Celts and context
in modern scholarly literature

Master’s thesis in Irish Studies

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Spring 2009
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Ceils and context in modern scholarly literature

Synopsis

This study addresses questions surrounding the influence of context on modern scholarly literature, and the effect this has on the study of Celts. Through separating modern research into three distinct categories, and then focusing on one author from each category, the study determines the degree of influence apparent in the work of the authors, and what kind of influence this is. It also explores the extraordinary role granted to the Celts in modern times, and the public uses of the terms ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’.

Celtic Studies are going through a paradigm-shift. This is in part the result of an awareness of the influence our political and cultural context has on us. There is a need among modern scholars of this field to distance themselves from older theories that contains too many contextually based elements. In addition to this, the demands of the modern society have influenced several scholars to maintain the old theories and deny the new. As a result, there has been vivid discussion and debate between these two more extreme fronts, and both fronts have been tied up to modern political development, such as the devolution of Scotland and Wales.

This study argues that influence from political and cultural context cannot be avoided in modern times. Through discussing the works of John Collis, Dáithí Ó hÓgáin and Bernhard Maier, it aims to show the degree and form of influence apparent in modern scholarly literature.
I want to thank

Ottar Nyland Becker, for never-ending support, proofreading along the way and clever discussions

Jan Erik Rekdal, for constructive advice, enlightening conversations and help along the way

Ingve Connolly Gran, for proofreading, humour and generally being great
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Introduction: A modern controversy

On March 12, 1998, the English newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* featured an article by the name of “Is the Celtic Civilisation merely a Myth?”¹ This article was a visible expression of a discussion that had raged back and forth for over a decade. Some topics of discussion in this debate are whether or not the Celts ever migrated in numbers to the islands, the origin of the language, the material culture (or lack of one) that can be shown archaeologically and its conflict with the established theories, and whether or not it is possible to discuss the island Celts at all using current terminology. This discussion is still active today.

Academic journals and milieus have been used as forums for the discussion, as has the public press, and the discussion has spread beyond its initial starting point of British archaeology; it has been contributed to by scholars from different fields of research, and from all across Europe as well as the United States. At times, tempers have been high, and the discussion has spread beyond its academic boundaries.

In 1996, Ruth and Vincent Megaw published an article in *Antiquity* 70 that inspired spirited responses from English archaeologists. The article was in itself a response to earlier works by Malcolm Chapman and John Collis, and to the idea that the ancient and modern Celts were a myth and a fraud, and that a Europe-wide Celtic culture had never existed. The Megaws blamed this view on English post-imperialism and nationalist views, as an expression of Europhobia and a response to the loss of prominence. In response, Simon James claimed in his article in *Antiquity* two years later that the Megaws’ article was based on insufficient research, and turned the tables around:

> “Is pan-Celticism, as outlined by the Megaws, not equally conditioned by socio-political imperatives? The Megaws’ attack surely must throw the ideological spotlight on both sides of the argument. To the question, ‘why do some not want to believe in a widespread Iron Age Celtic ethnic identity?’ may legitimately be rejoined, ‘why is it so important to others that such an identity should have existed?’”²

As indicated by this small summary, one of the larger issues in this debate has very little to do with the Celts, whether ancient or modern. Rather, it is a question of how the times we live in affect what we believe, and what we choose to support. It is a question of context and ethnicity equally as much as it is a question of Celtic presence.

¹ Sims-Williams 1998: 4
² James 1998: 205
However, ethnicity, context, and questions concerning the Celts cannot be separated from each other in this debate. As seen above, there are clear connections between the three. Modern concepts of ‘Celticity’ have become personal, and are tied up to each person’s understanding of ethnicity: “There seems to be an emerging consensus that ethnicity, and the perception of ethnicity, depend on context.”\(^3\) In this respect, it is interesting to note the word ‘believe’ in its usage by Simon James in the above quotation – it indicates that whether or not scholarly evidence proves the presence of the Celts or not, it is still a matter of personal choice to trust this evidence. This quotation insinuates that the belief whether or not there was a widespread Iron Age Celtic ethnic identity is not merely an academic conviction.

In addition to this aspect of the debate, we see the question of the value of generalisation playing a large role. Many of the arguments of the debate are based on the fact that the labels ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’ employed today are too wide and too inaccurate to be useful in an academic context: “in part we are witnessing a debate about emphasis and about the validity of generalising at all.”\(^4\) This aspect is related to the previous one, in that it is part of a wider problem of ethnic terminology that has arisen out of a need to be accurate and at the same time not insulting or degrading. In the twentieth century, many terms became useless due to racist connotations; racism is also used as an argument in the debate concerning the denial of the Celts.\(^5\)

The above quotations show that there is a clear political and cultural aspect to this debate beyond the surface discussion on Celts and Celtic presence and culture. This discussion is intrinsically tied into modern society. In part, it is a paradigm-shift that has its origins in the realisation that older theories contain elements that modern scholars no longer wish to support, such as racism, or are perceived as wrong. In part, it is a reaction to the awareness in modern society of the influence our context and history has on us, and the twentieth century use of academic reasoning to justify conflict, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. It has been recognised that there is a need to be precise and accurate in making distinctions and separations in academic theory. As the paradigm-shift has sprung out of the need to create theories that are free of political implications, this is also a reaction against the violent history of the twentieth century.

Hence, the twentieth-century context has been not only a large part of the reason for the debate, but also supplies a mode of expression for it, establishes its perimeters, and gives

\(^3\) Megaw & Megaw 1996: 176
\(^4\) Sims-Williams 1998:3
\(^5\) See for instance Megaw & Megaw 1996: 179: "the denial of another’s ethnic identity past or present may well be perceived as, and may itself be, racist."
basis for its arguments. Through this study, it is my aim to determine in what way this context is traceable in the works of the participants of the debate. As parties concerned debate, scholars and studies to a large degree are products of the twentieth century, there is no doubt that the impact of this political and cultural context will be substantial.
1. The theoretical basis

Whether or not the Celts actually migrated to Ireland and the British Isles is a question that has warranted many theories and fascinated many scientists in the last century. Since the question was raised, there have been many different approaches to it, and different attempts to answer it. In this chapter, I will try to give a brief outline of the more recent trends in this area of research.

It is interesting to note, as one looks through the older works written on Celtic Studies, that a majority of them mainly concern themselves with theories on language and literature. Quite possibly, this could be because there is an abundance of questions and riddles connected to these areas of study, and the amount of different material makes sure that it is nearly impossible to run out of themes and objects of discussion. I will not look closer on the works that deals with these areas, as they fall outside of the scope of this study. Instead, I will look closer on the theories that entail the Celts themselves and their possible physical connection to the islands. Some of these theories, especially the older ones, rely rather heavily on studies in language and literature to supply their basis of expertise. Because of this it is necessary to include a few aspects of the discussions of these areas here.

I have divided the material into three parts (category A, B, and C), each consisting of what seems to me a distinct form of theory. Category A is focused on the theories that place the Celts on the islands based on information from classical sources and comparison to Irish medieval literature. These theories rely on a joint effort between linguistics and archaeology to provide a foundation for the idea of insular Celts. The main sources used by the works in this category are classical texts, and in some cases the medieval literature of the islands. This is then used in conjunction with mainly linguistics and history to provide a theory of invasion or large-scale migration.

Category B is made up of theories that, as well as keeping the earlier reasoning in mind, also use archaeological finds in their base of research, and often use linguistics and historical sources in addition to this. The classical sources are abandoned as a source of factual information, and are instead used critically to throw light on what can be read from the archaeological and, in a lesser degree, linguistic evidence. The works in this category can often be recognized by that so many different scientific areas are included in the source material.
Category C contains the idea that the Celts never came to the islands at all, and this idea is based mainly upon archaeological sources. The classical texts are almost completely discarded, and historical and linguistic sources are used as a support for an archaeology-based theory, instead of in conjunction with the archaeological material. Because of this, this category is rather similar to category A, since the studies that are written on these theories are based on only a few areas of study.

1.1 Category A: The earlier theories

The early theories about Celts on the islands are to a large degree based upon studies that compare the contents of the Irish medieval literature to the descriptions of continental Celts put forward by classical authors. Such a comparison has shown us many similarities between the two, as we can see for example in Kenneth Jackson’s unavoidable “The Oldest Irish Tradition – a window to the Iron Age”, and there were undoubtedly reasons to accept this as logical truth, especially in lack of contrasting evidence.

But though the comparison of classical sources with Irish and Welsh medieval literature gave grounds to assume Celtic presence, it did nothing to show how exactly the Celts had come to the islands. There are no medieval texts that can be said to give a reasonable explanation for this, though such texts have been used as basis for theories. If one accepted the idea based upon the written sources, as most of the earlier theories do, that the inhabitants of the islands were Celts, then, based upon comparison with the classical sources, these were probably related to the Celts on the continent. Proving this was another matter entirely.

In this, the invasionist theory devised by archaeologists and linguists⁶ was helpful. This was a theory which, based on Celtic language trace and archaeological sources, envisioned a chart of Celtic migrations across Europe. This theory was initially based on classical sources, but the Celtic languages were used to affirm the information obtained from these sources. Archaeological evidence was then used to prove that both of these were correct. This deductive approach led to what might be called a selective form of research on both parts, since both the linguistic and the archaeological evidence were mainly used to confirm what was said in the classical sources, and were researched only as far as necessary to prove that.

