



***Celtic from the West: Alternative Perspectives from Archaeology, Genetics, Language and Literature.* Edited by Barry Cunliffe and John T. Koch. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010. 384 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1842174104. \$80.00.**

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Recently, there have been two questions lingering just below the surface of many discussions of Celtic studies related to prehistoric populations: 1) What is a 'Celt'? and 2) What are the origins of the Celts, geographically and temporally? The first question has been discussed at length, e.g., Collis (2003) and James (2000), but the authors in this volume contribute to existing definitions of what it means to be Celtic in new ways, predicated on the assumption that there is or was a group of people who can be designated, and studied, as Celts. It is the second question, however, that is the main focus of this book, utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach drawing on experts in various fields. The volume is divided into three parts: Archaeology, Genetics, and Linguistics and Literature. Each section identifies the strengths (and weaknesses) of various approaches to the study of the origins of the Celts while supporting Cunliffe and Koch's goal of interdisciplinary, holistic research.

The Archaeology section begins with Cunliffe's brief review of the now defunct paradigm of Celts from the east (Chapter 1). He provides an alternative proposal for the origins of the Celtic speaking peoples of Europe. Using evidence for the development and expansion of the Atlantic Zone of interaction and exchange (elaborated in more detail in Cunliffe 2001), Cunliffe suggests that technological innovations and new forms of material culture did not necessarily follow an east-to-west diffusion pattern of the kind that has been proposed for the Maritime Bell Beaker traditions associated with the quest for copper in the early Bronze Age. Cunliffe suggests that the western development of the Celtic languages resulted from millennia of interaction along the Atlantic coast. Contact from the Neolithic on, Cunliffe argues, allowed Celtic trade languages to develop in the Atlantic Zone and moved eastward.

Karl takes a different approach to addressing the long-held misapprehensions of Celts in antiquity (Chapter 2). Going beyond simply stating that the old model of Celticization is flawed, Karl suggests that *any* model of Celtic origins is inherently flawed, if not completely meaningless. He believes that defining or tracing the origins of the Celts should not be the goal of Celtic studies. Since there is no such thing as an 'essential Celt,' Karl argues that there must be a

more applicable definition of Celts that can be used across disciplines. So despite his opposition to definitional projects, Karl suggests, "a Celt is someone who *either* speaks a Celtic language *or* produces or uses Celtic art *or* material culture *or* has been referred to as one in historical records *or* has identified himself *or* been identified by others as such etc."(47). Karl's intention is an admirable one, since it allows for an overlap of definitions without negating the reality of spatial and/or temporal non-uniformity. Yet the problem of defining Celts persists. The use of the word Celt immediately creates an association with other, historic and nationalist, uses of the term, whether intentionally or not, and thus continues to blur the lines of this analytical category. While I disagree with Karl's contention that the way in which we define and trace the origins of the 'Celts' is meaningless, I support his desire to ask different, and possibly more anthropologically engrossing questions that will allow us to engage with European prehistory more fruitfully (62).

The Genetics section of this volume outlines more recent developments in Celtic studies. Røyrvik (Chapter 4) offers a brief but informative overview of the methods involved in modern population genetics, as well as outlining the ever-present challenges of mapping population movements in the past using present day genetic information. Despite the problem of tracing haplogroups to specific geographic locations in antiquity, the authors in this section demonstrate that much information can be gleaned from utilizing available genetic data to trace the movements of past peoples. Oppenheimer (Chapter 6) demonstrates that by genetically tracing and dating specific haplotypes in modern populations, researchers may demonstrate prehistoric population movements such as Early Bronze Age migration of groups from the Balkans to Iberia and Britain. Røyrvik and Oppenheimer both illustrate how the genetic evidence does not support the traditional paradigm of an Iron Age Celtic migration originating in Central Europe.

McEvoy and Bradley's (Chapter 5) use of historically attested Gaelic surnames, mapped onto the distribution of the Irish Modal Haplotype in Ireland, indicates that there is potential for the application of genetic data when confronted with a historical (or prehistoric) model of population movements or geographical association (see also McEvoy et al. 2008). They suggest that the Y chromosome found in the north-eastern part of Ireland dates to the period associated with La Tène artifacts, possibly suggesting gene flow accompanying that cultural package. In many ways, however, the limits of genetic analysis in Celtic studies are also demonstrated by these case studies. As Oppenheimer notes, this type of analysis is "best at testing hypotheses generated by other prehistoric disciplines"(146). For genetic analysis to be useful in helping to reconstruct movements in prehistoric Europe, it must be conducted in close collaboration with other disciplines such as archaeology and historical linguistics to situate the data within pre-existing models of population movements. While these chapters indicate that genetic analysis can contribute productively to the picture of prehistoric Europe, growing enthusiasm for such studies must be tempered by an awareness of the problems posed by the limited data sets and lack of substantial aDNA comparisons. In addition, the nature of phylogeography and other genetic approaches to the study of human mobility means that we must be careful not to return to a wholly population-diffusionist model of prehistory, where the only mechanism for the dispersal of material culture or language is large population movements. While there were undoubtedly large and small scale movements of people throughout European prehistory, perhaps especially in the Bronze Age, other forms of cross-cultural interaction may play a role in transforming and transmitting material cultural and language forms as well.

