as a Celtic people, although they were far from the region in north-central Spain that came to be designated as Celtiberia proper.

CELTIBERIANS
The ancient GREEKS first used the name Keltoi in the sixth century B.C.E. to describe people living to the north of their colony of Massilia (modern-day Marseille in southern France), although it is not known what group used this name, if any at all. It was reported by the ROMANS, who used the name Gauls to describe the northern tribes, that some among them referred to themselves collectively by the name CELTAE and one tribe used the name CELTICI.

The group name Celts can be thought of as parallel to that of the ancient GERMANICS, that is, the many different European peoples speaking Germanic languages, known by an array of other names. Perhaps it would be less confusing if the terms were always presented as “Celtic peoples” and “Germanic peoples” to indicate that these are general terms based on language and not on tribal or political organization.

ORIGINS
The identity of the Celts has been a cause of great debate among scholars. The current view, based on archaeological and linguistic evidence

The Extent of Celtic Settlement in the Second and First Millennia B.C.E.
as well as classical texts, is that people in Iron Age Europe and Britain spoke related languages and shared certain cultural traditions, such as the use of a common art style, usually called La Tène. The proposition that there was a single Celtic race is generally discounted in favor of a pan-Celtic culture. Yet scholars still debate over the extent and pervasiveness of that culture. The difficulty of defining the Celts as a people lies in the very different nature of the various sources of evidence about them: archaeology, linguistics, and written accounts by contemporaries.
The Celts are the first northern European people to be recognized and described by Mediterranean civilization. The archaeological record tends to provide a long view of cultural change and differentiation—archaeologists paint with a broad brush compared to historians. The picture of European prehistory shows long continuities and very slow evolutionary change; this is no less true for the Celtic Iron Age than for earlier periods. To archaeologists the Iron Age shows as much continuity with previous eras as difference. The tribes who were called Keltoi by the Greeks had a culture not so different from that of the Bronze Age Bell Beaker culture that dominated Europe during the second millennium B.C.E. With the emergence of written history about “barbarian” Europe, the time scale speeds up dramatically, and the dwellers in Iron Age roundhouses step onto the stage of world history as actors with distinct names, costumes, and traits. The challenge in studying and classifying these people is to strike a balance between the impression of marked differences among peoples in different eras and regions that ancient writers give and the picture of broad cultural commonalities given by archaeology.

Archaeology provides concrete evidence that the Celts were the people living in the part of Europe occupied by modern-day Poland, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Switzerland, Germany, northern Spain, France, and the British Isles during the Iron Age. Earlier theories that the Celts overran Europe from a variously located homeland to the east are now widely discounted. The Celts were the descendants of the tribes of the Bell Beaker and other Bronze Age cultures and before that of the peoples of the Neolithic cultures that developed after the introduction of farming practices to Europe.

During the Late Bronze Age several important cultural phenomena that may have coincided with the emergence of a distinctive “Celtic” culture appeared. One of these was the almost universal shift from burial to cremation of the dead and the burial of their ashes in urns, which gives the period the name Urnfield. A marked trend toward fortification began around 1100 B.C.E., with hilltop forts or timber stockades on lower ground being built over a wide region. In some areas burials were more elaborate and ostentatious than ever before and included large amounts of grave goods, many of them from far away, evidence of wide-ranging trade networks. One of the richest burial grounds has been found at Hallstatt in the Austrian Alps, where salt was mined on a large scale. Changes, too, were occurring during this time in settlement and subsistence patterns. In all, this period saw a series of revolutions in most aspects of life.

### LANGUAGE

Celtic languages were descended from the postulated proto-Indo-European language, the ancestor of nearly all modern European languages.

The Celtic languages were the product of the process of language drift whereby languages diverge from one another at a more or less steady rate when population groups of speakers are separated from one another. The different branches of the Celtic language group slowly evolved from proto-Indo-European in situ in the different regions mentioned. During the Iron Age differentiation between languages in these regions had not reached a point at which their essential family relationship had disappeared. The Germanic languages of peoples living during the latter Iron Age in the north European

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**Celts time line**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B.C.E.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after 1300</td>
<td>Late Bronze Age emergence of some elements of distinctive Celtic culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>1000–800</td>
<td>Hallstatt culture spreads north of Alps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>Greeks found trading center of Massilia (Marseille) in Celtic territory near mouth of Rhône River in southern France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 500</td>
<td>Earliest historical mention of Celts by Greek geographer Hecataeus of Miletus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>fifth century</td>
<td>Etruscans establish trade routes through Alps to Rhine-Moselle region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late fifth century</td>
<td>Greek and Etruscan trade with Celts halted by warfare with Romans; mass migrations of Celts into Italy and Balkans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>335</td>
<td>Alexander the Great receives delegation of Celtic tribal leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third century</td>
<td>Celts move south through Macedonia and into Greece; Celts under Brennus reach Delphi; no permanent settlements are made in Greece; Celts move into Anatolia in Asia Minor, causing widespread destruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230</td>
<td>Attalus of Pergamon decisively defeats Celtic army.</td>
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<tr>
<td>first century</td>
<td>Romans under Caesar and others conquer Gaul; Caesar attempts to invade Britain.</td>
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<th>C.E.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>first century</td>
<td>Romans conquer Britain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>first to fifth centuries</td>
<td>Celtic lands of central Europe overrun by Germanic tribes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifth to sixth centuries</td>
<td>Gaul and southeastern Britain conquered by Germanic tribes; Celtic culture survives in parts of Britain, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland and in Brittany in France.</td>
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plain, who were to displace the Celts, developed in the same way.

The different Celtic languages, including those currently known in England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Brittany peninsula of northwestern France as well as those that must have been spoken in other Celtic lands, now lost, evolved from a common ancestor, called by linguists Common Celtic. Common Celtic is divided into Continental Celtic on the mainland and Insular Celtic on the British Isles. It is theorized that Common Celtic diverged from Indo-European in central temperate Europe about the same time as Italic and Germanic languages developed on the Italian peninsula and the northern European plain, respectively.

Continental Celtic includes Gaulish (Gaulish; Gallic), Celto-Iberian (or Hispano-Celtic), and Lepontic, all now extinct. Insular Celtic includes the Brythonic branch, including Breton, Welsh, and the now-extinct Cornish, and the Gaelic (or Goidelic) branch, which includes Irish, Scottish, and the near-extinct Manx.

The earliest Celtic writing is found in ogham inscriptions from the fourth century C.E., a form of writing in which letters are represented by groups of strokes and notches, which appears on stone monuments.

HISTORY

Celts in the Iron Age: Contact with Greeks

The earliest historical mention of the Keltoi dates from the sixth–fifth century B.C.E. by Greek geographer Hecataeus of Miletus. His writings survive only in fragments, but he is considered a main source of the fifth-century B.C.E. historian Herodotus, who also mentions the Keltoi. Yet it is likely that the Celtic tribes the Greeks encountered in the early sixth century B.C.E. had been in their territories and speaking Celtic languages for a long time, as early as the Late Bronze Age (1300–800 B.C.E.) or even earlier. Cultural trends that began after 1300 B.C.E. still largely prevailed eight centuries later.

In the eighth century B.C.E. the city-states of the Greeks were beginning to coalesce; urban growth was accompanied by rapid population growth that the farmlands on the Greek mainland could not sustain. Overpopulation and the need for raw materials led to emigration and trading ventures on a large scale both eastward to the corn lands of the Pontic steppe south of the Black Sea and westward to metal-rich Etruria on the Italian Peninsula. Intensive trade with the latter region was under way by at least 770 B.C.E., and Greeks established trading emporia around this time on the island of Ischia in the northern part of the Bay of Naples. Greek traders steadily extended trade routes westward, in the land-hugging style of navigation of the time, which, for example, followed the coast around the Italian boot and then along the south coast of present-day France. In 600 B.C.E. the Greeks founded Massalia (present-day Marseille) near the mouth of the Rhône River. The Rhône became the highway north to the lands of tribes of the Hallstatt culture, the earliest culture definitely associated with the Celts.

Competition with the Carthaginians of northern Africa for trade with mineral-rich Tartessos on the Iberian Peninsula forced the Greeks to focus their energies northward, and during the sixth century Massilia developed rapidly for the purpose of controlling both the Rhône valley leading north and the route through the Carcassonne Gap and along the Garonne and Gironde Rivers to Celtic tribes and the rich sources of tin to the north and west.

Contact with Greek civilization had a profound effect on the societies with whom they traded. Products of Greek artistic genius such as finely crafted metalware, painted amphorae, and other pottery dazzled the northerners and were avidly sought. Possession of such exotic goods exalted the status of chieftains, and goods of lesser quality were passed on to retainers in cycles of gift exchange. Emulation by local craftsmen stimulated them to develop the distinctive Hallstatt and later La Tène craft styles. And tribes immediately adjacent to the Greek trading areas, controlling the flow of goods farther inland, grew immensely rich. Commodities associated with wine drinking were especially favored in the Hallstatt region; great numbers of wine-filled amphorae were carried to the north as wine replaced mead and beer in drinking rituals.

The leading households of the west Hallstatt zone in southern France competed for trading access to the Greeks, as shown in the relative richness of burials over time in different regions. Trade varied also because of the activities of the Greeks’ competitors, the Etruscans. The Greeks tightened their control over the Rhône trade route in part as a result of conflict during the sixth century with the Etruscans. Yet by the fifth century B.C.E. the Etruscans had found trade routes bypassing the Rhône, which led through Alpine passes to the Rhine-Moselle region, where high-quality iron ore was available, such as in the Hunsrück-Eifel region.
The tribes in the Rhine-Moselle region had already begun to develop a society of elites, possibly because of their involvement in providing slaves to the Hallstatt elite for trade with the Greeks. Now with direct contact to the Mediterranean luxury trade, they in their turn became rich. Etruscan influence on the tribes here is shown in their adoption of the Etruscan-style two-wheeled chariot and in the flowering of the richly inventive La Tène art style. The waxing of fortunes in this region coincided with the waning of the west Hallstatt system, whether this came about through direct aggression from the La Tène tribes, internal instability, or a diminution in the flow of Mediterranean goods is unclear. After 450 B.C.E. the Greek and Etruscan trading networks were under increasing stress from the growing power of expansionist Rome until, by the end of the fifth century, they had been completely disrupted by continual warfare in the western Mediterranean. The collapse of the west Hallstatt trading system may have been a consequence of this disruption or of an instability inherent in the custom of gift exchange, as aspiring leaders among the warrior class required war to win spoils for followers. Thus raiding of neighbors was endemic, and warfare was an essential part of the social system.

The absence of luxury items from Greece may have been part of the stimulus for the development of the La Tène style in the Rhine-Moselle region, as native craftsmen strove to fill the vacuum. For a time La Tène craftsmen managed to create enough prestige goods to maintain social equilibrium despite the loss of the Mediterranean trade. However, a rapid population increase, documented in the growth of the number of cemeteries during the fifth century B.C.E., greatly exacerbated matters. Together these factors resulted in what has been called a major system collapse, which led to a period of large-scale migrations.

That population increase caused the migrations was also documented by classical writers; the Roman Pompeius Trogus of the late first century B.C.E. said that the Gauls (the term the Romans used for all Celtic tribes, which has also been applied to those who inhabited a specific region known as Gaul) had outgrown their region and sent 300,000 men away to seek new lands. According to the Roman historian Livy (of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.), King Ambigatus of the Bituriges, a powerful Gallic tribe, possibly as early as the sixth century B.C.E., in order to rid his kingdom of the throng of unruly warriors and their families, chose two young kinsmen, Bellovesus and Segovesus, to lead a mass migration, one group to go east to the Danube River and the other to Italy. Livy’s account may indicate another cause for the migration: the consolidation of power in fewer hands, leading chieftains to wish to rid their kingdoms of the constant raiding by younger members of the warrior class, for whom military exploits were the means to prove themselves. This tension between forces inherently at odds would be seen again and again in the succeeding centuries, for example, among the Germanic tribes who helped bring about the fall of the Roman Empire, and among the Vikings, who raided throughout Europe, and among the Slavs, who slowly gained territory.

