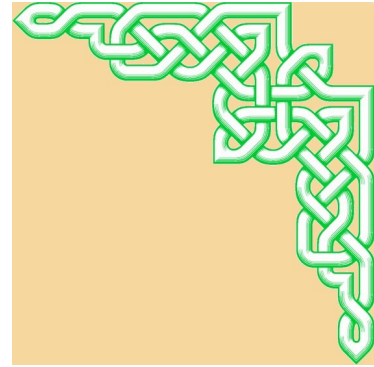


## The Continental Celtic Peoples



## The Celtic Heritage of Continental Europeans

**GERMANI, HELVETII, ALEMANII, TEUTONII, GOETHI (GOTHS)  
ETC.**

### A short Summary of Recent Consensus

Most of us know that the name Celt generally refers to people from Ireland and Scotland, and some know that people from Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Mann, Brittany (in France), and Galicia (in Spain) are also Celts. A few remember that the Romans conquered a Celtic people they called Gauls in what is now France. But where did all these Celtic peoples come from?

### The Ancient Origins the Celts

Although the Sumerian empire is the first recorded civilization, and dates to 5-4,000 B.C.E., the Sumerians and the Celts both emerged from an earlier culture of towns and city states dating to 10,000 B.C.E., just after the last ice age. These earlier settlements stretched across South Central Europe from what is now southern Hungary, eastern Austria and the Balkans (all later Celtic areas) and lands now covered by the Aegean and Black sea (which was then a smaller, fresh water lake ), Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Jordan.

From this origin in the northeast Mediterranean and South Central European area some expanded and flourished toward the southeast, eventually creating the city of Sumer in what is now Iraq, and its government, moved southward and eastward, abandoning some of the original territory when the Danube basin flooded from a collapse of a glacier and "dam" in what is now Austria. Others expanded into Europe to the west. As the ice continued melting, sea levels rose. Between 7300 and 7400 B.C.E., sea levels rose approximately 150 feet, and flooding much the Aegean sea and by about 5600 B.C.E. sea levels had risen high enough to flow through the Dardanelles, flooding the Black Sea with salt water.

Europe was thus cut off from the southern peoples, and the isolated northern peoples were free to begin developing a new cultures and languages, including Greeks and Etruscan-Romans around the Mediterranean Sea and Celts in the rest of Europe. By the time the Sumerian empire broke down about 4000 years ago, the Mycenaean Greeks and Minoans were creating their own empires in the coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea. This split still exists today between the Mediterranean countries and

the Celtic peoples in the rest of Europe. Oddly, Spain, at the western end of Europe, is the country most in the middle of the two worlds.

## The Urnfield Celts

At this time the first group with a culture and language identifiable as Celtic appeared in central Europe (2000 BCE), in what is now Switzerland, Austria, southern Germany, western Hungary, Croatia and southeastern France. Preceded by the megalithic culture of unknown peoples who buried their dead in tumuli (mound) tombs, the Urnfield Culture was so named because cremated their dead and buried remains in urns in flat graves.

## The Hallstatt Celts

The Urnfield culture was succeeded by one that also buried at least its chiefs and other notables in tumuli, or mound-tombs, often timbered, called the Hallstatt Culture. The "barrow burials" of the Vikings and others are a remnant of this tradition. The artifacts associated with this period and geography shows a common culture and probably a common language. The Hallstatt culture flourished in what is now Switzerland, Austria, southern Germany, and Hungary, from about 1200 to 500 BCE. The earliest cultural remains of the Hallstatt Celts show a continuity with the Urnfield Culture, but in the eastern and westernmost ends of their range, they mixed with other peoples.

In any event the Hallstatt culture was characterized by several things: hilltop fortifications and towns, the burial of dead in tumuli, the reverence for forests, and extremely well made metal objects of many types. Metal workers achieved a special protected status. The Celts, by this time also were well on their way to becoming excellent land-crossing and coastal merchants, traders, and salt miners (Hall is an ancient word for salt).