⁶Cunliffe 1999: 16-17
This model was in use up to about the 1960s. But the theories born from the invasionist model have been in use up to today, though the invasion to a large degree has been replaced with a migration. There are several examples on these theories, both recent and older ones. I will use three different works to illustrate this case in point.

T. F. O’Rahilly’s work from 1946, *Early Irish history and mythology*, is a good illustration of the use of classical and medieval sources in conjunction. He also uses linguistic evidence to strengthen the link between the two. In the medieval texts, four separate invasions are suggested, and O’Rahilly arrives at the same conclusion when using these sources: there were four different invasions of the islands, and he was able to establish who the invaders were and when they arrived “with an approximation to certainty”.7

One interesting aspect of O’Rahilly’s text, at least to this study, is his need to avoid using archaeological sources. He goes as far as to claim that this – hopefully – will be one of the advantages of his work.8 The opinion he vehemently expresses is that archaeology cannot hope to determine anything definite about the Celts, since the Celts are defined linguistically. For the same reason, he claims, he himself cannot make any assumptions on archaeological grounds.9 It is worth noting here that the prevailing idea, at least for O’Rahilly, is that the different subjects should not mix. Closer to our own time this changes, as we’ll see later.

T.G.E. Powell, author of *The Celts*, a study that was published in 1958, also subscribes to this theory, though in a slightly different way. Contrary to O’Rahilly, Powell was an archaeologist, and hence is possibly guilty of the crime the former tried to accuse all archaeologists for, namely intruding upon fields of research they knew nothing about. Powell uses all the sources available to him, regardless of fields of study; and, not unexpectedly, his conclusion is somewhat different than O’Rahilly’s.

According to Powell, there seems to be no doubt that at least part of the inhabitants of prehistoric Britain and Ireland were Celtic in origin. He notes the Belgae as the only group “for which there is direct documentary evidence of migration to Britain”10, but still agrees that there must have been other Celtic-speaking groups on the islands before their arrival. This is determined on the grounds of written sources, as the tribes reputed to stand against both the Belgae in Britain, and later the Romans (outside the Belgic sphere of influence), spoke a form of Celtic. For Ireland, he draws less definitive conclusions, claiming that the Hallstatt culture

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7 O’Rahilly 1946: Preface v
8 Ibid: vi
9 Ibid: 429-430
10 Powell 1958: 49
was brought there from the continent (possibly through England or Scotland), while La Tène, quite possibly, was not, but was brought with settlers from England.\(^{11}\)

The last example I will show for this category is the work called *The Celtic Realms*, co-written by Nora Chadwick and Myles Dillon, and first published in 1967. This book is years later than O’Rahilly’s volume, but it follows the same theory; there were four invasions of the islands. However, the authors disagree with the order O’Rahilly places them in.\(^ {12}\) The authors also disagree with O’Rahilly’s aversion to the use of archaeological sources, and such sources are used in the discussions in *The Celtic Realms*. Chadwick and Dillon claim that the most likely dates for any larger invasion of the islands is either 2000 BC or 600 BC, and these dates are mainly due to the fact that the archaeological sources deny any larger invasions between these dates. Like Powell, Chadwick and Dillon use archaeological evidence in connection with written sources to devise a theory supporting a migration or invasion to the islands.

Out of these three examples, then, it is possible to see the different ways in which this theory can be constructed. It is worth noting that this kind of theory did not fall out of use as the years progressed, but there was a slight change in detail: the indigenous Irish sources, the medieval literature, fell out of use as a historical source. This was probably due to the nativist-latinist debate, which I will not enter into here. Suffice it to say that in the more recent works, for instance Dáithí Ó hÓgáin’s *The Celts. A history* (which I’ll get back to in chapter three), the main literary sources are the classical ones. This also seems to be the case in Nora Chadwick’s *The Celts*, first published in 1970, three years after her work with Myles Dillon, and it is worth noting that she in this study moves slightly away from the possible evidence of the indigenous sources, and instead focuses on the classical sources. She still claims that the medieval literature has merit as evidence, but is much more careful with her phrasing. In this, her book might be foreshadowing of the next trend, explained below.

1.2 Category B: A change in focus

As we have seen, the early published works on Celts and Celtic culture depended heavily on indigenous and classical written sources. This has at times resulted in theories with very one-sided views. Though it seems apparent that accepting the classical texts at face value is, at times, unwise, and a healthy portion of scepticism is needed when using these sources,

\(^{11}\) Powell 1958: 55-6

\(^{12}\) Chadwick, Dillon 1973: 5-6
the question of whether or not the information that can be gleaned from them is at any
measure correct at all does not seem to have been raised. This might be because there were no
alternative sources of information that could be used effectively and independently.

It is only in the last century that we have had enough reliable sources in different fields
of research to enable us to ask this question. This has resulted in a well-spring of new theories
and controversies, and though some are more conspicuous than others, they all warrant
attention and closer examination. These theories can also be separated into different fields of
study, but the lines that defined them have grown blurry and are not as easy to discern as they
once were. For the first time, it seems that it really is necessary to combine several fields of
research, and to be familiar with other subjects beside one’s own, in order to understand and
discuss a theory, not to mention propose one.

As we have seen, the earlier works in this area were largely indebted to written sources
for their basis of knowledge and discussion. A lot of the change that we register in the newer
works sprang from recent archaeological research. As archaeology became more fully
developed as a field of study, it became apparent that a lot of the theories that were taken for
granted earlier now needed to be re-examined in light of these new discoveries. It is necessary
to emphasize here that although archaeology had been a valuable tool for the linguistics and
historians to employ also previously, it had up until very recently mainly been used to confirm
the theories already proposed (as we saw earlier), and had contributed somewhat less to the
final result than could be said for the written sources already mentioned. As the subject grew
and became an independent area of study it was seen to contribute more to the discussions and
to become a source of equal value as history and linguistics, and in some of the more recent
works that will be the focus of this study it is one of the main sources of information.

The works that fall in under category B, works that have a more diverse basis of
knowledge, can be recognized by the authors being somewhat careful about drawing
definitive conclusions. They also often acknowledge that what they write is not necessarily
the truth, and that further research in this field is needed. In this they separate from categories
A and C.

It is also worth to note that many of the works that I will discuss here can be seen to
have close ties to one of the other two categories. Some might depend more heavily on the
archaeological sources than the historical or linguistic ones, while others might ignore aspects
of the archaeological material and instead focus on other kinds of evidence. Many of the
works that can be said to belong here were written in the last decades of the twentieth century
and the first few years of the twenty-first. Category B might, then, be termed category AC, as it is clearly a bridge between the two extremes, and possibly a route from one to the other.

An intriguing example of this is Dáithi Ó hÓgáin’s *The sacred isle. Belief and Religion in Pre-Christan Ireland*, published in 1999. We saw earlier that his later book, *The Celts*, which will be examined more closely later in this study, belongs in the first part. Due to the chronological difference, one would perhaps expect the development to go the other way, and *The Celts* to go further towards category C than category A, as *The sacred isle* can be placed here. The possible reasons for the categorical placing of *The Celts* will be discussed further in chapter three.

Ó hÓgáin is basing his argumentations on the classical sources in this volume as well. Based on the name ‘Prettanik’, used of the islands by Pytheas in year 325 BC, he argues that

"The new name indicates that much of Britain was at that time under the control of the people who bore it, and there can be hardly any doubt but that these Pritani were Celts. They had probably arrived in Britain from the Continent at some time around 500 BC, bringing with them weapons and tools of iron. The designation ‘Pritani’ would appear to have been first applied to the inhabitants of the island by Continental Celts."  

Through this acceptance of island Celts it is possible to place this work in category B, and not category C. But Ó hÓgáin also uses archaeological evidence, arguing that the innovations in technology around year 400 BC indicates the arrival of a more highly-developed population group that could bring these to the native populations – though he is not sure whether this means a large immigration, as was believed by Chadwick and the others from category A, or if the arrivals were a small, but steady stream of people. This shows that *The sacred isle* does not belong in category A either. Interestingly, he also says that the theory about indigenous development of the Celts and their language, put forward by Barry Cunliffe and Colin Renfrew and discussed below, is not impossible and cannot be dismissed.

Another author that belongs to this category is Barry Cunliffe. He proves this with two of his more recent works, *The Ancient Celts* (first published by Oxford University Press in 1997, then by Penguin Books in 1999) and *Facing the Ocean. The Atlantic and its peoples, 8000BC – AD1500* (2001). I will discuss these works together, as they fulfill each other.

In the older book, Cunliffe consistently describes the island dwellers as Celts, though he emphasizes that this is not due to the classical sources, which never described them in that

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13 Ó hÓgáin 1999: 40
14 Ibid: 40
way. However, he equally consistently avoids saying something about how the Celts came to be on the islands in the first place. It is necessary to look to the other volume to determine his ideas about this. In this we see a similarity to Bernhard Maier, who will be discussed in chapter five.