The significant decrease in cemeteries in the Rhine-Moselle region strongly suggests that these initial mass migrations emanated from there.

The Celtic Invasion of Greece

Evidence from cemeteries provides evidence of where the migrating groups went: southward down the Po River valley into Italy and eastward along the Danube into present-day Hungary and on to Transylvania in present-day Romania. The archaeological record and the writings of classical historians agree about the movements of tribes from the Rhine-Moselle region to the east: They traveled along the Danube into Transdanubia (eastern Hungary) in the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E., founding substantial settlements near the Carpathian Mountains and Transylvanian Alps in Romania. In the latter part of the fourth century B.C.E. they launched raids from Transdanubia southward into Illyria (east Adriatic coast) and between 300 and 280 B.C.E. into present-day Bulgaria. In 335 B.C.E. Alexander the Great of the Macedonians received delegations of Celts living near the Adriatic. In 279 B.C.E. Celts migrated to Macedonia; they consisted of three groups, one of which eventually moved into Serbia, another to Thrace; the third, led by a chieftain of the Galatoi called Brennus, passed beyond Thrace and through the Pass of Thermopylae and penetrated deep into Greece as far as Delphi, probably attracted by tales of the great wealth that adorned Apollo’s shrine. This campaign failed because of severe winter weather, and the Celts fell back to Macedonia; many joined other Celtic groups in the Danube basin.

The combined groups became known as the Scordisci, whose major oppidum (town) was Singidunum, on the site of present-day Belgrade in Yugoslavia. Three tribes, the
Tectosages, Tolistobogii, and Trocmi, moved into Anatolia (Asia Minor), where they created widespread havoc. By 276 B.C.E. they had settled in parts of Phrygia but continued raiding and pillaging until finally quelled by Attalus I of Pergamum, a Greek kingdom in western Asia Minor, in about 230 B.C.E. They were called the Galatoi or Galatians. In the name Galatoi are echoes both of Galli and of Keltoi, implying an ancient connection.

Perhaps as a result of this restless movement of Celtic tribes, of which the only extant historical record concerns the migrations into Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor from about 450 to 200 B.C.E., the culture across a broad swath of Europe, from France to northern Italy to Poland and Transylvania, remained remarkably uniform. There was even an outpost of Celtic culture on the Iberian Peninsula, where Celtic tribes had migrated perhaps by the sixth century B.C.E.; they are classified as Celtiberians. The La Tène style is found in artifacts throughout this region, spread perhaps in part through migration of whole tribes, but also in part by trade. Warrior burials from this period are found throughout the La Tène zone, attesting to the continued importance of warfare; by the end, however, dense settlements of farmsteads and villages, with signs of increasing craft specialization, point to the emergence of greater social stability and the ascendancy of the arts of peace rather than of war.

Celts and the Roman Empire

The shock wave of the La Tène systems collapse, which sent one group of tribesmen to Italy, ultimately set them in conflict with the greatest power of the day, the Roman Republic. The region in Italy settled by the Gauls in the first wave of migration during the fourth century B.C.E. was called Cisalpine Gaul (thatis, Gaul on this side of the Alps), as opposed to Transalpine Gaul (Gaul across the Alps). Cisalpine Gaul was divided into Cispadane Gaul (Gaul on this side the Po) and Transpadane Gaul (Gaul across the Po). Transalpine Gaul (modern France and the Rhineland) was subdued by the Roman general Julius Caesar in the first century B.C.E., and most of Britain was under Roman rule in the first century C.E. In the same period the Celts of central Europe became dominated by Germanic-speaking peoples. In the latter centuries of the Roman Empire, Germanic tribes placed increasing pressure on Roman Gaul and Britain, eventually overrunning large parts of both provinces.

Celts of the Atlantic Coastal Zone

Western coastal Europe differed to some extent from this pan-European Celtic culture. Groups of Galls in western France, for example, in Aquitania (in the southwest) and Armorica (modern Brittany in the northwest), preserved their own distinct culture and when imitating La Tène elements adapted them to suit local taste. The same is true for the Britons of Britain. There are exceptions to this; vehicle burials in Yorkshire, for example, show close similarities with those in the Seine valley. The Yorkshire tribe were called Parisii; the similarity of the name with that of a tribe in the Seine valley strongly suggesting a tribal migration. Belgae from Gaul had settled in southeastern Britain by the first century B.C.E.

Germanic Europe beyond the La Tène Zone

As for Europe north of a line drawn from the mouth of the Rhine eastward to the Sudetan Mountains and on to the Carpathian Mountains, the people continued to live the “longhouse lives” (referring to the Neolithic building style) their ancestors had practiced since farming arrived there in the Neolithic Age, untouched by events to the south. In their isolation they were slowly evolving the language family ancestral to the Germanic languages of today.

Modern Celts

Except for isolated pockets in areas of the British Isles and France, which once were on the far fringes of the Celtic world, the pan-Celtic culture was swept away by forces set in motion by the Roman Empire and its collapse. In medieval times and to the present the Celtic tradition and languages have survived in Brittany (in western France), Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, the Scottish Highlands, and Ireland, where they are identified as Bretons, Welsh, Cornish, Manx, Scots, and Irish.

Culture

Economy

Early Farming Practices After 1300 B.C.E. and the probable emergence of Celtic culture farming practices maintained continuity with the past in that a variety of crops were grown. New crops added to this mix changed the character of farming in several ways. In the past different varieties of wheat and barley dominated grain crops, accompanied by legumes such as lentils and peas. But now millet and rye began to be grown throughout Europe; oil-bearing plants such as flax and poppy began to be important,
along with broad or Celtic beans. Common characteristics of these newcomers are their easy and prolific growth and their ability to flourish in harsh climate conditions. Millet is able to withstand drought and has a short growing span; in historic times millet was known as the crop of the poor, to be used not only in unleavened bread but also in porridges and fermented drinks. Millet became important in central and northern Europe during the Early Iron Age. Celtic beans, nitrogen fixers that improve soil fertility, can grow in a variety of conditions, including cool, moist weather. The oil-bearing plants have a high protein content, making them very nutritious, and they have a delicious taste, as the name of one of them, gold-of-pleasure, attests. Seeds of this plant were sprinkled on a loaf of bread found at the Early Iron Age site of Aggtelek in Hungary.

Not only the crops changed, but field systems did as well. Although the majority of fields in central Europe were cultivated by the beginning of the Bronze Age, their layout changed significantly in a number of regions after 1300 B.C.E. Previously field systems had consisted of many small fields workable by single families. Now long dykes were driven through this mosaic, creating much larger subdivisions of the countryside, which amounted in size to large ranches or estates. This phenomenon is found in Britain particularly; in Wessex the numerous hill forts are clearly related to these greatly enlarged systems of fields and linear boundaries. Hill forts contained large granaries; whether the grain stored in these was used to enrich single chieftains or to supply whole tribes in times of famine is unclear.

During this period large wild as well as domestic animals continued to be exploited, including wild cattle called aurochs and very large wild pigs. Red deer and a wide range of small mammals, as well as birds and fish, were important. Among domestic animals cattle and pigs were most important in Celtic regions; large numbers of cattle were herded in groups sorted as to age and sex. In Hallstatt Poland pigs predominated. Bees would have been kept, although evidence for this practice is scant. After 1300 B.C.E. horses took on a new importance, as evidenced by the appearance of ornate bronze and iron horse trappings in burials over a wide region of eastern Europe.

**Iron Age Farming** Cattle were used by Celts of the Iron Age mostly to work as draft animals and to supply milk; the primary meat animal was the pig. Milk and milk products and fresh and salted pork were the mainstays of the Celtic diet, along with porridge made of barley bran; breads from emmer wheat, spelt, oats, and rye; and legumes. Flax was grown for linen and linseed oil. Poppies were also grown; whether they were used to obtain opium is unknown.

Investigation of the large *oppida* (fortified settlements) that developed toward the end of the Celtic era has shown that, despite their large size, they were not true cities. Instead they were enclosed villages in which much of the acreage was given over to farm fields. Almost all of the food eaten in the *oppida* was produced there, and there are few signs of “urban” eating habits involving exotic imported foods such as spices or fruits such as figs that could be grown only in the south. The only foodstuff imported—and that in large quantities—was wine.

In general, Iron Age Celtic farming had changed little from that of the Bronze Age, either in crops or in animals. All of the Celtic domestic breeds were ancient, primitive forms little changed from those of the Neolithic, demonstrating a low level of animal husbandry in terms of attempts to improve breeds. Celtic cattle were the smallest in the history of cattle evolution, with a slender build, short horns, and narrow skull. Roman cattle were about six inches taller. Celtic pigs were similarly small and primitive. Surprisingly, considering the high regard Celts had for the horse, they were not skillful horse breeders. Celtic horses were much too small to ride and were used instead to pull chariots or carts. When Celtic chieftains wanted larger horses, they imported them from the Scythians in the steppe regions of eastern Europe, as indicated by eastern horse trappings found in burials. The Scythians also introduced chickens to Europe, and the Celts were most responsible for their spread, although they did not keep them in large numbers. They may have kept geese and ducks; their domestication is hard to determine archaeologically, since domestic animals differ little from wild breeds in skeletal structure.

In contrast to diets in the Bronze Age, wild animals were largely absent from those of Iron Age Celts in some regions—whether because of the shrinkage of forests and overhunting, or because of religious taboos, is not known. Of all their domestic animals, including the dog, only horses were apparently never eaten by the Celts.

**Trade** By the Late Bronze Age, although the quantity of goods traded was not great, thriving, long-range trading contacts across the putative Celtic regions of Europe were well established.
Trade at this time was completely intertwined with social relations; centralized market economies using coinage as a “socially neutral” medium of exchange, which allowed complete strangers to do business with one another, existed only in the cities of the Near East. In the Celtic regions goods moved through a continuous series of face-to-face gift exchanges or barter. Despite the essentially local nature of such exchanges, goods moved over long distances, as documented in recoveries from shipwrecks. A shipwreck off the coast of Turkey from this period revealed swords made in the style of smiths on the Atlantic coast as far north as Britain, as well as goods from a wide range of localities. The distribution of particular styles of metalworking over a wide area also demonstrates long-range contacts; for example, a sword type called Rossen has been found from Britain to Czechoslovakia.

An extremely important commodity new to trade at this time was salt from the Austrian Alps, mined and made in evaporation pools at Hallstatt and present-day Hallein (also in the Austrian Alps). Burials in cemeteries in the area from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages contain valuable objects from both north and south of the Alps, suggesting both the extent of the salt trade and the wealth it generated. One large cemetery near Hallstatt contained 2,000 burials. Salt mining began around 1000 B.C.E.; after 750 B.C.E. the amount being mined increased significantly. More than 3,000 square feet of galleries, which would have provided 2 million cubic meters of salt, were dug.

Some glass beads found in Europe were made of glass of a composition similar to that of glass made in the Near East; the Ulu Burun shipwreck off the coast of Turkey, dated to around 2500 B.C.E., carried raw glass ingots from the Near East, possibly evidence that such glass could have found its way to Europe via the Greeks. Amber was traded in large quantities from northern Europe to Mycenaean Greece.

In the first century B.C.E. trade flourished at Hengistbury Head in Dorset in Britain. Quantities of wine amphorae from the mainland and metal ores from Devon and Cornwall found at Hengistbury suggest that heavy cargoes were unloaded there; evidence for large numbers of cattle, together with signs of butchery and leather dressing, suggest that return cargoes may frequently have consisted largely of dry animal hides. The Greek geographer Strabo of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. includes hides in his list of British exports; according to Caesar, the Veneti used those hides to make sails for their ships, among other products.