## La Tene Celts

"Celti" were described by Greek historians about 550 B.C.E. , who believed they were related to Thracians. They claimed that the Celts became more warlike when an eastern tribe of Celts from what is now Transylvania and what was part of Thrace developed better weapons and overcame the leaders of the earlier culture in what is now Austria. Some modern archeological evidence supports this, and researchers have named this later group La Tene Culture Celts. By about 400 B.C.E. most of Europe north of the Mediterranean coast was dominated by the La Tene Celtic culture. They had become accomplished warriors and excellent boat-builders and navigators. Though Hallstatt Celts had preceded them in settlement, it was La Tene culture Celts that eventually ruled the British isles, and sacked Rome several times during this period, and over time proved to be Rome's most difficult opponents.

By the time of the Punic Wars, the Hallstatt Ibero-Celts had also adopted the La Tene culture, and in what is now Northwest Spain, they were building tall, round stone towers on their city walls. These Castellos provided an excellent defensive advantage, and made the conquest of Gallaecia most difficult Roman campaign ever. In his 1st-century epic on the First Punic War, "Roman Punica", Roman historian Silius Italicus writes:

*Fibrarum et pennae divinarumque sagacem flammis misit dives Callaecia pubem, barbara nunc patriis ululantem carmina linguis, nunc pedis alterno percussa verbere terra, ad numerum resonans gaudens plaudere caetras.*  
(book III.344-7)

"Rich Gallaecia sent its youths, wise in the knowledge of divination by the entrails of beasts, by feathers and flames who, now crying out the barbarian song of their native tongue, now alternately stamping the ground in their rhythmic dances until the ground rang, and accompanying the playing with sonorous caetras" (or gaethas, bagpipes, perhaps their earliest mention.)

When the Romans defeated Carthage and conquered Iberian peninsula (Spain), some of the Celts from Gallaecia went to the British isles and Ireland but the province was only superficially Romanized in the

time of Augustus, and the Iberian Celts hung onto the northwest of Spain against all challengers. In 410 CE, the Celtic Goetii (Goths), coveting Rome's riches, took advantage of weaknesses brought on by the Roman empire's unwieldy size, sacked the city of Rome itself. A large group took the eastern provinces of Roman Hispania (Spain) as their new homeland. These Western Goths (Visigoths) soon controlled the entire peninsula, but could not defeat the Iberian Celts in the Northwest. To this day, both these Spanish provinces, Galicia and Asturias, retain a rich Celtic cultural heritage.

## **Celtic Art and Cultural Legacies**

The La Tene culture combined animalistic and floral art depiction with abstract and spiral or knotted designs, and created many designs now thought of as traditionally Celtic, in wood and metal to decorate cloth and clothing. They also adopted bells for several uses, including decorative. Roman and Greek accounts described how women would sometimes sew small bells to the hems of their tunics. Large cauldrons for cooking were developed at this time, and continued in use much later in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Austria and Hungary, and even in Celtic Spain.

In France, Austria and Hungary, Celts developed specialized breeds of cattle and horses, crop rotation and new hybrids of grain, vegetables and fruits. The greatest of Celtic nations are very good agriculturalists and animal breeders and very adaptive to changing environments. Celts were the first to reserve and protect forests. Two of the earliest forest reserves that persist to this day were in Celtic Hungary in what is now Somogy county, and in western Transylvania near the Arad region. While England and France have lost virtually all their primeval forests, there are still remnants of ancient forests in Celtic-culture Scotland and Wales.

The Greeks described the Celts of Austria and the Danube areas as "tall," and often with blonde hair, although not naturally. Both sexes rinsed their hair in lime water, which bleached it, then pulled it back in braids or ties, often while wet. Women also piled their braids or coils on top of their heads. Men were clean-shaven except for mustaches, literally a 3500 year old or so Celtic tradition. The Greeks and Romans also described the Celts as a very clean people, who regarded smelly, dirty people with disgust, and credited the Celts with the invention of soap. Celtic houses, though smoky, were also clean. Women used cosmetics, especially to darken and delineate eyebrows, lashes (brown or dark brown, not black), and to make their lips redder, and both men and women adorned themselves with copious items of jewelry. They loved color and were known to wrap themselves in cloaks of "many colors with crossed striping" (plaids).