_Facing the Ocean_ is not so much a book about Celts as it is a book about the communities along the Atlantic coast. However, Cunliffe makes a few points worth noting for this study. His main argument is built on the theory that the Atlantic coastal communities were tied together in a trade network by sea, and enough so to warrant the appearance of a common culture and language. In other words, the Celtic cultures and languages grew on the spot, out of close connections that can be proved archaeologically. In this, Cunliffe completely abandons any invasion theory, but he’s not as radical as the authors in category C – he merely claims that an invasion is unnecessary, and that there is no trace of it in the archaeological evidence. If the communities had close contact with each other over a period of possibly four thousand years, as he supposes, this could be enough to explain the appearance of the Celts in the west.

In both these volumes by Cunliffe, he discusses the modern controversy that has grown around the Celts. He separates the term ‘Celt’ from the term ‘Celtic’, emphasizing that the one is a historical term while the other is a linguistic one. In connection with this, it is interesting to remember O’Rahilly’s idea that the Celts were defined linguistically. Cunliffe also opposes the circular argument that is involved in basing the historical model on the linguistic one. Interestingly, he claims that the invasion theory is out of fashion, even though it is still discussed. We see here how he is approaching category C, but without being as critical.

The last volume that will be discussed here is Barry Raftery’s _Pagan Celtic Ireland. The enigma of the Celtic Iron Age_, published in 1994. This volume is clear evidence that archaeology had begun to make an impact on research on the Celts. Raftery also argues that there is no archaeological proof for an invasion, but that it is much more likely that the Celtic trends were imported. He makes a good case for this in saying that the Hallstatt culture only used a couple of generations to spread from the centre of the Celtic area to its fringes. However, he does not exclude the possibility that innovative technology and artifacts arrived

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15 Cunliffe 1997: 146
16 Cunliffe 2001: 293
17 Ibid: 295
18 Ibid: 296-7
19 Ibid: 295
20 Raftery 1994: 26
to the islands with some sort of invasion or immigration from the continent, or were brought over in a raid.\textsuperscript{21}

Raftery takes one step closer towards category C than Cunliffe does, in that he uses a chapter of the book to discuss the modern implications of the use of the terms ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’. But he, too, is less adamant in this discussion, saying that the main problem is not the lack of proper terminology and the use of circular arguments, but rather that we have too little material evidence to draw any definite conclusions, and what we do have is too differentiated.\textsuperscript{22}

We see, then, that this category is indeed a golden mean between the other two. As such, the theories here might last longer than the ones in categories A and C, as archaeology will probably continue to be influential in many of these aspects. It is also probable that a compromise between categories A and C is the most likely to be the result of the paradigm-shift in Celtic Studies. I have chosen a limited selection of works to represent category B, but it is my belief that the majority of recent works written on the Celts on the islands belong here. In the discussion on Bernhard Maier’s \textit{The Celts} we will see that his volume also is an example of this form of theory.

1.3 Category C: Denial of the Celts

One more trend in recent works needs to be identified. This is a way of writing that, possibly, can be said to be less about the Celts than about the way other scientists have written about the Celts. In a way, it has sprung directly out from the debate that has been apparent in Celtic Studies – and in periodicals and newspapers – the last decade. The works in this category are full of definite statements, and they give no ground for doubt. The authors are apt to deny that the Celts ever came to the islands, and archaeology and social anthropology founds the largest part of their basis of knowledge. They tend to deny the knowledge given by other fields of research, often vehemently, and many of the texts use more words explaining and critiquing the circular arguments that have founded the earlier paradigms, and the knowledge that has formed the basis for theories, than of actually proposing new ones. The works in this category have sometimes been designed to provoke.

There are two works especially that are worth mentioning in this context. Due to the fact that a lot of what is written here is written by social anthropologists or others with very

\textsuperscript{21} Raftery 1994: 28
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid: 226
little connection generally to Celtic Studies, I have decided to leave them out of this study. Suffice it to say that it is enough to look through the source lists and bibliography of, for instance, Simon James or John Collis, and a lot of material will present itself for those interested.

The two works, however, that are worth looking at here, are Malcolm Chapman’s *The Celts. The construction of a myth* (1992) and Simon James’ *The Celts. Ancient people or modern invention?* (1999). John Collis’ volume, *The Celts. Origins, myths and inventions* (2003), also belongs here, but this will be discussed closer in chapter four.

Malcolm Chapman’s work has inspired both Collis and James, and is thus worth some attention. Chapman is, however, not a Celticist but a social anthropologist, and thus discusses this topic from a different viewpoint. I will not look closer on most of his work, but mainly sum up what is relevant for this study. The main lines of his argumentation is, essentially, that the Celts were never in Britain or Ireland, and if we look closer on the sources available to us we cannot be certain if they existed as a people at all – quite possibly, everything we read is wrong, the language name is invented, the archaeological trace does not prove anything, and the scholars are biased into believing. His main focus is dismembering the theories as they stand, and leaving the Celts as some sort of folk tale with little root in the real world. This is an extreme case of what Patrick Sims-Williams called Celts scepticism – as the terms of discussion are wrong, there is no need to assume that any of the theories are right, and it is much safer to just deny the whole thing.

Simon James operates on much the same level. The Celts are a modern idea that was born in the eighteenth century, and there is no basis for them at all, especially not on the islands: “the insular Ancient Celts never existed.” He even denies the linguistic argument, which so many scientists agree with: “the very naming of these languages as ‘Celtic’ around 1700 was no inevitable choice, but depended on assumptions about early history and the supposed movement of named peoples.” And the terminology has become, according to James, so wide and uncritical that it is impossible to use it academically. James also leans on the archaeological evidence, or the lack of it, as a basis of knowledge. He follows the theories that also Raftery argues, namely that lack of imported objects, continuity from the Bronze Age, and evidence of diverse cultures on the islands, indicate that there were no major population displacement, and thus that a migration never happened.

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23 Sims-Williams 1998
24 James 1999: 16
25 Ibid: 18
The majority of this volume, however, is used to discredit any form of invasion or migration theory. James denies the research done previously as well as the foundation for it, much as Chapman does. He also theorizes a completely different early history of the islands, where the population groups inhabiting the islands developed there to a large degree. We saw an aspect of this theory in Barry Cunliffe’s argument earlier, and the same idea can also be found in Renfrew. What is interesting about James’ volume is that it was written on the order of the British Museum in connection with the first elections to both the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and can thus, quite possibly, be accused of being biased before James even put his words on paper. I will discuss this possibility later on.

We see, then, that this is a category containing authors that have somewhat different motives for writing than the authors in the other categories do. The idea that the Celts should be reduced to no importance is a recent one, and one that mainly emerges in connection with the idea that the terminology used today has no scientific value anymore. The certainty with which these statements are made are unique for category C – and due to that certainty alone, this category is by necessity short-lived. Because, as we saw in category B, the theories are changing fast, and the determined and unwavering forms need to adapt accordingly.
Celts and context in modern scholarly literature

2. Assmann and the Celts as a Cultural Text

Celtic Studies are going through a paradigm-shift\textsuperscript{26}, and has been doing so for the last decades. This process isn’t finished yet. As the modern use of archaeology has punctured the bubble of the invasion theories, a whole new set of theories has blossomed. As shown in chapter one, it is possible to separate the current theories into three different categories. This separation forms part of the basis for this study.

The main focus of this study, however, is not the theories themselves – of which enough has been written elsewhere – but rather the reasoning and arguments scholars may employ in support of the different theories. I claim that these arguments are influenced by the authors’ context. It is quite likely that the tradition that an author is positioned within has a rather large impact on the way an author chooses to portray his or her subject. It is also probable that the author is ignorant about just how large an impact these traditions can have on his work.

The discussion mentioned earlier has mostly ignored this aspect. To my knowledge, this theory has not been put forward before. An outsider from a country with no Celtic background, proven or debated, can probably get a clearer view on this than the scholars standing in the middle of the discussion, and may not only notice what is being said, but why. That is what I aim to do in this study.

2.1 Assmann and the cultural text

Though modern scholars accept that our context affect us, it is difficult to demonstrate this satisfyingly. Therefore, in this context, Jan Assmann’s theories of cultural texts will prove a useful tool. According to Assmann, a cultural text is a text with normative and formative values, and is used to define or reinforce the way a society sees itself.\textsuperscript{27} He also claims that a cultural text is not necessarily writing, but any form of “sign complexes, that is, not just texts, but also dances, rites, symbols, and the rest”\textsuperscript{28}.

I intend to put the Celts, and then especially the island Celts, in the role of cultural text, and thus assume that they have a value to the people discussing them beyond mere empirical knowledge. This is an interesting assumption, especially when one takes into

\textsuperscript{26} James 1998: 204
\textsuperscript{27} Assmann 2006: 104
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid: 123
account that the participants of the island Celts discussion mentioned earlier often are from countries steeped in Celtic history. It implies that they have a personal interest in the Celts beyond scientific value, whether they are aware of it or not.

The fact that a cultural text can also be behavior or musical expressions, as Assmann proposes, is intriguing, especially when one thinks of the items the term ‘Celtic’ tends to be connected to in modern public cultural contexts. This could, for example, be the ideas of Celtic music, Celtic art (in tattoos and jewellery, for example) and other more or less pseudo-Celtic appearances. Through expansion of this definition, even the Celtic languages are a form of cultural text. The languages can certainly be said to have at least a formative value to the people who use them.