**Government and Society**

**Bronze Age Warrior Ideology** The pan-European Iron Age Celtic culture with its warrior class is thought to have descended from a warrior class already present in the Bronze Age. This emerged not in one place but in parallel all over Celtic Europe, sparked by the spread of what is called the Bell Beaker ideology around 2500 B.C.E.

This movement of ideas and, possibly, of people may be linked to the transformation known from archaeological evidence to have occurred at this time over large areas of Europe. Values and practices dating to the adoption of farming at the beginning of the Neolithic Age were replaced with new values held by an elite warrior class that emerged at this time, known from burials containing finely wrought bronze weapons, armor, and other prestige items. The common theme throughout those elements that distinguish the Celtic cultural complex—from the hill forts to the exquisitely wrought artifacts of the La Tène style—may have had its distant beginnings in this Early Bronze Age ideology based around the values of individuality and aggression. For people at this time the possession of valuable goods, whether cattle or objects of precious metals infused with the magic art of the smith, are proofs of bravery and the favor of the gods.

**Political Power of Priests** What may distinguish the Celtic warrior ideology from the very similar ideologies of later peoples, such as the Germanics, is another set of values held by a class of Celtic society equal in importance to the warrior class: that of the priestly order called the Druids. The signal importance for the Celts of the Druids, who in a real sense seem to have out-ranked any other social class and were the equals of kings, may be the most distinguishing feature of the Celts when compared to other warrior societies in Europe. The building of Stonehenge in Britain could have come about through a compromise between bearers of the Bell Beaker Culture, the first people in Europe who followed an individualistic warrior lifestyle, and people for whom the great communal rituals held in henge monuments, which had emerged earlier during the Neolithic Age, remained important. The distant ancestors of the Druids may have been priestly elites who directed the building of the great Neolithic monuments such as the stone circle and giant
henge at Avebury, the stone alignments of Carnac in Brittany in France, Maes Howe stone mound in Orkney, the Callanish stone circle in Scotland, and New Grange in Ireland.

The values of the Druids, the importance of learning and the arts and of communality among a people as a whole as a counterweight to the sometimes destructive individualism of warriors, devotion to the gods, the sacredness of the land, equality of women (who could become Druids) and the importance of goddesses, may have been a continuation of values of Neolithic times before warfare had assumed its later importance.

The Romans took the Druids’ political power very seriously. The emperors Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. all issued edicts to curb Druidic activity, which suggest its continuing strength. Suetonius Paullinus deliberately attacked the British Druidic stronghold on the island of Anglesey off the Welsh coast in 60 C.E. as a means of quelling British resistance to Roman rule. The Romans believed that Druids used their prophetic powers to incite rebellion against Roman order.

A World of Farmers The archaeological evidence suggests that farmers made up the overwhelming majority of the population. The splendid weaponry and other accoutrements found in warriors’ graves has fostered a picture of Celtic society in which warriors and chieftains had more prominence than they did in reality. The common image of a Celtic warrior society led by a chief or king may reflect an exception rather than the rule. Reassessment of evidence from the fortified hilltop settlements known as hill forts suggests they were often used as much for display or symbol as for defense. At the same time new studies contradict the idea that hill forts were typically the residences of chieftains since clear evidence of an aristocracy is hard to find. Instead the evidence points to a more communal and a relatively egalitarian society of small, competitive farming families in many areas of Iron Age Europe.

Gift Exchange The exceptions to this egalitarian state were found among tribes living near the borders of the Greco-Roman world or having access to Mediterranean trade goods, for whom the gift-exchange cycles seem to have led to greater social differentiation. More successful traders gathered ever more followers, exerting ever greater influence the richer they became and ever greater control of military power and trade.

Differentiation The Iron Age differed considerably across Europe. Although there were contacts and shared cultural elements, the differences in all aspects of life between neighboring areas are as evident as the similarities. One region might bury its dead in graves with grave goods, for instance, whereas in the next burials are absent. Areas differed as to whether they had hill forts and settlements enclosed by substantial earthworks or open settlements. Clearly groups had a great deal of contact with one another; it is probable that trade and marriages among different groups were common. But it must have been important for tribes to mark out their particular differences and their sense of their own uniqueness.

Class System According to various classical authors and the ancient Irish Brehon Law, tribes were divided into three classes: kings, of which there were different ranks; warrior aristocracy; and freemen farmers. In Ireland there were local kings ruling tribes, regional kings ruling provinces, and the High King of all of Ireland. The Druids, the priestly caste, were recruited from families of the warrior class but ranked higher. Caesar distinguished between men of religion and learning, warriors, and commoners. As in other Indo-European systems, the family was patriarchal.

Drinking and Feasting The inclusion of feasting equipment—drinking horns, a cauldron, and alcohol—in princely tombs provides clear evidence for the importance of feasting in Celtic Europe. Every undisturbed, elite burial found on the mainland from the late Hallstatt and early La Tène periods contains feasting and drinking equipment. In addition classical sources and the insular literature of Ireland and Wales provide abundant testimony that the ability to give mighty feasts with bountiful alcoholic drink was a key part of a leader’s claim to rule.

Since the Corded Ware period in the Late Neolithic, ceramic vessel sets, probably used to consume beer or mead, had appeared mainly in male burials. By the Bronze Age drinking vessels were being made of sheet metal, primarily bronze or gold. However, the importance of feasting in Celtic society increased greatly in the late Hallstatt period, soon after the foundation of the Greek colony of Massilia. Afterward wine in amphorae was traded north and east along major river systems together with metal and ceramic drinking vessels from the Greek world.
The rarity of wine and a chieftain's display of impressive imported goods added to the impact of his feasts on his followers. Classical authors emphasize the value of wine to northeners, adding that the lower classes drank wheaten beer prepared with honey.

Classical texts suggest that the layout of feasters, a chieftain, and his retinue sitting in a circle around a central hearth or fireplace had an almost ritual social significance. The alcoholic beverage circulated among them in a common cup with the chieftain taking the first draft, then sending it along among his followers, an act symbolic of his generosity. The sharing of the common cup may also have symbolized a common bond among the chieftain and his followers. Alcohol helped reduce social distance, suspicion, and rivalries. On the other hand several authors point to the seating arrangements as reflecting a hierarchy within the retinue, as those closest to the leader of the group received the largest quantity of liquor and the choicest cut of meat, both symbolic of favored status. Music was very probably a part of these feasts, with bards celebrating the warriors' deeds and those of their ancestors. Classical texts report that Celtic feasting involved bragging competitions that frequently led to brawls, even death.

The literature of medieval Ireland gives many details of feasts; literature among the Celts of later times was rooted in part in the storytelling that was an integral part of feasting. Vessels made of bronze, gold, wood, horn, and pottery are described in the Irish literature, and these correspond to archaeological finds from the Early Iron Age on the mainland and in the British Isles. The social symbolism of drinking is reflected in the connection between the Irish words laith (liquor) and flaith (sovereignty or lordship): laith flowing in abundance from the fount of flaith. Drinking horns, which were among the finds at Halstatt Burials, are frequently referred to in Irish poetry as symbols of authority and kingship, and as late as the 15th century a 300-year-old drinking horn was cited by the Kavanagh family as the basis for their claim to the kingship of Leinster.

The construction of swords shows that although certain sword types were used across Europe, they were modified into differing regional styles. Although only metal armor has survived, it was probably used only for display or for intimidation of opponents, perhaps in an attempt to make them believe they were confronting men of bronze; bronze armor offered no protection against sword blows and leather or wood would have been much more effective. A number of bronze shields have been found in northwestern Europe, especially on the British Isles.

The sword, first developed in the Middle Bronze Age in the eastern Alpine area, was central to the warrior's panoply, judging by the rapid evolution of different forms, indicating a kind of Bronze Age arms race to maintain technical superiority. Swords that have been found show signs of wear and repeated sharpening, attesting to their importance to their owners. A prevalent sword type was a long slashing sword called the "carp's tongue" from the shape of its tang. In Britain the first true swords were imported from the Rhineland from about 950 B.C.E. Although certain sword types were used across Europe, they were modified into differing regional styles. The construction of swords shows that although some were obviously functional, others must have been used only for display.

The Urnfield period saw the beginning of widespread building of protective ramparts and ditches around settlements, often on hills but also on lower ground. Forts at first had timber ramparts; they were later reinforced by wooden frames faced with stone and filled with rubble, and sloping revetment banks. The distribution of such forts in southwestern Germany was very even, with forts every 10 to 15 kilometers (six to 10 miles), apparently serving a thinly distributed population, again suggesting the small scale of military operations and the relative lack of social differentiation. Such forts usually seem to have had only a short lifetime before being destroyed.
The use of horses to pull chariots increased steadily through this period and into the Iron Age, as shown by the numbers of metal bits and cheek pieces found. After 800 B.C.E. many graves began to contain horse-riding equipment, coinciding in time with a westward movement of peoples, recorded by Herodotus, from the steppe lands to the east, whose horses were large enough to be ridden.

During the Early Iron Age chariots became heavier and, except in Britain, began to decline in use in favor of mounted cavalry. Warriors on foot used short thrusting spears and javelins for throwing. With iron, armor came into practical use, at least among the elite.

The Celts of the Iron Age seem to have made use of a kind of psychological warfare; Roman writers attest that they often fought naked in the ancient warrior style, perhaps to convince the enemy that they were as invulnerable as gods or that they were such formidable warriors they had no need for shields or armor. They would make terrifying sounds by blowing large trumpets, called carnexes, which had beast-shaped mouths, and they would roar as if they were wild beasts. Caesar mentions that Gallic warriors painted themselves with a blue dye called woad to make themselves look more terrifying. Bards often accompanied the warriors, inciting them to battle and hurling imprecations of savage satire against the opponents. The Celts believed the bards could call up magic mists to confuse the enemy.

The Purpose of War Our modern ideas that war should be waged solely for political or national purposes and that the resort to war represents a failure of diplomacy would have been very foreign to men of the European Bronze and Iron Ages. The relative inefficiency of their weaponry ensured that the casualty rate in their wars was never high. Men went to war for intangible purposes, such as to prove their prowess and win fame, so that tales would be told of their deeds after their deaths, as well as to gain territory or spoils. There may even have been a spiritual component to war, similar to the belief of the Vikings that only death in battle ensured that one would attain Valhalla. In risking their lives Bronze and Iron Age warriors throughout Europe may have been offering themselves in sacrifice to the gods; in the exhilaration of overcoming fear, they may have experienced a kind of ecstatic communion with the divine. Elaborate decoration of arms and armor may have been analogous to the decoration of temples and sacred vessels used in religious ritual. It is even possible that the Urnfield religious revolution with its changed attitude toward the material body resulted from the emergence of warfare as an integral part of society. The experience of battle could have furnished its seminal spiritual experience.

Dwellings and Architecture

Hill Forts The rich trade of the sixth century B.C.E. coincided with the appearance of hilltop settlements called hill forts, such as Mont Lassois in Burgundy, France, and the Heuneburg in southern Germany. Some Hallstatt chiefs emulated the Greeks even to the extent of building Mediterranean-style mud brick walls as defensive structures, completely inappropriate for the rainy north. A characteristic architectural phenomenon of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Celtic Europe, hill forts began to appear around 1100 B.C.E. and were built in a zone of temperate Europe from Wales and southern Britain, through northern France, southern Belgium, central Germany, to the present-day Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. Their numbers increased considerably during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. The style of these settlements was broadly similar throughout this zone, so that forts in Slovakia resemble those in Wales.

A rampart along the edge of the hilltop site enclosed circular or rectangular timber houses; metal-reinforced roads connected dwellings and grain storage buildings. In Biskupin, a hill fort in Poland, houses were arranged tightly together in 13 parallel rows, multiple houses sharing a single gable roof, along timber corduroy roads adjoined to a ring road along the rampart. There were 105 houses in the complex, suggesting a possible population of 400–500. Although the orderly layout implies a controlling power of some kind, there is no other evidence of social differentiation in, for example, house size. The use of hill forts peaked in the sixth and fifth centuries, and many were abandoned by the fourth century.