The Celts had a distinctive form of self-government. They organized themselves in family groups of clans, and then tribes. They also had few slaves, and any Celtic slave could earn his or her freedom by proving their value to the tribe, and thereafter would have all the rights of other Celts. Celts practiced the first true representative democracy. Celtic kings were elected, mostly on the basis of military or economic success. Some tribes gathered to elect a high king of that group of tribes. It was the leaders of the tribes that participated in the election of a high king, but men and women often participated together in the election of tribal lord or king. Kings did not always serve for life, and could be removed and/or killed by those who had elected them. The King could be succeeded by a member of the same family, but not always. The earliest Celts were matrilineal in determining inheritance, including leadership. This was a tradition that lasted in Scotland until Robert the Bruce. In Hungary, inheritance of titles and property is still from both parents.

In Northern Europe, where Franks (French), Allemanii (Alsacian), Helvetii (Swiss) and Germani (Germans), developed from the Celts of Central Europe, the tradition of elected kings led to the creation of the college of Cardinals to elect the popes and to the electors of the "Holy Roman Emperors." The Swiss, dropped the idea of kings completely and elected an entire government from states in which their own governments were elected, beginning in the 13th century. Kings were elected into the 1500's in Hungary and 1700's in Poland. Hungarians referred to their own version of a Magna Carta and their treaties with foreign families allowing them to rule Hungary to justify their attempted revolt in 1660 against a Habsburg emperor. Although by a happy accident for the emperor the head of the conspiracy died of a heart-attack with papers all about the Austrian prevailed, it was not a stable country until 1705, when Maria Theresa's father, Leopold I acknowledged the rights of the nobles and restored them to their ranks, lands and privileges with the Peace of Szatmar. He needed the Hungarians to support his daughter (he had no sons) in becoming empress after his death.

Anyone could become a noble, a bard, or a vate (soothsayers, seers, healers), or a druid (priest or priestess in charge of rituals) based upon the success of his or her work, study, and natural born talents. Druids could be also warriors or even kings. This was a practice that actually predated the Celts and was shared by them. In Hungary, Poland and other countries, partly theocratic states, as the Celts once had, continued until the 13th or 14th century. One famous Hungarian family descended from the "Prince-Archbishop" of Arad. The same practice, also existed in what became Switzerland and parts of Austria, and for a time in Ireland and Scotland and Wales.

Slaves were few, and often an export commodity for trade. Human sacrifice was practiced, but usually made from war captives. The most shocking practice of human sacrifice to the Roman and Greek observers was the occasional burning of men alive, usually in wicker cages suspended off the ground, but sometimes in wicker structures on the ground. The "Christian" practice of burning heretics and accused witches "at the stake" on top of a mounded pile of fuel is a direct descendant of this ancient Celtic practice.

The most commonly noted "barbarity" of the Celts by the Romans was the practice of taking heads and saving the skulls, even using them occasionally as drinking containers. The Celts believed that the real strength and essence of a man was in his head, and only by separating the head from the body that you kept his spirit from haunting and harming you. Additionally, to keep the head, meant you had power over the person whom you had killed and beheaded, and you added his strength to your own. Various European and American secret societies have continued something of this belief to this day and use skulls for some emblems.

## **The Celtic Confusion**

We owe the confusion of what peoples were Celts to the Romans, depending on whether they became Romanized, or retained their Celtic character. About 50 B.C.E. the Romans acknowledged that the Celtic people and culture were essentially one, but Rome had designs on France, Spain, the Balkans, and the Danube basin. These were prime agricultural areas, flat or gently hilly lands that made travel by large forces easier, and all the port areas of the northern half of the Mediterranean, important to maintain control with swift deployment of forces from the heartland of Rome. Rome had become an imperial mega-nation, and a slave economy, where no gentlemen or aristocrats worked. This was typical of most Mediterranean-focused civilizations and is a characteristic of Mediterranean culture. Thus the Romans made war on the Celtic peoples already occupying these regions to enslave them and force them to produce food and other goods for Rome.