If the Celts are to be used as a cultural text, it follows that the authors writing about them are commentators. Their role is to interpret the text, and maybe make it available to a wider audience. Because Assmann employs both the term ‘sacred text’ and the term ‘cultural text’, it is necessary here to make the distinction between these terms. A sacred text should be repeated verbatim, and nothing in it could be changed; it needed specialists to handle it, and it was to be available to the public only in its given form. It had mystical capabilities.29 On the contrary, a cultural text is not required to stay in the same form. It can be changed, and indeed, often will be; for it stands at the centre of a changing community, and as an identity-forming text, will need to change with it. Hence it will need to be interpreted anew continuously.30

Placing the Celts in this role indicates that they do not occupy a set past – interpretation is needed constantly, and change is inevitable. The forms these changes take are part of what I will discuss in this study. It is logical to assume that any changes that are made to a cultural text will affect all its expressions, and if we follow Assmann in including music, art and language, among others, to these, this could have very intriguing results indeed. We could be looking at a change to the cultural inheritance, or possible discredit of a culture.

By using the Celts as a cultural text and the authors as commentators this will enable me to recognize more clearly the differences between the theories, and determine contextual backgrounds for these differences. If the perception of a cultural text is what binds a culture together, as Assmann indicates,31 then changing the text will also change the way a culture perceives itself. It is possible that this in itself is a motive for initiating change. It may

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29 Assmann 2006: 42
30 Ibid: 123-4
31 Ibid: 94, 104
therefore be possible to remove or change a country’s cultural background by rewriting the history books. And this in turn may change the way someone feels about the culture they are a part of.

In other words, in the course of this study I will examine how the island Celts are treated as a cultural text in modern scholarly literature, and determine whether the way an author discusses his material is in any way determined by his political or cultural context of the author. As mentioned earlier, I have no intention of discussing the actual theories to a large degree, but instead focus on why a certain theory is chosen and the way it is portrayed. To do this, it is necessary to choose source material that exemplifies the different trends that can be identified.

2.2 A question of context

No modern scholar would deny that we are all influenced by our context. This is taken for granted, and is often used in discussion. In this study, I assume that the context of the scholars has been influential to a degree where it can be detected in the writings of the scholars. I operate with three different aspects of context, namely cultural, political and historical. Cultural context is a primarily public context. It includes public aspects of society, and is mainly defined by public usage. Political context is based on the way modern countries are run, their relationship to other countries and to their own inhabitants. It is defined by a person’s relationship to his own country as a political unit rather than the culture he’s a part of. Historical context contains both of these, but in a manner that is no longer current. For instance, the fact that Gaul was once conquered by the Roman Empire can be said to be part of the historical context of France.

Due to the fact that this study focuses on the contextual differences, it is also necessary to look at the circumstances of the material. It must cover different cultural, historical and political contexts. To cover these aspects as best possible, I have chosen three different authors that all have written works entitled The Celts within the last nine years. Each work can be placed in one of the trends identified in chapter two, and each author has thus chosen his theory for how the Celts came to the islands. These authors are interesting also because they each stand for a different field of research, and because they come from different countries.

For the theory claiming the correctness of the facts stated in the classical sources, and the idea that the Celts came to the islands from, amongst others, Gaul, I have chosen Dáithí Ó hÓgáin’s *The Celts*, from 2002. Ó hÓgáin is an Irish folklorist with a few works of the Celts and Irish medieval history behind him, and many studies on medieval literature and modern folklore. In this case, it is interesting to see in what way his supporting the classical arguments can be connected to his context, and which traces this has left on his study.

On the other side of the debate, claiming that the Celts never came to the islands at all, we find John Collis’ *The Celts*, published in 2003. His case is especially interesting because he is an English archaeologist, and the English archaeologists are the ones who most vehemently have argued this case. The question of whether the English are biased towards the Celts on a fundamental level has been posed before, and it could be interesting to look closer on this possibility here. The fact that Collis has gone to the opposite extreme compared to Ó hÓgáin is also an aspect that could be rewarding to explore further with regards to political context.

To bring in a continental contribution, I have also included Bernhard Maier’s *The Celts*, published in Germany in 2000. It was published three years later in English, and it is the English translation I will be referencing. Maier, a German historian of religion, supports the theory claiming that we do have sufficient evidence to know the Celtic aspect of the islands’ history, and that current theories based on several fields of study are applicable. He is not the only one claiming this theory, but it is interesting in his case because he stands separated from the debate. Though Germany in part has a Celtic past, the country is not mentioned in the discussion, since the facts are clearer in its relation and there are less unanswered questions.

As we see, there are many different angles to explore here. It is necessary at this point to emphasize that I will not be using the entire texts named above, but will mainly be focusing on the parts that deal with the migration (or lack of migration) to the islands, as this is more central to the topic discussed. As the three authors stand for different fields of research, this might also be reflected in their writing, but in how large a degree is this determinant for their viewpoint?

If the Celts are a cultural text, the probability is that it takes different forms in different countries. This can be compared to the way different cultures will treat a shared past – for example, how Norwegians and Danes might view the Viking age differently, though both countries were a part of it. This is part of what makes this hypothesis so interesting. If these contextual differences really are as influential as I want to show, it can change the way Celtic
history is viewed. It is possible that the fact that there are actual regional variations in the Celtic cultural remains, and differences in the archaeological trace, is less influential to an author’s viewpoint than his or her own footing in a country with a Celtic past. Maybe the cultural, national, political and historical traditions that are apparent in connection to this past are more determining to an author’s viewpoint than previously believed.
3. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin and the classical approach

In this chapter I will examine Dáithí Ó hÓgáin’s volume *The Celts. A history*, published in Cork in 2002. Ó hÓgáin represents the trend I identified in chapter one as category A, the category in which written sources are the most prominent.

If we look back, there are three different ways to approach the question of the Celtic migrations to Britain and Ireland. The method Ó hÓgáin has chosen is in this context the most archaic one, since he relies almost exclusively on the classical sources for his basis of reference. This is remarkable, especially when we compare him with the other works discussed under category A that utilized the same method. They were all published more than thirty years before this volume. We can wonder why Ó hÓgáin has chosen to use this kind of theoretical basis, instead of making use of the modern research and development that is available to him. In this chapter, I will attempt to answer this question, and discuss *The Celts. A history* in light of it. As stated, I will not discuss the entire studies that are examined here. Instead I will focus on the parts that are concerned with the arrival of the Celts on the islands, and the theories the authors have concerning it. This means that I will only deal with Ó hÓgáin’s theories from about 500 BC and up to the Roman invasion of Britain, and only mention other periods when it is needed in order to establish perimeters for this chapter.

3.1 Factual information

*The Celts. A history* covers a period of time from about 1000 BC to the fourteenth century. For the discussion of the earliest period (up to the middle of the first century BC), Ó hÓgáin employs archaeological evidence, but the rest of his discussion is based almost exclusively on written sources. For the theory of the Celtic arrival to the islands, this means Caesar and other classical sources. He also uses the medieval literature of the islands to a small degree, mainly in connection with the migration to Ireland. The discussion of the later periods (from the Roman withdrawal and onward) is also based on these indigenous sources. I will not look into this part of the discussion, as it falls outside the scope of this study.

The most important fact to keep in mind when discussing this study, is that Ó hÓgáin expressly states that it is meant to be a study of Celtic military prowess.\(^{33}\) This means that he does not discuss material culture and religion, for instance, except for brief comparisons. This

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\(^{33}\) Ó hÓgáin 2002: preface
is a different viewpoint than the other two authors examined, as we shall see later. It is also a viewpoint that allows rather a different result than most works written on the Celts, since it does not aim to present new information, but merely restate what is already known. And it goes a long way to explain why Ó hÓgáin’s work is based on the written sources, since these are the only ones available to us that relate military conquests, migrations, tribal movement and similar in detail. It does not explain, however, why he would exclude so many of the modern angles.

There are many aspects of Ó hÓgáin’s work that merits closer examination. One of these is his argumentation that the early Celtic migrations may have been ritual in origin. It is an aspect that is only briefly discussed, but it is still interesting in light of my theory. Ó hÓgáin opens for this ritual aspect of the migrations very early in the volume, using Livy to account of how the brothers Belovesus and Segovesus were sent out in different directions with large numbers of men, to settle new lands allotted to them by the gods. This is, according to Ó hÓgáin, indicative that “large-scale migrations were regarded by the Celts as ritual acts.” Ó hÓgáin quotes Livy on several migrations – for instance the ones of Belovesus and Segovesus (which Ó hÓgáin dates to from the sixth century BC and onwards), and a migration from Gaul (which he dates to the middle of the fifth century BC). They are all described as being ritual in origin, though the latter is more uncertain as there seems to be some confusion between that and the earlier ones in Livy.

It is interesting to note that it is not necessarily the migrations themselves that are regarded as ritual, but rather the end of the migration and the reaching by the migrants of a form of ‘Promised Land’. As Ó hÓgáin also notes, the circumstances of the tribe quite probably were the determining factor for the decision to migrate. In the latter case described by Livy, overpopulation is the reason for which the migration is initiated, and this is also a likely reason for the earlier ones. War, famine and disease could also be causes for migration.