Scholars disagree over the purpose of hill forts and the degree to which they were used for defensive purposes. The mud brick ramparts of Hallstatt versions argue against defense as their primary purpose as they must have been regularly eroded away by rain and in need of refurbishing. Despite broad similarities, hill forts differ from region to region. In Britain, for example, they seem to have the character of farming villages. Later in the Celtic period, especially under Roman influence, some hill forts evolved into oppida, fortified towns more municipal in nature than military.
The Roundhouse  A common Iron Age building style was the roundhouse. The exact construction of roundhouses is hard to determine because most of the building materials were natural, such as timber and reed. Organic materials like these do not survive for long unless they are protected in some way, such as in very dry, very cold, or waterlogged conditions. Out in the open and exposed to the elements, natural organic materials used in roundhouse construction rarely survive the test of time.

Archaeological excavation has revealed evidence for the foundations of roundhouses such as postholes, stake holes, wall gullies, and stone wall foundations. The remains of hearths have also been found, and occasionally drains, drainage trenches, and drip gullies (formed by rain water dripping off the end of roof eaves and falling on exposed ground). Daub sometimes becomes fire-hardened similarly to pottery. Occasionally archaeologists find packed clay or daub floors within the interiors of the roundhouse wall foundations.

Iron Age roundhouses, as well as farms and hill forts, faced east or southeast in the direction of the morning Sun. In some cases roundhouses were built so that their doors faced the location where the Sun rose on the winter solstice. Many apparent rubbish pits on further analysis display an organization in their deposition that points to ritual. Some of this rubbish includes complete animal and human carcasses and bits of carcasses, possibly the result of sacrifice. But even broken potsherds, old tools, and worn-out quern (hand mill) stones were sometimes placed in special parts of a farm, together with other objects, sometimes even according to a particular order.

Clothing

The male clothing of the Celts in its basic elements was probably broadly similar to that of men throughout temperate and northern Europe, even in those areas, such as lands of the Germanics, outside the Celtic sphere. It consisted of trousers, shirt, leather shoes, and a covering cloak, the ancestor of European dress that prevailed after the influence of the Mediterranean world had waned with the fall of the Roman Empire. Trousers, called bracae, particularly distinguished Celtic dress from that of Greeks and Romans. To the Greeks wearing trousers was a sure sign of barbarity, as sure as having a moustache, beard, or long hair (in this betraying their insularity and Greek chauvinism, for the highly civilized Persians wore all of these).

Women wore a sleeved under-tunic covered by a chiton, a rectangular cloth similar to a poncho with an opening for the head and neck, which was belted at the waist; over all they would wear a cloak like that of the men if the weather were cold. For both men and women, the brooches (also called fibulae) used to secure their cloaks were often prized ornaments and were made in a variety of intricate shapes, usually of bronze, but also of precious metals. The shapes of brooches were the subject of fashionable preference, which differed from place to place and changed constantly throughout the Celtic period.

Until the Roman conquest the wool used for clothing was from sheep whose fleece was very coarse; fine wool sheep were introduced to Europe by the Romans. Thus wool was mostly used for making cloaks. Diodorus Siculus, a first-century B.C.E. Greek historian living in Sicily, writes that the cloaks had striped or checkered designs, with the stripes close together. This could describe Scottish tartan patterns, which combine broad bands of different colors running perpendicular to one another to form squares of color with thinner stripes of contrasting color setting off the squares. Swatches of fabric were preserved in the Hallstatt salt mines; some of these resemble tweeds still made today in Celtic areas such as the Scottish islands of the Outer Hebrides. Others show a tartanlike combination of parallel thin stripes running perpendicular to broader bands. Wool was commonly woven into twill.

Linen was also widely used and woven into cloth. It was the fabric of choice in Celtic Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary; in La Tène France and Switzerland twilled wool was preferred.

Diodorus called the Celts’ clothing “astonishing,” and besides their bracae, what impressed him were the bright colors of their shirts and the embroidery with which they were embellished. Remnants of linen cloth found in the present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia were stitched with red, gold, and silk thread. Embroidery was done with a simple stem stitch; meanders and swastikas were common motifs.

Diodorus mentions that the Celts bleached their hair blond by washing it in lime and combing it back from their forehead, rather like a horse’s mane. (To Romans this shaggy hair made Celts look like woodland spirits, perhaps the satyrs of myth and legend.) Some were clean-shaven, but men of high rank shaved their cheeks, leaving a moustache that grew over the mouth and trapped particles of food.
An important ornament type was the torc (torque), a metal neck ring made of metal wires twisted together so as to resemble a rope or cord, with an opening in the front with molded terminals welded to the ring ends. Torcs may have been worn only by the nobility, particularly during the La Tène period; astonishingly elaborate and heavy gold, silver, and bronze torcs have been recovered from burials. Some torcs almost appear unwearable, as though they were used more as symbols of status. The Gallic warriors who overran Italy and Greece during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. went into battle naked (as did the Iron Age Celts), some of them wearing only a torc. Deities are shown wearing torcs; a famous example is the horned god on the Gundestrup Cauldron (a huge silver cauldron found near Gundestrup, Denmark, thought to document Celtic religious iconography), who also holds a torc in his right hand, a large snake in his left. Torcs thus had some religious significance as well. Some scholars speculate that the rope appearance of the torc refers to a noose or garotte, the terminals like knots, used to dispatch a sacrificial victim. The wearing of torcs by warriors may have been a sign that in going into battle they were devoting themselves to or putting their fates into the hands of a god—perhaps Esus, who received his sacrifices through having them strangled or their throats cut.

Transportation

The Bronze Age The long-range trade evident already in the Late Bronze Age implies efficient means of transportation among Celtic peoples. Little is known about Bronze Age ships and boats to the north of Mediterranean regions, but the trade routes along major rivers such as the Rhône, the Rhine, and the Danube show that water transport was important. A model boat found in Wales from this period is somewhat bowl-shaped; much later, in the early medieval period, the Irish made long sea voyages in a type of bowl-shaped boat made of hides called a currach or coracle. This is the kind of boat St. Brendan reportedly utilized in the sixth century C.E., when he went on a long sea journey as a pilgrimage. It is possible that the Irish, who of all Celtic peoples had experienced the least influence and interference from other more dominant cultures, were at this time continuing a boat-building tradition of their Celtic ancestors even as far back as the Bronze Age. Curraghs made of wood are still used today by Irish fishermen.

More is known about land travel from this time because of the survival of timber or brushwood tracks laid down in marshy areas, which have been preserved in peat or under water. In the Somerset Levels in England a major phase of track-building took place around 1200 B.C.E., possibly a result of climate change that caused higher rainfall and flooding. Such tracks consisted of brushwood pegged in place, supplemented by wooden planks in wetter areas. In dry areas the location of important sites gives an idea of routes.

Evidence of Celtic vehicles includes depictions and models, and bronze fittings, wheels, and whole wagons found in burials. Great ceremonial wagons and wheeled urns were used in ritual processions; farmers used slow-moving wagons with solid wooden wheels—similar to those of the Neolithic—drawn by oxen or horses.

The Iron Age Archaeological evidence shows that trading vessels that plied the English Channel in the late first millennium B.C.E. had high sides and flat bottoms; they relied on heavy cargoes or ballast to give them stability. Ships arriving at Hengistbury Head in Dorset, for example, carried heavy wine amphorae, but on their return journey to the Continent they carried only light-weight cattle hides and thus needed ballast. A number of “quarry hollows” and “scoops” were discovered on the north shore of the defended promontory at Hengistbury, dug to obtain gravel for ballast. The hollows and scoops were found close to the old shoreline, where the flat-bottomed boats were no doubt beached or berthed to facilitate unloading and reloading.

Other Technologies

The Late Bronze Age Industrial Revolution One of the revolutions after 1300 B.C.E. was an explosion in metalworking activity among the Celts both quantitatively and qualitatively. Enormous hoards of metal objects from this period displaying a great increase in the skill of smiths have been unearthed. Multiple-piece rather than the simpler two-piece molds of earlier times were now used to form molten metal, allowing a greater variety of shapes. Sheet-metal working began during this period, and bronze armor was made—cuirasses, greaves, helmets, and shields, shaped and elaborately embossed with hammers of various sizes. Such armor was useless for actual defense; demonstrations have indicated that it can easily be penetrated by blows from a bronze sword. Its main purpose, then, must have been decorative and/or ritualistic. The lost-wax method became important; in this method wax was shaped into
the desired form and encased in clay, which was fired in a kiln, causing the wax to melt away, leaving a mold without seams. The ease with which wax could be worked enabled smiths to create much finer and more subtle forms with more intricate detailing than ever before.

These new techniques both enabled and inspired smiths to endow even the most utilitarian objects, such as axe heads, cauldrons, rivets, and buckles, with beautiful decoration and form. These efforts probably derived less from aesthetics of the sort that inspires modern fine craftspeople than from a sense of the magical and spiritual quality of metal, which has been transformed from rough ore, through the magic agency of fire, into something completely different. Greek myths such as that of Prometheus, who created humankind out of clay, and others concerning men made of bronze may suggest the attitude of early bronze workers elsewhere in Europe. The implication is that in transforming natural materials into pottery and metal, smiths emulated the creative acts of the gods. Such attitudes, remembered dimly about their own past by Greeks of the classical period, may well have been held as well by other Europeans during the Bronze Age in Europe. In using their utmost skill to beautify their creations, smiths may have been expressing their sense of divine emulation. The burial of huge quantities of metal objects, possibly as offerings to the gods, may derive from similar attitudes.

The great increase in the volume of bronze made implies a well-established, long-range trading network because the sources of copper were widely dispersed (Ireland, the Alps, Carpathians, and Balkans), as were the probable sources of tin (Cornwall, Brittany, and parts of what are present-day Germany, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Spain, and Italy). The presence of copper in Ireland and of tin in Cornwall, Brittany, and Spain may have made these areas on the periphery of Celtic Europe closer to the sphere of Celtic cultural influence.

Glassmaking began during the Early Bronze Age, although not in great volume, since it required a much higher firing temperature than did bronze. Glass was made mostly in the form of beads for decoration; in Switzerland so-called eye beads and beads with twists of different colors were made. Glass-making spread quickly throughout Europe; such rapid technology transfer demonstrates the interconnectedness of Europe at this time under the probable Celtic cultural hegemony.

The Iron Age The transition to the Iron Age was slow and incremental, although iron was far more readily available than the copper and tin needed for bronze; iron is found throughout most of Europe. The melting point of iron is only slightly higher than that of copper, and bronze-working techniques were used at first in working iron. Recent research suggests that iron did not directly replace bronze at the end of the Bronze Age but rather took over the roles of flint, which had continued in use during the Bronze Age because of its superior hardness and cutting ability.

Coal came into use in the Iron Age in coal regions such as Britain. Large quantities of coal fragments, many of them burned or charred, have been found in the defensive ditches of an enclosed Late Iron Age settlement at Port Seton near present-day Edinburgh, Scotland.

Art Evolving Styles As with other aspects of Iron Age Celtic culture the roots of Celtic art can be traced back to the Urnfield period of the Bronze Age. The rich burials of the Hallstatt culture at the beginning of the Iron Age provide many examples of Celtic art that have affinities to art of the Bronze Age. Under the influence of Mediterranean styles, but maintaining their autonomy, artisans of the Rhine-Moselle region created the La Tène style, which became the first pan-European art style, influential across a wide region. La Tène style is evident in the making of many objects, such as weapons, vessels, and jewelry, in bronze, gold, and occasionally silver.