In France they killed hundreds of thousands of them and deported a larger number as slaves. When a part of the Helvetii, a Celtic tribe east of the Rhine in what is now Switzerland, moved into France as a result of losing a battle to another Celtic tribe moving west from Austria as a result of Roman pressure on the Danube basin, the Romans asked a Celtic tribe allied with Rome to drive the Helvetii back across the Rhine or exterminate them. In the end, Rome had to seek another Celtic ally and killed most of both of the Helvetii and the first ally. The remainder finally fled back across the Rhine.

Thus, the Romans had names for a dozen or more Celtic tribes in the conquered regions. The rest, the Romans generally described with one term: Germanii. These were also Celts, according to the Roman historians and included tribes with names of Alemanii, Teutonii, Helvetii and Goeti/Goths. Since the Romans conquered most of the Danube basin and what became southern Romania as well as France, the German forest and mountain Celts were confined to a much smaller area than what they had enjoyed prior to 50 B.C.E., the Goeti eventually left, and skirted the Roman provinces along the Danube ending up in what is now the Ukraine and southern Russia and the northern shore of the Black Sea. They eventually came into eastern Romania, from pressures from the Huns, still Celtic-Goeti/Goths.

The Romans assimilated Celts in France, part of western Switzerland, and eastern Austria, Croatia, Thrace, and Hungary, holding them as serfs and slaves in their own homelands to grow food and manufacture other products for Rome. As mentioned above, when Roman forces from these regions were recalled to fight the Celtic-Goths in the Roman heartland, the Danubian Celts stayed behind,

seeing a chance to regain their freedom. When the Goths then split, Visigoths in the west and Ostrogoths in the east, the eastern Goths merged with the other Celts of Austria, Hungary, and Croatia.

The Celtic Visigoths and Galicians held Spain until the 712 when the muslim Moors and Berbers conquered most of the peninsula; **but they never conquered Galicia!** The reconquest of Spain began from this Celtic stronghold in 718, and by 1252, had regained most of Castile, Aragon and Catalonia. It is important to remember the Goths were themselves Celts, just another tribe. This meant that during the "Dark Ages" (roughly 450-950 CE), Spain and Croatia-Illyria, Austria and Hungary were all ruled by Celtic Goths, and their populations were AmeriCeltic descended .



Central Europe continued to be ruled by Celts once called generally "Germanii" until the arrival of the Huns. However, even the Huns did not exterminate the Celts in the Danube basin and eastern Austria, but intermarried with them, and included them in their armies when they continued to attack Rome, and sacked its northern cities a second time. Their king Attila the Hun died leaving his kingdom to four sons, who soon squabbled. Less than 50 years after Attila's reign, the Celtic-Gothic warlords re-emerged and ran most of Hungary until the arrival of the Avars in 560 CE.

The Slavs, a mixture of Celtic people and Sarmatians, Scythians and Cimmerians all related Indo-Iranian peoples, passed through but were not allowed to settle in most of Hungary and ended up in the Balkans. Hungary and eastern Austria, as well as Switzerland, and Germany and the latest evolution of France, continued to be all in Celtic Germanic-Gothic hands, populated by Celtic tribes of several names.

After the fall of Rome, Europe nearly became completely Celtic again. What destroyed this path was the Franks, ironically another German-Celtic tribe who adopted Mediterranean-Roman imperialist government, the Latin alphabet, and a large degree of Mediterranean-Roman culture, including Roman Christianity, to ensure longer-lasting dynastic control of a large area by a particular Frankish family. Charlemagne, the zenith of this family, created a large west-European empire on a Roman model, and then left his empire to four sons, creating four successor states. Until modern times, the rulers of those states, and successor states of those, claimed descent from Charlemagne and so the blessings of the Roman Catholic Church. The destruction of Celtic culture in France was a deliberate decision by the Frankish rulers in exchange for blessings of the Christian church and the persuasive powers of the armies of priests and monks on the masses for Charlemagne's empire to help "legitimize" it.