It is reasonable to assume that the goal of any migration would be to move away from bad circumstances, and finding new land to settle would surely be something to thank the gods for. But if the migrations themselves were ritual acts, this aspect of them might be a secondary development. A group of people reaching new, safe lands to settle would most likely lay their success at the feet of the gods, and this could easily be given a ritual aspect by

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34 Ó hÓgáin 2002: 7
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid: 8
37 Ibid: 13
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
those who witnessed it, whether they were foreigners or part of the tribe. It is, of course, possible that this ritual aspect was invented by the onlookers, or by the author of the text. In which case, we’re facing simply another example of classical creativity, and the problems accompanying the use of these texts as sources become apparent yet again.

Ó hÓgáin does not mention this ritual aspect in connection with the migrations to Britannia and Ireland. This makes sense if we look to the differences in his sources, Caesar and Livy. Caesar is his main source for these migrations, and he was, naturally, mainly interested in describing his own martial prowess and would thus focus on elements that enabled him to do this. Livy, on the other hand, was a historian describing a foreign culture that predated him by several centuries. It makes perfect sense that their treatment of such phenomenon would be quite different, and thus that the resulting texts would have very different viewpoints. Again, it is a matter of context, and how the writers choose to portray their subject. The fact that the two authors are more or less contemporary is also interesting. It is a very good example of the differences and ambiguities inherent in the classical texts, and the way an author’s motive can colour the subject of his writing.

Another aspect of Ó hÓgáin’s argumentation has already been discussed in chapter one in connection with his other volume, The Sacred Isle, namely what he argues about the names of the islands. These differ in accordance with which sources he is using; he gives ‘Albiu’ and ‘Éveriju’\(^{40}\) as general names used by several sources, and ‘Pritani’ or ‘Prettanik’ in connection with Pytheas.\(^{41}\) What is interesting here is that he claims that all these names were originally given to the islanders and their lands by the continental Celts:

“In all probability, the two islands were given these names, ‘Albiu’ and ‘Éveriju’, by Celts on the Continent (...) Pytheas of Marseilles, who visited Britain about 325 BC, may already have been acquainted with the toponymics, but he collectively called the countries the ‘Prettanik’ islands. This was derived from the population name Pritani (‘those who paint themselves’), by which the whole island of Britain came to be known. The new name indicates that a significant part of the island was at that time under the control of the people who bore it, and these must have been Celts. The designation Pritani itself would appear to have been first applied to the inhabitants of the island by continental Celts.”\(^{42}\)

It is interesting that Ó hÓgáin does not give any reason why the people in the islands at this time have to be Celts. He simply uses the names as evidence for Celtic presence. Later in the volume he gives an alternate explanation:

“Celtic groups had been settling in Britain since the early sixth century BC or thereabouts. As we have seen, the earliest of such groups would appear to have been those displaced in

\(^{40}\) Ó hÓgáin 2002: 14
\(^{41}\) Ibid: 15
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
Gaul by the powerful peoples of the Marne and Moselle, and these were followed by a
section of the Auleric and their neighbours. Having been established in Britain, such
Gaulish groups came to be known to their Continental cousins as Pritani (‘painted ones’),
from which designation the island got its name (later Latinised as Britannia).”

Here, he claims that these island Celts had originally migrated from Gaul – and that it was the
people of the continent who gave the island Celts these names, quite possibly several
centuries later. That means that he has two separate theories, one for each set of names. The
‘Prettanik’ name is referring to a people living on the islands, and was given to these
inhabitants by continental Celts, but the Albiou and Everiju names were given to the islands
themselves by continental Celts, regardless of the inhabitants of the islands. And if we look at
Ó hÓgáin’s argumentation, these names are more or less contemporary.

Again, we are dealing with one of the problems of the classical sources – they are in
many cases written long after the events they are describing has occurred, and the accounts
are often second-hand. The theory of these names is problematic at best, simply because of
lack of proper documentation. Questions can also be raised about the second name, Pritani:
should this really refer to migrant Gauls, then it is strange that a group should change so much
in three centuries that the tribes in the lands they once had a part of should call them ‘painted
ones’ instead of the tribal names they would have had. And if we believe Caesar’s claiming
that these groups were in close contact, it becomes especially curious.

In this argument, Ó hÓgáin is guilty of the crime that the authors in category C are so
insistent about: he transfers the meaning of one definition to another, often mixing different
fields of research, and his arguments are circular. The argument that the Celts were there
because the names of the islands were Celtic, and that the names of the islands were Celtic
because the Celts were there, only works for the authors positioned in category A. As Ó
hÓgáin has chosen this viewpoint, he is adhering to this circular argument, and has thus
chosen to ignore a larger part of the debate that has been going on for the last couple of
decades. There might also be traces of circular argument in his claiming that the Pritani had
been on the islands from the sixth century and onwards – it seems that he is placing the Pritani
there at that time because Pytheas found them there when he voyaged around the islands
sometime around 325 BC.  

Concerning the migrations to the islands, it is apparent that Ó hÓgáin conforms to the
category A theory of tribal migration from the continent. He names tribes, describing their
movement and city settlement. This, and the conflicts that ensue, is his main focus. It is clear,

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43 Ó hÓgáin 2002: 155
44 Ibid: 15
then, that he follows the line he set out for himself when he chose to focus on martial history. He does at times go into a language discussion – mainly concerned with the shift from the $k^\nu$ phoneme to the $p^{45}$ - but it is more a statement of fact than an actual discussion. This also separates him and the rest of category A from the other two categories – the discussion of language development has a larger role in categories B and C.

3.2 Consequences of category A

As previously stated, Ó hÓgáin’s choice of this viewpoint dictates the outcome of his discussion in no small manner. In fact, his work is less a discussion than a retelling of what is, to writers of category A, the only credible theory. His focus on martial history also leads to this way of writing. In other words, both the way he has chosen to write, and what he has chosen to focus on in his writing, influence the finished product. The choices Ó hÓgáin has made concerning the direction of his discussion also naturally dictate his choice of sources. I have already mentioned his focus on classical and medieval written sources, but it is also necessary to note some aspects of his scholarly source material.

Ó hÓgáin’s source list includes works from a period of time stretching from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. It is interesting that he has employed modern works in some aspects of his work, yet completely ignores the ideas brought up in the last thirty years concerning the migrations to the islands. This must be a conscious choice as there is very little possibility that a scholar from a land that is part of the debate to such a degree, is ignorant of the discussion and the arguments that have been put forward. But if the leaving out of modern arguments is a choice, as I claim, then the question is what could spur the writer to make such a choice. To answer this, we must look closer on all aspects of his work – first of all, what enables him to do so. A large part of this lies in a closer examination of category A.

Using elements of category A implies that the writer does not wish to add anything to the current theories. In fact, it might be more important for him to rephrase what has been said before, and maybe increase its value that way. He has chosen to restate what is already known (though no longer held to be true), and he does so using the same sources as those who has chosen this angle before him. In short, we can say that he comes closer to what Assmann calls canonization than innovation.

$^{45}$ See, for instance, Ó hÓgáin 2002: 8, 16, 104
Assmann uses the term canonical to describe texts that are sacred and has been given a finalized form, where nothing can be altered. Examples of canonical texts might be Homer and other classical texts, literature by writers as Shakespeare or Dante, or certain religious texts. As stated in chapter two, I would be using the Celts as a cultural text, and the writers as commentators, and canonization does not come into this. A cultural text will change in coherence with the society, not fossilize into a picture of the past. Should that happen, it is no longer a cultural text defining the society it exists within. As this cultural text, the Celts, is clearly changing, canonization is out of the picture. In spite of this, it could be rewarding to examine how canonization ties in with this way of writing and the theories forwarded here.

It is understood that the writer is not operating with canonical text. However, the sources he has chosen to use (sources that also can be called canonical in form), the way he is using them, and the method he has chosen for his discussion, opens for the idea that his work is an attempt to canonise what he sees as the correct theory. It is possible for commentators to change a cultural text, but maybe we are bearing witness to an attempt to canonise it instead. If we look at when this work was published, this seems more likely – it may have been published as a protest to the commentaries who seek to change the established cultural text. If so, it is clearly a contribution to the debate.

But it takes more than this to canonise a cultural text, and one commentator’s view is simply not enough. This is also something the author must have known, although he might not think of it in those terms. In light of this, one can wonder why he has chosen to fight such a lost battle. It must have been apparent at the time of publishing that his work alone would not be able to change the way the cultural text is developing. We remember from chapter one how Ó hÓgáin’s older book, *The sacred isle*, belongs in category B. One could expect *The Celts. A history* to follow on the same path. But instead of continuing the work started by the first book, Ó hÓgáin has instead chosen to publish something that in the long run probably will make no impact on the way Celtic history is viewed. As far as I can see, there are few reasons to do this, unless the point was to protest against other ways of presenting the Celts at the moment, instead of leaving a lasting imprint.

Another aspect of category A is a limited use of different fields of study, and a main focus on written and historical sources (that have later often been shown to be lacking). We find this also in this case. Though this is part of the method the writer has chosen, and thus is to be expected in his work, it is undoubtedly of additional use to him. It leaves him free to ignore much of the information that has been made available through other fields of research in the last three decades. In this case, that enables him to follow up on his theory without
having to include aspects that do not fit with his arguments. For instance, he can exclude modern evidence that contradicts his theory. An example of this is his circular argumentation in connection with the names of the islands and their inhabitants, mentioned earlier.