The Celts decorated even the most mundane objects with beautiful art. Tools that were used for everything from war to cooking presented opportunities for carving or metalwork. The art of the Celts was inseparable from their religion; it embodied a sense that forces unseen underlay every activity and imbued every object in the material world. The intricate swirls and spirals so characteristic of Celtic art may have been intended to evoke in the viewer and user of decorated objects a sense of harmony with the spiritual realm that so permeated the material.

Stylized plant motifs and fantastic animals, derived from the Scythians and other steppe peoples, are characteristic of Celtic art; the human figure plays a secondary role. Celtic art was full of elliptical and opposing curves, spirals, and chevrons, also derived from steppe art. These elements were combined in dynamic yet symmetrical geometric patterns in relief, engraved, or in red, yellow, blue, and green
enamel on shields, swords, sheaths, helmets, bowls, and jewelry. They also appeared on painted pottery: cinerary urns, food vessels, incense bowls, and drinking cups.

Fine examples of Hallstatt period Celtic art from a tomb at Hochdorf in Germany, show continuities with art from Urnfield times. It contained the princely burial of a man wearing a great gold torc, bracelet, shoe and belt coverings, and a conical birchbark hat that is thought to be an emblem or symbol of high status. The torc (torque) and bracelet are stamped with lines of bosses reminiscent of bosses on cups from Urnfield times, although far more intricate and varied in shape. The torc has a pattern of tiny stylized horsemen. A shallow gold cup has Urnfield-like bosses around its rim.

A tomb in Hallein contained flagons whose decoration is typical of the later La Tène style. A later La Tène sandstone statue of a warrior found at Glauberg, Germany, has teardrop shapes on each side of his head although upside down; they seem to be sprouting out of his head. This is called by archaeologists a Blattkrone, “leaf crown,” and is thought to symbolize divine status. Heads with Blattkronen adorn a four-sided pillar from Pfalzfeld in Germany as well as other figures from the period.

**Celtic Linear Art** An important type of pottery developed in Roman Britain, called Glastonbury Ware, illustrates a fundamental difference between Celtic and Greco-Roman art. The focus of the latter was on the spatial, creating a sense of volume and mass, of three dimensions, even in reliefs or two-dimensional painting. Greco-Roman art is basically sculptural, whereas Celtic art is linear, more like drawing. Thus Roman artisans, when making reliefs on their pottery, carved dies in the desired shapes, much as they would have carved out a marble sculpture. The British artisan used a funnel to extrude a line of wet clay somewhat in the way he might have used a brush to apply paint. The curves of his lines and their rhythms were most important. Thus, in scenes showing running hares or dogs, their elongated bodies are paralleled by curving lines above and below; the shapes of the bodies themselves are hardly more subtle than thickened lines. The sense of speed derives at least as much from the lines as from the bodies, which, one feels, would have had equal impact if they were two- rather than three-dimensional.

The essential difference between Celtic and Greco-Roman art is well illustrated by the Hochdorf cauldron, which has reposing lions along its rim. Two of the lions are of Greek manufacture; the third is Celtic, probably made by a Celtic artisan to replace a missing Greek lion. Compared to that of the Greek lions, the shape of the Celtic lion is clumsy, a mere barrel body topped by a head whose muzzle is a simple funnel, with little attempt to model the lion’s cheeks, chin, and nose. The mane is suggested by incised lines rather than the fully sculpted curls on the Greek lions. However, the lines of the tail curling into a circle and of the crouching haunches are much more skillful and charged with potential energy.

**Celtic Christian Art** The final efflorescence of Celtic art occurred in Christian Ireland and in Irish monasteries in Scotland after the fifth century C.E. The Irish incorporated new elements from the Romans and from the Anglo-Saxons in their illuminated manuscripts such as *The Book of Kells* and their metalwork. The Irish adapted the Pictish tradition of large carved standing stone cross slabs to create the three-dimensional high Irish cross.

**Music**

Material evidence for the practice of music among the Celts is scanty. Few musical instruments or depictions of them have been found earlier than the first centuries C.E., when Mediterranean instruments were introduced in Celtic lands under Roman influence. This may mean no more than the lack of material evidence of Celtic poetry, both media being transmitted orally. It is nearly certain that Druidic poetry had a musical element in the same way that the Homeric poetic tradition did. In traditional societies all over the world, music and poetry have been and are inseparable. That the Celts had a keen understanding of the psychological impact of music is shown by their use of carnyxes, their great war trumpets shaped like roaring beasts, to terrify their enemies.

Among the few sources of evidence on early Celtic music are the Venetic bronze situlae found in present-day Slovenia. These are large decorated bucket-shaped vessels that depict scenes of festivity and apparent ritual. Although some situlae have been found in areas associated with the Illyrian-speaking Veneti, other similar ones come from the eastern Hallstatt zone, demonstrating considerable cultural commonality between Hallstatt and Venetic peoples. Dating to about 700 B.C.E. the situlae show a number of different forms of instruments. The four-stringed lyre (similar to the lyre of contemporary Homeric Greece) predominates in these scenes, played standing in processions and to
accompany dancers and played seated to entertain feasters. The other most common instrument is the syrinx, or panpipes, usually with five pipes (suggesting the use of a pentatonic scale). Panpipes are thought to be of eastern European rather than of Mediterranean origin. Another type of instrument resembles the Greek aulos, a vibrating reed flute typically with two pipes.

Contemporary pots in the western Hallstatt zone in southern Germany and France show mostly female dancers not accompanied by instruments; they dance with their arms raised. At the Hallstatt site itself several actual instruments have been found, including a set of simple end-blown bone pipes, a single pottery globular flute from the cemetery, and a cow’s horn with carefully cut mouthpiece discovered in a salt mine. Far more complex than these are the nine-tubed panpipes cut from sheep or goat bone found in what seems to have been the grave of a priest or religious person of some kind in the cemetery of Przeczyce near Katowice in southern Poland. Here we have a possible connection of Druids and music.

The late Hallstatt chiefs who participated in trade with the Mediterranean world adopted the musical aspects of feasting of Greeks and Etruscans along with the accoutrements of wine-drinking. Artifacts depict dancers at feasts; in some cases these are sword dances, appropriate for the warlike Celts. An Etruscan ceremonial rattle of iron with bronze jangle plates has been found in a princely Hallstatt grave.

From near Budapest comes a tiny bronze figurine of the late Hallstatt period, possibly a mount from a bronze vessel or cult model, of a man playing the double pipes, or aulos, one of the few evidences of music from the central Celtic region. Indeed the most abundant evidence of instruments among the Celts comes from the periphery of the Celtic world and shows clear influences from other cultures. Very little evidence of musical instruments has been found in the period from about the fifth century B.C.E., the time of the collapse of the Hallstatt economic system, to the first century B.C.E., when Celts in Gaul and then Britain came into contact with Romans. Some researchers have thought this evidence that Celts were essentially unmusical. It seems more likely that their musical practice consisted mostly of song and dance. Again, the importance of poetry among them makes it nearly certain that music was of great importance as well.

A few bone pipes with pentatonic tuning have been found dating from this period in Britain, as also a bronze coin showing a centaur playing an aulos-like set of pipes. Much more numerous evidence has been found for the great war trumpets called carnyxes. These were nearly man-high trumpets with mouths fashioned to look like beasts; they were held vertically with the snarling beast mouth forward. As in the case of other instruments, few carnyxes or depictions of them have been found in the central La Tène region. A second-century B.C.E. frieze on a temple in Pergamon shows Galatian Celts in battle blowing carnyxes; other examples come from Roman Gaul; and the Gundestrup Cauldron (a great silver-gilt cauldron, found at Gundestrup in Jutland but probably made in Thrace for eastern Celts and dating probably from the very late second century B.C.E.) shows boar-headed carnyxes. Several actual instruments have been found in Britain, including one with a boar’s head that had a moveable tongue made of wood that had been preserved in the peat bog where it was found.

In Ireland an indigenous type of metal horn with a curving stock had begun to be made in the Bronze Age; it is thought to have been an imitation in metal of animal horn instruments. Such horns continued to be made in the Iron Age. Another bronze horn was found in the lake deposit of Llyn Cerrig Bach on the Isle of Anglesey, the ancient Druid stronghold of Mona, clear evidence of the use of such instruments in ritual. They can play only a few notes but the evocative quality that must have been impressive when used in religious rites.

Celtic coinage in Gaul and Britain, which mostly dates from during the period of Roman contact, has many depictions of instruments, including of lyre-players. There is textual evidence that Maponus, a god of people north of Hadrian’s Wall in Britain, was identified with lyre-playing Apollo. The existence of a lyre-playing Celtic god is further attested by a figurine found in Gaul wearing a torque with large buffer terminals, sign of high or divine status, and clasping before him a seven-stringed lyre. Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century B.C.E., speaks of bardoi, bards, singing to the accompaniment of a strunged instrument. Although this comes from a time when Celts were again coming into contact with the Greco-Roman world, since religious practice is inherently conservative in nature, it seems unlikely that the use of instruments in worship would have been taken up in Druidic circles so quickly. (The conflation of Celtic with Roman gods happened only over time and mostly after the conquest.) Rather, they may well have been
using lyres for a very long time, as attested by Hecataeus of the sixth–fifth century B.C.E. A piece of a possible lyre dated to the third century B.C.E. was found below the rampart of a hill fort in north Wales. Irish early medieval texts such as the Ulster Cycle mention stringed instruments.

On the other hand the assymmetric harp so associated with the Celts of the British Isles came into use only in the ninth century C.E. Regarding the vibrating reed instrument most associated with Celts in both Britain and Brittany, the bagpipes, there is no evidence of their use before the Middle Ages.

Literature

**Insular Literature** A central part of the training of Druids involved memorizing and composing poetry. They learned great numbers of verses by heart, and some studied for as long as 19 years; they thought it wrong to commit their learning to writing, as this might dilute its potency, but used the Greek alphabet for other purposes. In Celtic literature poets were able to perform magical acts through their recitations, for instance, calling up magic mists to provide cover for the war bands they accompanied, or reciting savage satires that rendered enemy warriors helpless. Some scholars believe that occult religious knowledge was hidden, in riddling fashion, in a number of important Welsh poems, as for example, “The Battle of the Trees” and “The Song of Amergin.”

After the Welsh and Irish adopted Christianity along with the literary traditions of the Greco-Roman world, in addition to compiling their ancient tales, writers made new compositions, such as the Welsh *Y Gododdin* (The Gododdin) and the Irish *Lebor na hUidre* (The book of the dun cow), which successfully integrated old and new influences.

A discernibly “Celtic” spirit and atmosphere have continued to pervade the literatures of Ireland and Wales to the present, as evinced by poets such as Ireland’s William Butler Yeats and Seamus Heaney and Wales’s Dylan Thomas, with mystical life at the center of their work.

Religion

**The Urnfield Revolution** Archaeology gives us the first glimpse of Celtic religious practices from ancient times. The widespread change in burial practice after 1300 from inhumation to cremation and the burial of ashes in urns in well-defined cemeteries seem likely to have resulted from a seminal change in spiritual beliefs. Although cremation had been practiced before this and inhumation continued in some places afterward—indicating that local and personal preference continued—the “Urnfield” phenomenon constituted a genuine revolution. Urns were covered with small and sometimes very large mounds and sometimes accompanied by rich grave goods; however, as a rule Urnfield graves tended to be poorly furnished. The change to cremation may reflect a change in attitude toward the material body: that no longer was the body needed for the continuance of the spirit in a life after death. Likewise grave goods for use in the afterlife may no longer have been deemed necessary. A sense of the spirit as an unseen agency or force more akin to mental and emotional processes than to the visible body, escaping from the body by being transformed by holy fire into smoke rising toward heaven, may lie behind the Urnfield revolution. In keeping with such an attitude, memory, aided by commemorations of the dead in song and story, may have been considered a more fitting tribute than physical monuments.