In the east, meanwhile, the Mongolian Avars too, being small in numbers, intermarried with the Celtic inhabitants of the Danube basin and Transylvania. The Germanic Celtic peoples were still frequently at war with Byzantium and the southern Danube regions and Balkans were often battle-grounds, a lot like the border area between England and Scotland. The Avars brought a kind of peace and stability to the region by creating a mostly neutral buffer state, but besides a temporary peace, the stirrup, and fresh bloodlines for horses, there was little else that the Avars contributed.

Another aspect of Celtic culture is that they have always been excellent metal workers. The "Avar Gold" collection, now in the Louvre, coveted and taken by Charlemagne as he destroyed the Avar khanate, has determined to be largely made by Celtic workers under the Avar rulers. The Avars ruled, and some intermarriage took place, but they were not a large occupying force of their own accord, and had little unification among themselves. The Avars had been defeated and driven west by the Khazars just before the Franks unified France freeing their large army to move eastward. The Avars were not as sophisticated in making a living as either the Khazars or their Celtic subjects. They had some metal weapons-making skills, leather and felt making skills, and were excellent cavalymen and bowmen, but their whole preceding way of life had been as horse herders and sporadic raiders, and they were more distant from the Celts in race and language than even the mostly Turkish Khazars. The Avars never really settled down in the Danube basin and fully adopted the existing culture.

The Mongolian Avars also had no intention of ever becoming Christian or adopting any religion that resembled it. It eventually made them easy to target as "non-Christian foreign invaders who should be destroyed" by the Pope, at the urging of the Franks and other Celtic-Germanic peoples who were actually more interested in the Avar gold and horses. Charlemagne lead a combined army, defeated the

Avars, and a few years later the resurgent Danubian Celtic-Goths attacked again killing many of the remaining Avars, and drove the rest of them from the Danube basin. While a small group did remain in Hungary, firmly settling at long last among the Celtic-Goths, a larger group of Avars eventually settled in what became Moldavia, on the eastern side of the Carpathians from Hungary.

However, the Khazars still wanted a buffer between the Celtic-Germanic peoples, and the Byzantine empire, and realizing their mistake in sending the Avars, sent the Magyars, a people that had relationship with the Khazars, but was even more ancient and had previously been neighbors with and shared culture with the most ancient of the Celtic peoples themselves. The Magyars were also becoming a threat to the Khazars as they formed military and socio-political alliances and trade with two other large ethnic groups, the Onogurs and the Uighurs. The strategy of the Khazar emperor was to divide the Onogurs who were the middle link, and send 3 tribes of them westward with the more numerous 7 tribes of Magyars. According to the Societe des Sumerologistes at the Sorbonne, in a research published in 1975, the Magyars are the last living descendants of the Sumerian empire and spoke a language directly related to Sumerian. After 6,000 years they had finally returned to where some of their first towns and city states emerged, and where they had previously intermarried with and shared culture with the proto-Celts.

The Magyars stayed in the Danube basin, as the Celtic-Goths previously did. They were, like the Celts, a mixed agricultural and herding culture and good at both. They were also accomplished and persuasive traders. They entered Hungary in well organized tribal and clan groups with wagons and bags of seeds, cages of chickens, and driving herds of sheep, cattle and horses. They revered forests, were accomplished wood-workers, metal workers and bowmen, and knew how to distinguish edible mushrooms, and grow and use herbs. They were racially, also a mixed race, taller and shorter, red and brown haired, green, blue, gray, brown and hazel eyed. The language was now very different, but that was managed over time. Hungary developed as a "modern" kingdom of two or more languages early on. One of them was German, a Celtic language. Even today, the two languages most Hungarians want to, and do, learn as a second language are German and English.