This is also a recognizable trait of other works in category, but what separates Ó hÓgáin from the other scholars also classified in category A is first and foremost more than thirty years in time. In that time the fields of study that used to function simply as a support for history has grown into independence. This means that when O’Rahilly chooses to ignore archaeological finds, he’s ignoring a minor group of evidence still without context that cannot be used as definite proof. When Ó hÓgáin ignores archaeological finds, he’s ignoring one of the larger sources of evidence for Celts on the islands. The writers had the same idea, but it has a very different outcome in the two cases.

We see, then, exactly how closely connected the writer’s focus on martial history is to the method he has chosen for his writing. If Ó hÓgáin’s goal was to take a step towards canonization of the version of the Celtic migration theories he proposes, or simply protest against the alternate theories of the last decades, then the choices of method and focus would be logical. If, however, he had other intentions, it is uncertain how effective this method may be. As previously stated, it goes against most other works published at the same time, and it is uncertain whether or not it will make an impact. Whatever possible intentions the writer may have had with these choices, will be discussed in later chapters.

3.3 Ó hÓgáin and the debate

As mentioned, whether or not Ó hÓgáin is making a contribution to the debate with his work is unclear. He’s promoting an outdated version of the Celts, and is thus doing exactly what the authors of category C (and, to some degree, category B) criticise. It is logical to assume that this work is meant as a contribution to the debate. To call it a denial of the debate is imprecise – there is, as far as I can see, no reason to publish this kind of work so much later than other works dealing with the same focus and method, unless it is meant as a reaction towards modern development. I mentioned earlier that this work does not add any new information to the cultural text of the Celts on the islands. Hence, the reason for its publishing cannot be simply to share new information or interpretations. This means that there must be other reasons to have it published at this time.

As a contribution to the debate, this work fulfils a different function. Its purpose is no longer simply to share information that might be deemed new or innovating from the author’s
point of view. Instead, it fills a slot that was previously empty. Few of the debaters have utilized arguments belonging to category A in their argumentation. It is quite possible that Ó hÓgáin’s work will make more of an impact as part of the debate than if it were to stand on its own. Many of the other contributors have radically different views on the Celts, and Ó hÓgáin’s work might simply serve to remind these authors of everything they’re discussing against.

We can see a parallel to the role this work has in the debate in some of the category C contributions. But where Ó hÓgáin is mainly interested in restating older knowledge, the other writers tend to disown everything that does not have its basis in archaeology. There is also an increasing trend to discredit theories simply because the terminology used is, in the debaters’ idea, outdated and imprecise. This is the opposite extreme from Ó hÓgáin’s work. If there is room for the one in the debate, there is room for the other. In fact, the category A angle might be needed to balance the category C angle in this respect.

*The Celts. A history* contains very few references, if any, to the theories and arguments posted in this debate, and thus places itself outside it – yet it stands steeped in it as surely as the other contributions. Part of the reason for this might be the author’s background in a country with a possible Celtic past – I will look more closely on this option in chapters six, seven and eight. I’m convinced that the choices described above were conscious choices, and that the effect seen in connection with the debate was intentional. There is little doubt that though this work seems to be isolated from the debate, it is anything but.
4. John Collis and the Celtic Scepticism

As we remember, this study operates with three different approaches to the idea of the Celts on the islands. I have chosen John Collis, an English archaeologist, to represent category C, but it is necessary here to stress that he is one of the less extreme examples of writers in this category. His study, *The Celts: Origins, Myths and Inventions*, was published in 2003, and if we compare this to the other writers mentioned in chapter one under category C, we see that Collis published his study four years after Simon James’ work, and a full eleven years after Malcolm Chapman published his. Collis’ study is significantly different from these works in several ways, and some of this might be due to the time difference between them. I will come back to this later in the study.

Where James and Chapman use a lot of pages to claim how everything we know is wrong and why, and are mainly targeting historians and linguists, John Collis has intended the archaeologists as his target group:

"Though I hope this book will be of interest to a wider public, it is mainly aimed at archaeologists, to demonstrate how we ourselves fall into the trap of illogicality and false interpretations, simply because we do not know where our ideas come from, whether they are right or wrong, and how they fit in with the historical development of our subject." 46

This quotation shows that Collis’ main intention with his work is not to discuss any single theory or propose one, but rather to examine the theoretical basis employed by other theories and discuss its validity. I will in this chapter look more closely on Collis’ role in category C, and examine his views concerning the possible migration of the Celts to the islands. I will also look at Collis’ relationship to the debate.

4.1 Collis and category C

In chapter one, I used the concept of ‘Denial of the Celts’ in connection with category C. Where Collis is concerned, this is imprecise: he’s not denying the Celts in any way, and is writing on the basis that this people at least has existed at some point, though it is uncertain how far towards the present, how far back in time, and in what areas the term is applicable. I have still chosen to include him in category C, as he does not conform to any one theory, but instead looks closely at all of them to define which parts of them are the most likely to be

correct. He’s thus employing a rather critical attitude to the sources and to current methodology and terminology, and these points places him in category C.

Collis’ study is not a theory in itself and neither is it a full-out attack on any other theory. He does not discredit any theories, neither from category A nor from category B, and he looks at classical, linguistic and archaeological sources in detail to determine who the Celts were, and where and when they existed. One might call his work an attempt to tidy the clutter surrounding the theories on the Celts today. It is interesting that his study is mainly aimed at other archaeologists. This implies that Collis is taking a stand against the way that these scholars have argued their case in the recent debate on island Celts, perhaps especially the negative attitudes that have been apparent at times.

It is interesting to note that Collis uses a part of his book to compare different classical sources. As a category C archaeologist, one might expect him to dismiss these texts as inconsequential evidence, and mainly focus on the archaeological remains, using the texts only as far as they fit with the archaeological evidence. Although he is critical to the written texts at times, he is not more so than the authors in category B, and often only after having examined the texts thoroughly. He adopts, to some degree, the same viewpoint as the category B authors: we cannot accept the classical sources at face value, but they can be used in coherence with archaeological and linguistic sources to determine a tentative certainty. He also dedicates a part of his text to a discussion of the origin of the term ‘Celtic art’, as well as examining where and when the term Celtic first came into use in modern times, and the circumstances around it. This shows that his study contains many of the same elements that are found in, for instance, Simon James, but Collis is using a less critical approach.

Collis demonstrates the largest scepticism about the way that modern authors have used their sources. He explains the way the modern theories have been formed on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas, and emphasizes in particular how the theories that laid the foundation for the modern concepts of Celts, Celtic languages and Celtic art and artefacts were uncritical at best, and at times could be said to be nothing but a jumble of ideas based on coincidences or misunderstandings (“He labelled the finds ‘Late Keltic’, the ‘Late’ to distinguish them from the geometrically decorated pottery and metal objects which could be assigned to the Bronze Age (which, as we have seen, was also considered ‘Celtic’ on the evidence of craniology)”\p{47}). The theories are also often heavily influenced by the context of the scholars, cultural, historical or political. Collis demonstrates that the theories we follow

\p{47} Collis 2003: 83
today can be traced back to a handful of individuals: Henri D’Arbois de Jubainville for the archaeological viewpoints\(^{48}\), Paul-Yves Pezron, Edward Lhuyd and Paul Buchanan for the terms for the modern Celts\(^{49}\), and Pezron also for the link between language and race\(^{50}\). The concept of Celtic art was formed on the continent, mainly in connection with archaeological sources, but the link to Britain was created using the Tara brooch and the Battersea shield, and was based largely on the linguistic definition of the islanders as Celts.\(^{51}\) Hence, the definition of the island cultures as Celtic was created out of the idea that a certain art form had to be Celtic because the languages spoken in the areas where the art form was found were Celtic also.

This shows that when the category C authors criticise the authors from categories A and B for employing flawed methodologies, or outdated or useless terminology, the same points are also valid concerning the authors in category C, especially the ones that base their discussion on archaeological evidence. That Collis as an archaeologist should emphasize this is very interesting, because he’s turning against other category C authors in doing it. In other words, he is turning the arguments that Simon James, among others, has employed against authors of other categories, against the archaeologists. It needs to be stressed here, though, that not all English archaeologists can be placed in category C. However, Collis’ discussion will also influence category B writers, as they to a large degree follow the same arguments and theories. This is an effect that is caused by the idea that a modern scholar needs to be aware of the theories in the fields of study he or she is working alongside. For instance, an archaeologist will need to be aware of current theories in history, and the historian will need to be aware of development in linguistics. This means that though the categories stand separate from each other in focus and source use, the same methodology is used in all of them.

John Collis is also eager to show the differences in modern theories, and actually goes a fair way towards dividing them up in different categories much in the same way as was done in chapter one in this study. To do this, he employs different maps given by the authors of various works published from 1958 and onwards.\(^{52}\) Several of these maps have been

\(^{48}\) Collis 2003: 63
\(^{49}\) Ibid: 102
\(^{50}\) Ibid: 56
\(^{51}\) Ibid: 81-3
\(^{52}\) Ibid: 93-8
published in more than one study. His division is mainly based on views on Celtic locations in the fifth century BC, and he divides the theories on this into three parts:

- Interpretation 1, placing the Celts in central and northern areas of what is France today, and based mainly on information derived from classical sources. Collis uses the authors Christopher Pare and Amédée Thierry as examples of this interpretation.