**Spiritual Symbols and Cult Places in the Late Bronze Age** The bird was an important symbol during the Late Bronze Age, represented in figurines of clay and bronze and in decorative motifs on wagons and cauldrons. Water birds draw or are associated with boats and even...
wagons and chariots. The many depictions of these creatures of the air suggest a new focus on a spiritual realm in the sky in addition to that of the underworld beneath the soil.

People during this period continued the practice of ritual deposits underground, however, including hoards of metal objects, pottery, and human and animal bone, possibly from sacrificial victims. Deposits were made within fortifications and at cult sites of earlier times; Bronze Age pottery was deposited in the holes that encircle Stonehenge, built 1,000 years earlier. It is probable that open-air sites such as sacred groves and hilltops were used for ritual activities, as documented for Iron Age Celts by Greek and Roman writers.

**The Druids** A significant aspect of Celtic spiritual life was the presence among them of the Druids, a priestly class of enormous importance both for religion and for social life. After the Roman and then the Germanic takeover of much of Celtic Europe around the start of the first millennium C.E. the importance of the Druids is perhaps most clearly seen in Britain, where, according to Caesar, the Gauls sent their sons for their religious training. The relative isolation of Britain and of Ireland may have allowed the survival there of values antedating the aggressive individualism of the Bronze Age warrior ideal, and closer to the older Neolithic values of community and a sense of identity growing out of allegiance to the group and to the land. The rites of communal worship and communal labor on megalithic monuments and vast earthworks may in part have given the religious observances of the Britons their particular prestige and mystique to the rest of the Celtic world. But they may only have been preserving a socioreligious ideology once common throughout Celtic Europe.

Much is mysterious about the Druids because they never revealed their doctrine and practices in writing, perhaps because to do so would have been an impiety. Fragments only of these matters were known to the Greeks and Romans who wrote about them. Even the mean-thing matters were known to the Greeks and Romans who wrote about them. Even the mean-ing of the name Druid is not known with certainty. Pliny the Elder in his _Natural History_ speculated that because of their reverence for the oak, the name druidae may derive from the Greek name for the oak—drus. Another suggestion by modern scholars is that druid is derived from the proto-Indo-European word *wid, denoting wisdom (as in English wit and wisdom, which have that root), with *dru an intensive, so that dru + *wid meant “very wise.” Yet another theory combines dru meaning “oak” with *wid to give “oak wisdom”—a form of esoteric knowledge gained during rituals involving the oak. Some scholars, ancient and modern, have noted the resemblance of druid to dryadæ, the Latin for the oak nymphs of Greek myth, female spirits who haunted oak trees.

A word related to druid is Drunemeton recorded by the Greek Strabo, writing in the first century B.C.E., as the place of judgment of the Galatians of Asia Minor, an offshoot of the Galatoi. The second part, -nemeton, would be cognate with the Old Irish Nemed, denoting a sanctuary or a consecrated place. Drunemeton, then, would mean either “very holy sanctuary” or “oak sanctuary.” The use of specially consecrated sanctuaries for judgment and other functions was evidently a pan-Celtic practice, given the wide dispersal of place-names containing nemet. Strabo emphasized the legal activities that took place there, but in archaic societies, judicial, political, and religious functions are not at all distinguished in a modern sense. The root of nemet and nemeton in Old Irish is nem, “heaven.”

**Druids as Judges** Caesar describes the Druids as having a judicial function equal to their religious one. They presided over all disputes and adjudged guilt in murder. The source of their power was their ability to forbid anyone who flouted their decisions to attend religious rites and sacrifices. Caesar described this as a heavy punishment among the Celts, tantamount to shunning by the whole of society.

In general, because of the prestige accorded the Druids, according to Caesar, and the benefits they enjoyed, including exemption from military service and any tributes or taxes, many wanted to join their order, and many parents sent their children to study with them. The course of study included the memorization of many verses, probably numbering in the thousands. It is likely that law codes were embodied in many of these verses, a practice that continued in Wales into the Middle Ages as preserved in the _Triads of Wales_, a collection of verses denoting transgressions and their penalties.

**Druidic Rites** Among the many matters of obscurity concerning the Druids is what their rituals were. Roman writers mention horrific sacrifices, one involving a Roman general fighting the Boii who had allied themselves with Hannibal during the Second Punic War. The general was captured and beheaded, his skull then gilded for use in sacred rites as a libation and drinking cup. This may be no more than
Roman prejudice against a tribe who had aided Hannibal, but then again may not.

A rite described by Pliny has been more generally accepted by scholars and is the only detailed description of a druidic ritual. It concerns mistletoe, a parasitic plant that grows on trees but only very rarely on the oak. Thus, when a mistletoe plant was discovered growing on an oak tree, the Druids carried out a very special rite to gather it. They had a feast under the tree to which they took two white bulls. A Druid in a white vestment would lop the mistletoe with a golden pruning hook, while others caught it below in a white cloth. The bulls were then sacrificed, perhaps in recompense to the god for the gift of the sacred plant. The mistletoe was highly prized, says Pliny, as a means of giving fertility to cattle and as an antidote for poisons; the Gauls called the mistletoe “the healer of all things.” The word for mistletoe in Irish today means “allheal” or “panacea.” Aside from this descriptive term, there is no actual name for mistletoe in Irish; the only other possibility is Drualus, “Druid’s plant,” another description rather than a name. Just as the Druids never described in writing or described their cultic practices to outsiders, the actual name of this sacred plant may have been taboo, withheld from any outside the Druidic order who might weaken its potency or draw down evil by carelessly speaking its name.

Education of Druids Among the Celts religion and cultural products such as poetry were closely interlinked. A central part of the training of Druids involved memorizing and composing poetry. They learned great numbers of verses by heart, and some studied for as long as 19 years; they thought it wrong to commit their verses by heart, and some studied for as long as 19 years; they thought it wrong to commit their learning to writing, as this might dilute its potency. In Celtic literature poets were able to perform magical acts through their recitations, for instance, calling up magic mists to provide cover for the war bands they accompanied, or by reciting savage satires that rendered enemy warriors helpless.

Excommunication by the Druids A striking aspect of Caesar’s account of Celtic religion, given in his Commentarii de bello Gallico (Commentary on the Gallic War, 52–51 B.C.E.), and that of other Romans is the attention to its special importance for the Celts. They were reportedly given to religion, and banishment from participation in religious ritual, which was occasionally meted out to wrongdoers by the Druids, was considered the gravest of punishments. That this importance of religion to the Celts was remarkable to Romans, whose own society was closely bound up in religious ritual, is in itself eloquent testimony on Celtic spirituality. It is clear that for the Celts the interpretation of the secular and sacred realms, of the material and the spiritual, was complete. It seems that every aspect of their life related to an organic unity of the here and the hereafter, the natural and supernatural, in which each was the continuation and completion of the other, and there was constant communication between them.

Evidence about Celtic Religion The usual difficulty in studying the Celts caused by the incomplete and varying evidence about them is compounded with respect to their religion because they seem to have considered it impious to commit any of their belief to writing, even when they had begun to use Latin and ogham script under Roman influence. Only after the Irish and Welsh converted to Christianity did scholar monks among them begin to commit their mythological narratives to writing, centuries after paganism had ceased. The obvious shortcoming of deriving evidence of pagan beliefs from Christian scholars, whose basic attitude was one of condemnation, is counterbalanced by the close links between the Celtic Christian Church and Druidic beliefs and practices. Scholarship and the preservation of religious narrative were central to Druidic practices; a large part of the education of Druids consisted of committing their mythology to memory. In a sense the Irish monks in particular were simply carrying on this enterprise in a different medium, the written word. Striking archaisms of style and content in their writings give a sense of the monks’ fidelity to their ancient sources.

There are two other main sources of information on Celtic religion. There are contemporary written accounts of Celtic religion by Greco-Roman writers; they, however, observed Celtic religious practices only at the end of the Celtic Iron Age, and under circumstances of turmoil and dramatic cultural change. There is also a large body of iconographic evidence and of inscriptions on monuments. The Celts left many religious monuments and artifacts, but in the absence of contemporary information on their liturgy and belief system from the Celts themselves, such monuments and icons are hard to interpret. Moreover, most inscriptions date from the Roman era.

Yet this piecemeal body of evidence, when taken together, exhibits a number of consistencies among the different sources, which must
constitute a core of authentic information. For example, the second–first-century B.C.E. Greek philosopher Poseidonius and others describe three classes in Gaul involved in sacred ritual and learning: Druids, bards, and a group called in Gaulish vatis (seers). This division corresponds to the medieval Irish literature that also tells of Druids, bards, and filidh, or seers. In general the sacredness of “threeness,” of the triad, is supported both by iconography, for example, the many sculptures in Gaul showing a triad of women called in inscriptions the Matrones, “the mothers,” and the importance of the concept in Irish and Welsh literature.

Perhaps even more fundamental is the Celts’ belief in the sacredness of the land and of nature in general. It is possible to discern in the evidence that the Celts divided the natural world into three spiritual realms: earth, water, and air or sky—the latter sometimes represented by fire. Evidence includes the water rituals of the Bronze Age, which continued into Celtic times; earth burials of both the human dead and metal hoards, and the use of hilltop sites for ritual. The chief god in the Irish pantheon was the Dagda, a sky god, whose mother was Danu or Dana, an Earth goddess who also seems to have been a deity of rivers, especially the Danube (in German, Donau). The Gauls had a mother goddess called Madron whose sacred river was the Marne.

The Celtic attitude toward the land is indicated by an important branch of learning among the Irish, called dindshenchas, “the lore of famous places,” by which mythical narratives were furnished to account for place-names. In Ireland place-names numbered in the hundreds and were given to all sorts of sites: hill and mountain tops, clearings and fields, rocks, fords, confluences, rivers, and springs. A striking example is the twin hills near Killarney now known as the Paps; in Gaelic they were called the breasts of Anu, the mother of the last race of gods to live on Earth, the Tuatha de Danaan. At least two of the early Irish festival sites, Carmun and Tailtiu, were the reputed burial places of goddesses associated with the fertility of the Earth. In Gaul, too, deity names were given to such sites. In both Gaul and Ireland named places proliferated along tribal boundaries but also in the territorials, a reflection of the Celtic sense of the land as redolent with deity.

The sacredness of the land is underscored by the coronation ritual of Irish kings, which consisted of a sacred marriage between the new ruler and a woman—possibly a priestess, or else the king’s consort-to-be—who represented the Earth goddess. A Gallic god mentioned by the first-century C.E. Roman writer Lucan was Teutates, the god of the tribe; presumably as the god’s mortal representative the Irish sacred king married the representative of the goddess. That such unions were meant to ensure the land’s fertility may be the symbolic meaning of the many tales concerning widowed hags, blighted and decrepit as a winter landscape, who are restored to radiant youth and springtime beauty by the act of intercourse with a virile hero.

The Problem of Celtic Gods Perhaps the most dramatic contradiction among the various sources on Celtic religion concerns their gods—their names, numbers, and functions. Caesar’s Commentarri de bello Gallico gives the names of five important gods among the Gauls, some of whom have clear counterparts elsewhere in the Celtic world, while others are hard to relate to other evidence. Caesar’s main source aside from firsthand experience is thought to be Poseidonius, whose work on the Celts of Gaul was also used by the first-century B.C.E. Greek historian Timagenes. Including also Diodorus Siculus and Strabo, this trio constitute what is called the Poseidonius school.