The Linguistic and Literature section of the volume begins with Isaac's technical study of the origins of the Celtic language family (Chapter 7). As he has more fully illustrated elsewhere (Isaac 2004), Isaac suggests an eastern European origin for the development of proto-Celtic based on the many innovative morphological characteristics shared by Celtic and Eastern Indo-European languages (Indo-Iranian, Baltic, Slavic, Greek, Tocharian, and Albanian). In previous publications, Isaac has insisted that the *only* way to address Celtic origins is through linguistics, and only linguists can do linguistics (165-166; Isaac 2004: 57). It is surprising to find such a sentiment in a volume focused on interdisciplinary collaboration. While we must always question existing paradigms, we must also trust in the competence of our collaborators, especially in disciplines that we have not been adequately trained in ourselves. To claim a monopoly on the use of any term, especially one with such a long historical trajectory as Celtic, negates the purpose of collaborative research and virtually guarantees that large sections of the picture of prehistoric Europe will be missed.

Parsons (Chapter 8) uses a historical linguistic point of view to study the diffusion of Celtic languages. Using the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons in England and the spread of the Germanic language as an analog, Parsons suggests that it might be possible to trace the movement of the Celtic language in the British Isles (and elsewhere) by tracking place names on the landscape. This method provides a fruitful avenue for future investigations that could tie language more directly to a geographic location, though it also has its limitations. For example, Murray's work suggests that landscapes, though seemingly static incarnations of language or identity, are composed of multiple historical naming events that can be tied to an archaeologically identifiable past in some cases (Murray 2006). Unfortunately, place names are subject to the same forces that accompany other forms of cultural change over time, and thus also have the potential to "misinform" researchers about the past (Murray 2006).

Koch's chapter provides the best argument and evidence for reevaluating the possibility of a very early appearance of Celtic languages in Western Europe (Chapter 9). He suggests that the Tartessian inscriptions from Southwest Iberia represent the earliest attested evidence of a Celtic language (ca. 8th–6th century BC). Though Tartessian has been viewed as distinct from Celtic or Indo-European languages, Koch argues that the recent analysis of the Tartessian alphabet from inscriptions does suggest that Tartessian is a Celtic language. Koch provides an extremely thorough analysis of the 95 currently known inscriptions, along with English translations of all the texts, as well as a comprehensive dictionary of Tartessian words (complete with explanation), as well as exhaustive notes on syntax, word order, and dialect affiliation. Freeman's chapter (Chapter 10) supports Koch's research, providing a complete list of all of the Classical, Near Eastern, and Biblical references to Tartessos. Guerra's chapter, found in the Archaeology section of the volume (Chapter 3), also complements Koch's analysis, providing good background for the archaeological context of the most recently discovered Tartessian inscriptions. The final contribution to the volume is Wodtke's (Chapter 11) discussion of Lusitanian, another possible Iberian Celtic language, which may further support an early western appearance of Celtic. The limited number of inscriptions that can be used to reconstruct the language makes any definite comparison to other Celtic languages tenuous. Even so, the potential for another early Celtic language (or perhaps a proto-Celtic language) is intriguing for the future of philological investigations in Iberia.

As is often the case for publications that address the spread of Celtic languages, this volume is missing a key component necessary for a more complete picture of Bronze and Iron Age Europe: a mechanism for language movement and development. If only implicitly, the medium to large scale migrations of people still seem to be invoked as the primary impetus for the movement of languages across the European continent (e.g., Koch's suggestion that proto-Celtic mariners from the eastern Mediterranean sailed to southwest Iberia). Cunliffe's proposition of a Celtic language developing as a *lingua franca* in the Atlantic Zone as a pidgin or creole is one alternative explanation, but the details of how such a language would develop and expand are vague. Historical analogies have previously been suggested as models for such an occurrence (Waddell and Conroy: 2004), but are not presented in this work. This is not to suggest that large scale migrations were not responsible for much of the language movement in prehistoric Europe, only that such a claim would be more convincing if the specific mechanisms of language transfer were more clearly articulated and more robust datasets that supported such ideas provided and analyzed.

While the intention of this volume was at least in part to initiate a paradigm shift from a central-eastern European origin of the Celts to a western one, what the authors also have succeeded in doing is to make the case that the most effective way to engage in Celtic studies is to utilize a multi-disciplinary approach that makes use of a variety of specialists who are interested in similar questions and strive for common academic goals. While the volume has not completely succeeded in providing a convincing synthesis of all the disciplines of Celtic studies identified by Sims-Williams (1998: 524), it has opened up a number of new avenues for investigating European prehistory.

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