- Interpretation 2, placing the Celts in northern Gaul and southern Germany. This interpretation equals the knowledge from the historical sources with the spread of La Tène art, and is mainly connected to authors such as Ruth and Vincent Megaw, Barry Raftery and Pierre-Marie Duval. This is the most widespread interpretation among modern authors.

- Interpretation 3, placing the Celts in northern Gaul, southern Germany and Bohemia. This interpretation is connected to, among others, Barry Cunliffe, Simon James and John Haywood, and is mainly based on archaeological sources. Tribal names and other elements from classical sources are included, but there are large areas where the archaeological sources have been given precedence over the historical ones, and many elements from the historical sources have been moved to fit the evidence indicated by archaeological sources.

It is worth noting here that Collis himself thinks that as far as determining the location of the Celts in the fifth century, Interpretation 1 is most likely the correct one. He also concludes with this when the archaeological sources are employed as determining factors.

These three interpretations can be compared to the three categories given in this study. We see that what Collis gives as Interpretation 1 can be to a large degree connected with category A: the focus is on the historical sources. In Interpretation 2, attempts are made to reconcile the historical and archaeological sources, so this matches category B: but instead of comparing the source material to the archaeological material, the archaeological material was simply adapted to the information given in the written sources. Thus, the reconciliation is in

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Collis 2003: 117
Ibid: 97-98, 117
Ibid: 93, 96, 117
Ibid: 96-7, 117-8
Ibid: 98, 127-8
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itself flawed. Interpretation 3 and category C are also similar, as the placing of Simon James in both of them shows. However, the focus of Collis’ interpretations is different than that of the categories of this study, and thus Collis’ Interpretation 3 is less extreme than this study’s category C. This is both because Collis’ Interpretation 3 is open to historical sources, and though its authors are mainly focused on archaeological sources, the authors are not placed there because of their critical attitude.

4.2 Collis and the insular Celts

Collis mentions many times the lack of contemporary documentation for the Celts on the islands, merely naming Caesar’s claim that the Belgae had migrated across the sea to Britannia, and that there are place-name evidence for the presence of other tribes on the island as well. 58 Aside from these few points, his main case of evidence concerning Celtic presence on the islands is found in archaeology.

When it comes to the insular Celts, Collis follows the discussion of authors like Colin Renfrew and Barry Cunliffe, supporting a large area with a common culture covering both sides of the channel. He does not explain or debate against any theory, as for instance Simon James does; he seems to assume that enough has been said already, and merely sums up the situation in a few lines:

"Rather than seeing punctuated links with the continent, we can suggest a continuity of contact, sometimes greater, sometimes less, affecting now this, now that, part of the material culture and society’s ideology, but certainly not the isolation and lack of movement implied by migrationist theories." 59

For Ireland, Collis merely emphasizes the lack of sources, and that there is no evidence to base theories on: “merely there is no evidence, and so we should maintain a neutral stance.” 60

The lack of attention given to the insular Celts in Collis’ study can be explained by the focus he has chosen. To explain the theory he follows in detail has no point – he is writing for people who follow the same theory as he, down to the details, and as such it is unnecessary to explain it further. This is especially true considering the amount of words that have been used in this study to explain the faulty logic that has led to today’s theories. Collis spends more

58 Collis 2003: 180
59 Ibid: 182
60 Ibid: 183
time explaining why the theory he follows here is the most logical one than detailing the contents of it. He does, however, spend some time arguing what has been claimed in the recent debate, and I will come back to this later.

As demonstrated, Collis says very little that has relevance to the islands directly, but some of the arguments in the discussion surrounding incursions into Italy and Iberia can be transferred to the islands. Collis argues on a base that what is true in one area is generally true in the others as well – thus, if a language could precede a possible migrating population in entering a specific area, as he argues could have been the case in Iberia, there is no reason why this can’t be true for the islands as well. This fits in with the theory he follows on an area of shared culture on the islands and the continent, as argued by Renfrew and Cunliffe. On the same note, if one does not envision population change in ancient Greece when its art trends went through the process of orientalising and thus changed, there is no reason to assume population change in central Europe when the same process happened there, even though a new and distinct art form appears.

Collis also emphasizes that this is a theory that archaeologists have been following for longer than scholars from other fields of study. This is interesting, because it follows what James has been saying in some degree, but where James is berating other scholars for not catching up, Collis is merely stating fact, and doing so without any accusation or other negative attitude:

“...the concept of the archaeological culture is something which ‘New Archaeologists’ in the 1970s were rejecting as a useful heuristic device, but that this had not generally been taken up by Iron Age specialists on the continent, and by more traditional archaeologists in Britain. It has taken even longer to start to impact on those outside the discipline such as historians and linguists, and this has led to a long survival of flawed methodological approaches in general books on the Celts.”

“In 1931 Hawkes abandoned the Hallstatt/La Tène terminology on the grounds that it was impossible to apply them in an insular context; the material, though reflecting continental trends, was too different, especially the ceramic styles.”

Collis is also very focused on the fact that Celtic Studies has developed quite differently from other studies, and that development affecting other fields of study heavily often has failed to make an impact on Celtic Studies at all. As Renfrew and others do, he often compares Celtic Studies with development in research in German Studies, showing that changes that occurred in the methodologies and theories of the latter did not necessarily occur

61 Collis 2003: 122
62 Ibid: 157
63 Ibid: 157
64 Ibid: 152
in the former, though one might expect them to. Both fields of study deal with population
groups contemporary to the written sources, and have in common a later classification of the
languages of these groups as respectively Celtic and Germanic. It is perhaps logical to assume
that the research done in both fields of study would be similar. I will discuss some possible
reasons for the differences between these two fields of study more closely in chapter eight.

4.3 Collis and the debate

I mentioned above how Collis’ study can be seen as an attempt to tidy the clutter
surrounding the debate in Celtic Studies. As such, it is clearly both inspired by and directed
towards the debate. Again, it is apparent that Collis’ intended target group is the
archaeologists, and he frequently points out errors in their logic or source use:

“Simon James has suggested that this acceptance of the term Celtic was due to an
increasing sense of being ‘other’, especially on the part of the Welsh and Scots, the latter
in the wake of the Act of Union in 1707. Though this difference of identity certainly
existed, it should not be overplayed; the rebellions of 1715 and 1745 were, after all, not
about the independence of Scotland, but about who should sit on the throne of England,
and, as previously mentioned, I can detect none of the Welsh nationalism that James sees
in Edward Lhuyd’s writings.”

Collis also identifies himself as one of the few who do not follow flawed methodologies:

“(…) we cannot use false methodology in situations where it does not matter, as it will then be
used in situations where it does, in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, in the Near East, where
archaeology is being used in modern propaganda battles. It is here that I deviate from
the majority of authors who have written on the Celts as they are, usually tacitly, perpetuating
methodologies and interpretations which are grounded in the racism and stereotyping of our
nineteenth-century predecessors which, I suspect, most of the authors would themselves reject,
if they knew where they came from.”

In this quotation, a part of the idea behind Collis’ argumentation is shown clearly,
namely that the current views on the Celts are based on racist and stereotypical attitudes
dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In other words, these early theories
have been heavily influenced by the cultural context of the scholar forming them and by the
times in which they were formed. Collis reacts strongly to this, and his book is in part an
attempt to rid the modern theories of such contextually based ideas. But he is also influenced
by his own context and time, as the heavy attack on various forms of racism within and

65 Collis 2003: 71
66 Ibid: 229
without the government in his last chapter shows. I will demonstrate in a later chapter that most modern writers are influenced by their cultural context and the times they write in, though perhaps in not so apparent a degree as what Collis shows for the authors of the nineteenth century. To me, what Collis shows here as racist and stereotypical attitudes in nineteenth-century theories proves yet again that it is impossible for an author to not be coloured by his context, and there is no reason to believe that we should have been able to avoid it in present times when all evidence shows that we could not do so in the past.

I mentioned earlier the amount of years that have passed between the publications of Malcolm Chapman, Simon James and John Collis. We can trace a development here, from Chapman’s vehement denial of anything Celtic, to James’ denial of the Celts on the islands, and then to Collis, who does not deny anything, but rather claims a false and biased basis for the theories in current use. This development indicates that the view of the archaeologists in category C, at least, has changed slightly as we come closer to present times. It might also mean that the debate has quieted down somewhat. However, the different reactions to the studies named here contradict this: Collis quotes James having gotten heavy criticism for his work, both from other archaeologists and scholars and from the general public.67

4.4 Collis and the cultural text

If we look at this with the methodology employed by Assmann, we can answer a few more questions. It’s apparent that according to the perimeters established for this study, the authors are all functioning as commentators of a cultural text. What is interesting is the form their commentaries take. There is a chance that it was necessary when Chapman published his work to be rather provocative in order to be heard by those commentators who viewed the cultural text differently. The fact that the contrast between category C and the other categories has been brewing in certain groups of commentators for the better part of a century might also have added a touch of impatience to the mix. For James’ study, much of the provocation shown might be based in the reason for his publishing at that time, namely the commission of the work by the British Museum – in which case, it is not him who is the commentator, but the institution he worked for.