Caesar mentions five deities, giving them only the names of Roman gods with whom he identifies them. Mercury, the most important Celtic god, had the greatest number of images made; he was the inventor of all arts, the guide and protector of travelers and tradesmen, and in general the patron of commerce. Many images of Mercury have in fact been found in Roman Gaul; moreover, he seems to have a clear counterpart in the insular literature: the Irish Lugh (in Welsh, Lleu), who is commonly described as “skilled in many arts together.” The fact that the capital of Roman Gaul was Lugudunum (Lyon) and that many other towns seem to have derived their names from Lugh, including Liegnitz in Silesia, Leiden in Holland, and Carlisle (Luguvallum) in Britain, brings the identification full circle. Lugus has been identified with the sculptures of a deity wearing a Blattkrone, “leaf crown,” possibly of mistletoe leaves, which first appeared around 500 B.C.E., when La Tène chieftains were enriching themselves through trade with the Greeks and Etruscans. The later statues of Mercury usually showed him bearing a moneybag (ostensibly to pay the boatman ferrying souls across the River Styx, for Mercury was the conveyer of souls to Hades, the land of the dead in Greco-Roman myth).

For the other gods Caesar mentions, however—Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva—
identification with evidence from other sources becomes problematical. Inscriptions mentioning Minerva are found throughout Roman Gaul and Britain; the dedication of a temple in Bath (Aque Sulis) in Britain to Sul-Minerva identifies her with the goddess Sulis of the medicinal springs there. The Celtic word for eye was sul, perhaps a reference to the use of medicinal springs to cure eye ailments, but also to her role as patroness of learning and goddess of divine wisdom: Sul the All-Seeing One. She, as did Minerva, oversaw the teaching of crafts. However, Caesar said that healing was the province of Apollo.

The greatest problem with Caesar's clear-cut and simple scheme is that it stands in contrast with the teeming abundance of deities mentioned in Irish and Welsh literature and in inscriptions. This has led some scholars to conclude that the Celts had no universal gods and that all of them were local and particular to each tribe. However, again correspondences in inscriptions, depictions, and the insular literature are not wanting (as in the case of Lugh), and the proliferation of names probably came about through local tribes' giving their own names to pan-Celtic deities, who nevertheless had the same attributes all over the Celtic world. Sulis, for example, had an Irish counterpart in Brighid, daughter of the chief god, Dagda, who was also concerned with healing, craftsmanship, and poetry. Brighid may have had a counterpart among the Brigantes of northern Britain, whose goddess was called (in the Latinized version of her name) Brigantia, "exalted one."

The state religion of Rome, fundamentally urban and national in nature, with its highly organized pantheon and yearly cycle of festivals, represents religion at a later stage of development than that of the tribal Celts. The Romans used their religion as a unifying agency to bind together peoples all over the Empire—to Romanize them. The Provençal religion of the Celts seems to have emphasized individualism—individual reinterpretations of pan-Celtic gods and beliefs (similar to local reinterpretations of the La Tène art style). The disjunct between Caesar's account and Irish and Welsh myth derives from this fundamental difference in religious attitude.

The whole tenor of the Celtic worldview as seen in the insular literature defies the neat classifications of Romans. A common theme of Irish and Welsh myth is that its characters frequently change from one form into another. The Irish "Song of Amergin," for example, consists of a long series of statements beginning with "I am."

The narrator describes the changes he has undergone, from being a wind, to being a wave, a ray of sunshine, a hawk on a cliff, the greenest of plants, a boar, a salmon, and many others, ending, "I can shift my shape like a god." A Welsh story tells of a character called little Gwion, who changes his shape in his efforts to escape the angry goddess Cerridwen, each shift followed by one of hers. He becomes a fish, whereupon she becomes an otter and hunts him; he becomes a mouse and she a cat, and so on. The strong impression the mythology creates is of a world of fluid change and eternal becoming in which appearances are deceiving and categories unimportant.

It was precisely the gods' ability to assume different forms or multiple forms that made them objects of worship to the Celts. An inscription in Spain to Lugh or Lugus refers to him in the plural—the Lugoves, and the Matrones probably represent a divine mother in triplicate. Names of goddesses in particular proliferate—Rosmerta, Nantosvelta, Damona, Sirona, and Nemetona, among many others. A goddess whom the king figuratively weds may have been conceived of as the mother of the people, of the tribe, as well as of the land. The Welsh goddess Branwen, for example, has been described as one of the great ancestor goddesses of Britain; the Irish triad of Eriu, Fedla, and Banbha are considered the ancestor goddesses of Ireland. The consort Maia, also called Rosmerta (the provider), accompanies "Mercury"—or more probably Lugus—on many Gaulish monuments and is also a fertility goddess.

The character of Celtic goddesses was by no means entirely benign, and some of them presided over warfare. Such were Buannann ("The Lasting One") and Scathach ("The Shadowy One") and the triad of Morrighan ("The Phantom Queen"), Bodhbh Chatha ("The Carrion Crow") and Nemhain ("Frenzy"), who would incite warriors on the battlefield but also confuse and ensnare them to their deaths. The Gallic equivalent of Bodhbh Chatha is Cathubodua, known from an inscription in Haute-Savoie in France. The Iceni queen Boudicca of the British Isles led warriors to battle and invoked the goddess Andraste. Another important epiphany of the goddess was as a horse, called Epona, "The Divine Horse" or "Horse Goddess," whose name is preserved in hundreds of inscriptions. She was connected to the fertility of the land and of nature, and was another form of goddess as mother of the realm, judging by the coronation ritual of some Irish
kings, which consisted of the king miming being born to a mare. The Irish horse goddess was Macha, who gave her name to Ard Macha, "Height of Macha," an important pagan sanctuary that later became the center of Christian worship in Ireland. Her Welsh equivalent was probably Rhiannon, "Divine Queen."

In general the importance of goddesses to the Celts, together with the fact that women could join the priestly class, strongly differentiates Celtic religion from others in contemporary Europe—those of the Greeks and Romans, as well as the Germanics, whose goddesses are clearly subservient to the gods. This, together with marked similarities between a number of Celtic myths and stories in the Vedas of India, for example, the myths of the Irish queen Medbh and the Indian Mahdavi, has led many scholars to conclude that Celtic religion arose out of and preserved a substratum of belief and ideology once common to the speakers of the original Indo-European language, who spread throughout Europe and India sometime during the Neolithic Age. Moreover many religious terms in Celtic languages derive from proto-Indo-European, attesting to the conservative nature of Celtic religion.

The earliest appearance in what would later be Iron Age Celtic Europe of a clear warrior ideology was that of the Bronze Age Bell Beaker Culture. There is suggestive evidence that Bell Beaker warriors engaged in some sort of compromise with people holding to the older Neolithic values of worship of nature and the land, perhaps embodied by a goddess, which they expressed by building great earthworks and stone monuments and holding rites of communal worship there. Stonehenge and other great stone circles in the British Isles may well be a monument to this compromise, since Beaker warriors probably took part in their building. Although we may never know what deities in particular were worshipped at Stonehenge in the Bronze Age, goddesses or a single goddess of the Earth were probably among them. And the religion of Iron Age Celts may have preserved some aspects of this cult along with other aspects of Bronze Age spirituality, which, among Greeks and Romans, had been greatly modified by the latter half of the first millennium B.C.E.

Some of the earliest written evidence on Celtic religion is from the sixth–fifth-century B.C.E. Greek geographer Hecataeus of Miletus, of whose writings only fragments remain. He gave an account of people worshipping in a round temple. He is quoted at length by Diodorus Siculus on the religion of a people called the Hyperboreans (referring to the fact that they lived "at the back of the North Wind," called Boreas by Greeks). Hecataeus writes that according to tradition Latona, Apollo's mother, was born on an island the size of Sicily opposite the coast of Celtic Gaul, and that people there venerated Apollo more than any other god, worshipping him with continual song and harping in a sacred grove and in a round temple. This temple has been thought to be Stonehenge, although there are other candidates, including the Callanish stone circle in Scotland. The Hyperboreans had had contacts with the Greeks "from remote periods," Hecataeus writes, and were particularly attached to the Delians, inhabitants of the Aegean island of Delos, which was a center of Apollo's worship in Greece.

**Apollo-Maponus** A strong candidate for the Celtic Apollo of Hecataeus is Maponus, "The Divine Son," who was especially worshipped in northern Britain, as attested by inscriptions of Roman times. In Gaul his sacred sites were located near healing springs, so that he may be identified with the god Caesar calls Apollo, "who drives away disease." Maponus is indeed equated at least once with Apollo Citharoedus, "the Harper."

According to Hecataeus Apollo visited Britain once every 19 years, "in which period the stars complete their revolutions," and because of this the Greeks distinguish the cycle of 19 years by the name of "the great year." The 19-year cycle is the period required for the lunar and solar calendars to return to synchrony. As noted earlier, Caesar informs us that a period of 19 years was the statutory study period for any acolyte wanting to train for the Druidic priesthood. The reference to continual harping and hymn singing accords with the importance of poetry and music in Druidic training and practice. Because of the Greeks' trading links with northwestern Europe, it is not impossible that Hecataeus received his information from first-hand accounts by traders or other travelers. Greek travelers to Britain would have given the name of their god Apollo to a British god who had characteristics similar to Apollo's; the fact that this god's season began with the spring equinox, as Hecataeus mentions, suggests he was a Sun god, as was Apollo. He must also have shared Apollo's patronage of music, healing, and prophecy. It may not have been solely, or even principally, desire for plunder that led the Celts who overran Greece in the fourth century to make their way to Apollo's principal shrine at Delphi.
**Contrast between Celtic and Greek Religion** In general Apollo figures in Greek myth as a god who took over the attributes of an earlier great goddess; for example, he assumed patronage of the shrine at Delphi by killing the goddess’s sacred python. This story has been thought to document the shift in Greek religious belief to a strongly patriarchal system, with the mother goddess no longer the equal partner of the father god, Zeus. (Thus Hecataeus’s account emphasizes Apollo’s worship, saying nothing about that of Apollo’s mother, Latona.) The situation was otherwise with the Celts, who held to attitudes they once shared with the Greeks of “remote periods” in the past. (For the Romans, too, Apollo was the god of healing, which for the Celts continued to be the province of the goddess Sulis/Brighid.)

Maponus receives little mention in medieval Irish and Welsh literature; for the Welsh he was Mabon, son of Modron—or Matrona, the divine mother. However, inscriptions attest to his importance; he figures prominently in the Celtic paradigm of the triad of father god, mother goddess, and divine son: Teyrnnon (Divine Lord), Modron, and Mabon. This triad appears in Irish myth as the Dagda (among other names), Boand or Boann, goddess of the river Boyne (as Modron was of the Marne in France), and Mac ind Og, “The Young Son” (also called Oengus). They dwelt in Bruigh na Bòinne, the great Neolithic passage grave now called Newgrange. Mac ind Og tricked his father into ceding him possession of Bruigh na Bòinne by wordplay, which places him in the tradition of the Divine Son as trickster (like Mercury).

**Cosmology and the Cult of the Sacred Center** The “sacred geography” of Ireland provides a glimpse into the cosmology of the Celts as a whole. In a scheme that has analogues in many of the world’s cultures, including those of India and China, the five provinces of Ireland mapped out an earthly microcosm of the lineaments of the immortal world. The four provinces of Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connacht represented the cardinal points of the compass, and Midhe (middle), not territorially separate from the others, was located in the center. The royal coronation site of Tara, where the high kings of Ireland were crowned, stood within Midhe, and the structures there were probably intended to reflect the universe in microcosm. There was a Gallic analogue to Tara for, according to Caesar, the Druids of Gaul would meet at a holy site in the territory of the Carnutes, which was believed to be the center of all Gaul. The crux of the Celtic cosmology, then, seems to have been the concept of the multiplicity of the world transcended and unified within a sacred center, like the “jewel in the heart” of the many-petaled lotus of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Iron Age Human Sacrifice** Greco-Roman writers of the first century B.C.E. to the second century C.E., including Caesar, Strabo, Lucan, and Tacitus, state that the Celts engaged in human sacrifice. A variety of methods, they say, were used, including drowning, burning, hanging, stabbing, shooting with arrows, throat cutting, and tearing to pieces. Women, men, prisoners, children, and even priests were among the victims. Many modern scholars think that Roman writers, whose compatriots were engaged in conquering the Celts, exaggerated and distorted their accounts, as commonly happens when the conquerors write about the conquered. Much archaeological evidence exists, however, that strongly suggests sacrifice. This evidence is from the whole span of the Iron Age from the seventh century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., and in Britain for some time after the Roman conquest.