## **Modern Celtic Culture**

The Germans never really lost their Celtic culture. They are still Celts, culturally, socially and politically. Except for couple of hundred years of mistakenly trying to emulate the Roman-French idea of imperialistic nationalism, fortunately done away with at the end of World War II, Celtic style democracy has prevailed. Democracy is a major aspect of Celtic culture, since with true democracy, even as representative democracy, there must be respect for all other people as yourself, and opportunities for all to advance economically as their skills and wills determine, so long as they don't abuse others.

The closest linguistic and cultural relatives to the Germans are the Dutch (Netherlands) and Scandinavians. Since severely limiting their remaining monarchies, and giving more power to parliaments, and the Dutch ending their colonial empire in Asia, they too have returned to more traditional Celtic government and egalitarianism.

The best metals in Europe today, are widely acknowledged to be Scandinavian, German, British and Spanish. Shopping in Spain today is an arts-loving person's dream, and one of the most popular items is the silver filigree jewelry and sculptures based on the old Celtic spirals, vines, and knotwork designs. Much of the earliest forms of what we now think of as Celtic music from the British isles had their origins in Ibero-Celtic Spain, and Gothic-Celtic Spain, both before and after the Moors, contributed many musical instruments now thought of as Celtic, or otherwise used to play Celtic music, including fiddle, flute, accordion and of course, bagpipes, (Gaita). Spain since the 1980's has become a constitutional and parliamentary democracy and shed its remaining overseas colonial empire. Spain has also been rediscovering its ancient musical and artistic roots, and reviving arts along those lines, as well as combining them with the best of the Moorish influences.

Modern Austrian and Hungarian culture has also retained a great deal of traditional Celtic culture, from sophisticated agriculture, and tribal families, which Matyas Corvinus king of Hungary in the 14th century himself described in some detail as clans and tribes, to elected rulers, metal work, and

decorative styles, and of course, bagpipes. Out of Celtic knotwork came lace and filigree, to which Hungarians added floral and other naturalistic embroidery over the lace while the Irish monks over painted letters with knotwork and natural images on parchment, such as in the "Kells".

The Venetii (Venetians) who as northern Italians also had a strong Celtic genetic and cultural influence, particularly before and after the fall of Rome, show Celtic traditions in their famous jewelry and glasswork. Glasswork, cloth, parchment are different mediums, but their decoration in the Celtic areas express many of the same basic ideals.

## **Celtic Genetics**

Celts share a very high percentage of their genes with other European and West Asian groups, right across Europe from the British isles. There are very few differences in most European peoples. Recent genetic studies show that most Austrians and Hungarians share genetic links going back tens of thousands of years. The genetic maps drawn up between 2002 and 2005, in summaries of dozens of studies, show that the Austrians, Croatians, Hungarians, Germans and Ukrainians were so similar to one another that there was no need to indicate more than one of them in the pie charts with the maps. They show amazing similarities to most of northern Europe, peoples of the British isles, and yet some peoples of central and west Asia as well. The first major differences seen in genetic compositions are in the extreme northwestern islands of Britain, the countries of Italy, Greece, and Romania who have links to north Africa, and as an increase in Asian genetic variants beginning in Kyrgyzstan and moving eastward and southward.

## **Summary**

So who are the descendants of the Continental European Celts and that have retained the most Celtic cultural traditions? They are the Germans, the Dutch, the Swiss, the Austrians, the Scandinavian countries, southwestern France and Brittany, northern Italy, Croatia, Hungary, most of Spain, especially Galicia, Asturias and Leon. That's all of Central Europe and most of Northern Europe, and part of Western Europe, in addition to Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man. Julius Caesar would be amazed. With the exception of France and Roman Catholicism, over 2,000 years, Europe has pretty much gone right back to the way it was when Julius Caesar first decided that conquering Gaul and destroying the Celtic culture in Iberia and Gaul was the way to become emperor of Rome. The Celts have prevailed after all.

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