Individual finds on their own cannot be interpreted as proving human sacrifice, since a body showing signs of violent injury could have suffered murder or execution, and the injuries could have been inflicted after death. But certain aspects of the context in which bodies are found can point to sacrifice. Bodies buried in pairs, such as a man and a woman, who clearly died at the same time, suggest the Indian practice of suttee, in which wives were sacrificed to accompany husbands. (Such a practice has been documented for the Vikings of Russia by eyewitness account.) An example is the Early Iron Age Hallstatt D royal tomb at Hohmichele on the Upper Danube. It included two large burial chambers, each of which had contained two bodies of high-ranking people. There were also low-status secondary graves within the mound. These could have been retainers or dependents of a noble sacrificed so that they could continue to serve him or her in the next world.

Bodies were sometimes placed in disused grain storage pits. A number of these have been found at Danebury hill fort in Britain. Such deposits appear to have occurred from the seventh to first century B.C.E. and to have been done on average once every six years. The limbs of these bodies had sometimes been bound together; some were weighted down with large flint or chalk blocks. All of these factors seem to point to a ritual component of their deaths, perhaps including sacrifice. The purpose of such sacri-
fices could have been propitiation of deities of fertility.

Stronger evidence of sacrifice is that of bodies that show signs of struggle. At Curragh in county Kildare, Ireland, signs of writhing and struggle exhibited by a woman's skeleton suggest she was buried alive. Other such bodies have been found.

Of the many burials in streams and bogs a number were almost certainly sacrifices. Some, for example, from La Tène (which means the shallows) and Cornaux in Switzerland were weighted down with heavy timbers in the shallows of a lake. Lindow II, a young man who was deposited in a marsh in Cheshire, England, in the first century C.E., was apparently killed ritually, underscored by the importance of the number 3 involved: in the means of killing him (head blows, strangling, and throat cutting) and in the details (three head blows from an ax, and three knots on the cord that strangled him).

Ceremonial aspects of many of these bog deaths include the fact that victims were buried naked and that they had eaten special food just before their death. Lindow II had some bits of blackened cake or bannock in his esophagus. This finding recalls a custom among boys in remote Scottish villages that persisted almost to the present. On May 1, called in some parts of the Celtic world the feast of Beltane, boys would go out to the moors, kindle a bonfire, and divide a cake into pieces, one for each boy. One of the pieces was blackened with charcoal and all were placed into a hat. Each boy, blindfolded, drew a piece of cake from the hat; whoever chose the blackened piece was called the “devoted” one, that is, dedicated or made over for sacrifice, which he mimed by jumping three times through the bonfire. The cake Lindow II had eaten, in addition to barley and wheat, contained mistletoe pollen, suggesting the season of his death, since mistletoe pollinates in March or April.

The numbers of possible or probable sacrifices found as a proportion of all burials suggest that sacrifice was not common but rather unusual and special; this indeed conforms to the written accounts. Sacrifice was possibly performed at critical times: for example, to avert famine and epidemics or to commemorate the death of a leader or defeat in battle. Lindow II was sacrificed around the time of the Roman invasion, in itself a crisis serious enough to elicit an extraordinary response.

**Seasonal Festivals** Much of what is known about the seasonal festivals of the Celts is taken from insular sources. In Ireland the year was divided into two periods of six months by the feasts of Beltane (May 1) and Samhain (Samain; November 1), and each of these periods was equally divided by the feasts of Imbolc (February 1) and Lughnasadh (August 1). Samhain seems originally to have meant “summer,” but by the early Irish period it had come to mark summer’s end. Beltane is also called Cetsamain (First Samhain). Imbolc, sometimes called Oímelc (sheep milk), inaugurated the lambing season and was particularly associated with the goddess Brighid. Beltane (Fire of Bel) was the summer festival, and there is a tradition that on that day the Druids drove cattle between two fires as a protection against disease. For the festival of Lughnasadh (Festival of Lugh), into recent times, in one of the rituals people pretended to be working at different tasks: weaving, spinning, or plowing. Early commentators gave this a Christian interpretation: The people were miming work that they had done unlawfully on the Sabbath. However, the miming may once have been in honor of many-skilled Lugh.

**Esus and Other Celtic Gods** Three other important gods of the Celts mentioned in classical literature were Taranis, the god of thunder; Esus, the god of the underworld; and Teutates, the god of the tribe. According to Lucan each required a specific type of sacrifice. For Taranis, as thunder and lightning god, fire was the method of death and prisoners of war were burned alive in giant wicker cages in his honor; alternately, his victims were dispatched by a blow to the head, another way of symbolizing the lightning bolt. The victims of Esus were either hanged from sacred trees, stabbed to death, or killed by both means. Teutates received his sacrifices in sacred wells and pools. The threefold means of killing Lindow II may have meant that victims were offered to all three gods. His head blows would have been a sacrifice to Taranis. His strangling and throat cutting, in this interpretation these two means conflated into one, could have been to Esus. And his deposition in the marsh could have given him to Teutates.

Esus’s name meant “lord” or “master.” That his victims were sacrificed by hanging from trees suggests he may have been a tree or vegetative god. A relief in the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris portrays him as a bent woodman cutting a branch from a willow tree. This and a related relief from Trier, in Germany, both called Tarvos Trigaranus (The Bull of the Three Cranes), associate him with the sacred bull and his accompanying cranes or egrets.
Esus is sometimes paired with a horned or antlered god named Cernunnos, known by name only from a single inscription, as a sort of alter ego who ruled one-half of the year; Cernunnos ruled autumn and winter and Esus, spring and summer. Thus the bull in the relief at Trier would be Cernunnos and the cranes, whose migratory return heralded the spring, would be Esus. The Gundestrup Cauldron depicts an antlered god who may have been Cernunnos. Sitting cross-legged in a posture that resembles the Tantric lotus position, the god holds in one hand a snake (commonly a symbol both of renascence since snakes are “reborn” after shedding their skins, and of spring since snakes emerge from underground in the spring) and in the other a torque. He also wears a torque, the twisted cord appearance of which could symbolize Esus’s garotte.

**Zoomorphic Deities** The many animals on the Gundestrup Cauldron imply that Cernunnos was a form of the Hindu god Shiva in the guise of Pasupati, Lord of Beasts. In general there is much animal imagery in Celto-Roman iconography, representing the deities in combinations of animal and human forms, again attesting to the Celtic fascination with shape shifting. Another prominent zoomorphic deity type is the divine bull, the Donn Cuailnge (Brown Bull of Cooley), which has a central role in the great Irish hero tale “Táin Bó Cuailnge” (The Cattle Raid of Cooley) and recalls the Tarvos Trigaranus reliefs from the cathedral at Trier in Germany and at Nôtre-Dame de Paris. Other animals that figure particularly prominently in association with the pantheon in Celto-Roman art as well as in insular literature are boars, dogs, bears, and horses.

**Celtic Christianity** Under the auspices of the Roman Empire, for which Christianity had become the state religion, the Christian faith was well established in Celtic Britain by the fourth century C.E. At the same time St. Patrick, a Romano-Briton who had been captured in an Irish raid and spent years of his boyhood as a slave in Ireland, returned there to convert the Irish after he won his freedom. He spearheaded the foundation of a new church in Ireland, which then became the center of Celtic Christianity. Patrick particularly targeted the Druids as key to converting the Irish people as a whole.

By the early seventh century though the church had succeeded in reducing the Druids to irrelevancy, their influence continued to be felt in the Irish Catholic church, particularly in its devotion to learning. The Irish monks did much to preserve a knowledge of ancient Roman literature in early medieval Europe. The distinctive organization of the Irish church, based on monasticism in which bishops were subordinate to the abbots of monasteries, may well have been based on the sacred colleges of the Druids. The *filidh*, although Caesar calls their mainland equivalents seers, carried on the Druidic traditional learning and were able to maintain many of their activities unchecked, retaining a considerable part of their pre-Christian tradition, social status, and privilege. *Cormac’s Glossary* (c. 900) recounts that St. Patrick banished those rituals of the *filidh* that involved offerings to demons, and it seems probable that the church took particular pains to stamp out animal sacrifice. What survived of ancient ritual practice tended to be related to *filidhecht*, the traditional repertoire of the *filidh*, or to the central institution of sacral kingship. Although the concept of the sacred marriage of the king with the goddess of sovereignty that constituted the core of the royal inauguration seems to have been purged from actual practice at an early date, it remained alive for many centuries in the literary tradition.

In 1991 the president of the European Union’s Commission on Culture, at the opening of an exhibition on the Celts in Venice, announced that being Celtic was the common bond that drew together all the nations of Europe, in effect saying, “We are all Celts.” This statement was received in some quarters with less than enthusiasm or even worse. Commentators in the United Kingdom, particularly in Northern Ireland, no doubt under the influence of the highly charged political atmosphere there, equated it with Nazi assertions of racial supremacy and nationalist pride. Clearly the commissioner intended just the opposite: that Celtic identity could be a unifying concept replacing the nationalism that, since the emergence of nation-states in the late Middle Ages, has repeatedly torn Europe apart and in the 20th century put the world on the brink of nuclear annihilation.

That a culture that had largely disappeared before the end of the first millennium C.E. could retain enough vitality 1,000 years later to cause controversy is remarkable even though many of its modern manifestations, particularly in popular art and music, are in great measure modern constructs that say more about us than about the ancient Celts. What we can discern of Celtic culture shows it to have been a unifying—although by no means always peaceful—force over much
of Europe for centuries. The spiritual and artistic aspects of Celtic culture can be compared in this to the Christian Church, to Renaissance art, baroque and classical music, and even modern science—that is, it transcended national or ethnic boundaries.

Less a distinct “people” than a socioeconomic and spiritual order, Celtic culture arose and flourished in a Europe that had yet to know civilization fully. (The often-lamented Celtic lack of writing, which forever places aspects of their culture beyond our understanding, was nevertheless of their essence as an oral culture.) Moreover the Celtic culture was the culmination of the earliest warrior-elite culture in Europe—that of the Germanic peoples was later. Our continued fascination with Celtic culture lies in its lack of writing, which forever places aspects of civilization fully. (The often-lamented Celtic baroque and classical music, and even modern science—that is, it transcended national or ethnic boundaries.

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FURTHER READING


Peter Berresford Ellis. *Celtic Myths and Legends* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2002).


Cenimagi

The Cenimagi are classified as a Celtic tribe. They lived in Britain and are discussed as CELTS or BRITONS. According to Julius Caesar they were allies of the TRINOVANTES and surrendered to the ROMANS in 54 B.C.E., along with the ANCALITES, BIBROCI, CASSI, and SEGONTIACI. It has been assumed the Cenimagi were actually the same as the ICENI.

Cenomani (Aulerci Cenomani)

The Cenomani are classified as a Celtic tribe. They lived in Gaul around present-day Le Mans in northwestern France and are discussed as CELTS or GAULS. A Celtic tribe with the same name, thought to be a branch of the same people, lived in present-day northeastern Italy in the early centuries B.C.E., neighbors of the BOI and SENONES and allies of the ROMANS. They defected from the alliance in 200 B.C.E., siding with the CARTHAGINIANS, but made peace with the Romans three years later. Suindinum on the site of Le Mans became a civitas capital in Roman Gaul; Le Mans takes its name from the tribal name.

Ceretani

The Ceretani are classified as a Celtic tribe. They lived in Gaul near the Mediterranean around present-day Céret in present-day southwestern France at least by the first century B.C.E. and are discussed as CELTS or GAULS. Céret takes its name from the tribal name.