Collis’ study differs from these other two in that he is not commenting the cultural text as much as the commentaries others have made on it. This is an element that is also present in

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67 Collis 2003: 225
the works by the other category C authors, but he stands separate from them in that he hardly comments the text at all, while they are rather focused on bringing out their own commentary. Collis, however, challenges the basis for their commentaries. In this, we see a sign that what Collis is really challenging is the established commentary, and this might be seen as an attempt to battle canonization of a theory that he sees as being flawed. Should this be the case, he is standing on the other side of the problem compared to Ó hÓgáin, who is trying to canonise a theory that is out of current use.

There is another angle that can be explored using Assmann. As mentioned above Simon James received much criticism after the publication of his study. This criticism might in part be due that he comments on every aspect of the theories surrounding the Celts, including modern questions. This means that he is voicing an opinion that many people will have cause to respond to, since he is challenging a cultural aspect that has a formative and normative value for many people, whether they are scholars or not. The way he is doing this, possibly based on the attitudes of the British Museum, is also rather harsh, and this might inspire stronger reactions from other commentators as well as the public. Part of this reasoning might also be relevant concerning Chapman. Collis, on the other hand, is not challenging the formative and normative qualifications of a society. Instead, he’s challenging the basis of the commentaries of other scholars. This leaves the general public out of the picture, giving them less cause for complaint.

There is another, more psychological reason for why James would receive so much criticism. It is possible to ignore Chapman’s theory should one wish to, since what he is doing is basically to deny everything. Giving credence to this theory may seem like listening to a man who in the twenty-first century claimed that the earth was flat. James, on the other hand, is criticising everything and, to a degree, everyone, and he’s doing it with a solid (though possibly slightly biased) standing in modern research. This is much harder for people to accept, and much easier to interpret as personal. It is similar to how people can ignore what is seen as madness, for madness isn’t expected to contain any sense: however, a sane, but deviating person is much harder to ignore, since what he says will touch on the truth.

It is apparent that category C is much more political and with closer ties to the public than category A. This is evident both in the amount of criticism received from the general public, and in the aim of the various authors: James, with his backing in the British Museum, would have aimed his book directly at the public, since most likely it was the public that the Museum wanted to influence. And Collis, though aiming at other archaeologists, is launching himself into a debate that is both highly controversial and very much in the public’s eye. I will
show later on that we cannot escape the political factor in discussing the Celts, since both past and present discussions are very much a product of the political times the discussions are made in. From Caesar with his propaganda motive, to the nineteenth century writers influenced by colonialism and craniology, to modern writers focused on a sense of belonging to a culture, ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’ have had political implications.  

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Collis 2003: 195
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5. Bernhard Maier: A continental voice

Bernhard Maier’s study, *The Celts. A history from earliest times to the present*, is an example of the trend I have identified as category B. This means that Maier supports a theory employing both written and archaeological sources. But there are other reasons why I have chosen Maier to represent this category in this study.

It is my belief that including a scholar that has his background on the continent and not on the islands is essential to this study. The difference in the backgrounds and contexts of the different scholars will mean that whatever influence the context has on the work of the scholar will be unique in each case, leading to several distinctive expressions. As Maier is German, I expect that his work will show significant differences to Collis’ and Ó hÓgáin’s work in this respect.

There is another important aspect that separates Maier from Collis and Ó hÓgáin, and that is the subject he has chosen to study. While Ó hÓgáin’s main field is folklore, and Collis’ subject is primarily archaeology, Maier is a historian of religion, and it is to be expected that followers of three such different fields of study will give rise to different interpretations of the same cultural text, and may also have different foci.

It is apparent, then, that the three scholars chosen for this study are different from each other not only in what trend their work can be identified with, but also in their background, field of study, and nationality. In later chapters, I aim to use these differences to throw light on the Celts as a cultural text.

5.1 Maier and the insular Celts

*The Celts. A history from earliest times to the present* was published in 2000, and the English translation used here was published in 2003. In his study, Maier covers the period from the earliest mention of the Celts in the classical sources up to modern times. More than a third of the text is devoted to Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Brittany in the Middle Ages and onward, indicating quite clearly that he thinks of the groups living in these areas as Celts. It is quite possible that the Celts of this period are his main focus. For this part of the study, he uses mainly historical written sources, while his discussion of the older periods is based on classical texts and archaeological sources. It is noteworthy that though Maier is a historian of religion, he does not include religion in his discussion to any large degree. This aspect mainly
comes up in connection with Christianity on the islands, and then most often to demonstrate changes in society.

Though Maier speaks of the islanders as Celts from the beginning of the study, he never explains why he believes that this was the case or how it came to be. Neither does he explain any theory of the spread of the Celts in detail. However, his extensive use of historical sources, and the fact that such a large part of his book is dedicated to historical times, may indicate that he adheres to previously established theories and simply neglects to say so. If this is the case, then the theory in question here is based on linguistic continuity as proof of a Celtic presence on the islands, and historical and classical sources are used in supporting this; the lack of archaeological evidence in some areas, and the large disparities found in the archaeological remains, is not taken into consideration.

If I am correct about the kind of theory Maier is adhering to, then it is logical that his theory follows it closely, meaning that it also is mainly based on written sources and linguistic evidence for the identification of the islanders as Celts, and uses the archaeological evidence to support this. We see an example of this in the way Maier assumes that both Maiden Castle in Dorset and Dún Aengus on Inishmore are Celtic sites\(^{69}\), though he adds that the latter has yielded little to no archaeological evidence while we have substantial evidence for the first. As there is little archaeological evidence concerning whether or not Dún Aengus is Celtic, this assumption must have been made using previous theories based on written sources and linguistic evidence.

It is interesting that Maier has portrayed the sites in this way, as recent research (for instance studies by Barry Raftery, whom Maier has listed as a source, and Barry Cunliffe) claims that due to the lack of evidence one should avoid drawing conclusions about Celts in Ireland. Maier is avoiding this question entirely – he mentions that the evidence is scarce, but does not imply that it is insufficient to draw conclusions from. The fact that he does not take a stand concerning these questions, which have been given so much attention in the recent debate, and also that he is purposely not saying whether or not he conforms to long-established theories or more recent ideas, has implications for his connection to the debate, and I will get back to this later.

Maier also employs linguistic evidence, mainly in comparisons between the development on the islands and on the continent. One of the phenomena he discusses in this respect is the change from Indo-European \(k\) to \(p\) in Celtic languages. This change is well

\(^{69}\) Maier 2003: 117-9
known in connection with the insular languages, but, as Maier demonstrates, “the continental Celtic languages show the same change.”\textsuperscript{70} He also uses languages as proof of Celtic presence on the islands: “...our picture of ‘Celtic’ Ireland and ‘Celtic’ Britain (...) rests primarily on linguistic continuity.”\textsuperscript{71} Though he is most likely aware of the theories concerning language continuity and a common cultural language that have arisen in the latter part of the twentieth century, he does not comment them, though it is noticeable that he does not agree with the idea of a common cultural language.

Concerning the languages, Maier takes a definite standpoint that sharply opposes that of Barry Cunliffe and Colin Renfrew. Whereas they both claim that the Celtic languages developed as a kind of Lingua Franca in the areas of the Atlantic coast, Maier seems to be a follower of the invasionist theory in this respect: “That the Celtic languages came to Britain and Ireland from the European continent and completely replaced the languages previously spoken there is certain.”\textsuperscript{72} This is also a controversial idea that has been the topic of much discussion in the last decade. We see that he has chosen to again make a claim without explaining the basis for it, as was also the case concerning his theory on the Celtic presence on the islands in general. This seems to be a constant in his discussion of this field, and this may not be coincidental. Concerning this, we need to look closer on Maier’s role in the modern controversy.

5.2 Maier and category B

As discussed in chapter one, scholars are placed in category B based on their usage of both written and archaeological sources. They also follow a middle road between the other, more extreme categories. However, it must be mentioned that this category is not uniform, and there are large variations between the different scholars. This is distinctive for category B. Though the writers of category C can also be shown to be slightly different from each other, as John Collis stands separate from Simon James, these are often differences of intensity more than they are differences in theory. In category B, it is more often theoretical differences that separate the scholars.

I placed both Barry Raftery and Barry Cunliffe in category B. I’ve demonstrated above how Maier’s theories in some aspects go against the theories proposed by these authors

\textsuperscript{70} Maier 2003: 121
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid: 75
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid: 120
he disagrees with the idea of a common cultural language (which has been argued by both Colin Renfrew and Barry Cunliffe), and with Raftery’s claim that based on archaeological evidence, Ireland was not necessarily Celtic. Maier’s willingness to draw conclusions in spite of limited or lacking evidence also contrasts with what these scholars claim. This means, added to Maier’s following of the written sources and using archaeology in support of them, that he stands closer to category A than Cunliffe and Raftery, though it is not by a large margin. Maier does not employ the written sources as absolute proof, as Ó hÓgáin does, but neither is he challenging them in any way, nor does he give the impression that he is distrusting what is stated.

I claimed in chapter three on Dáithí Ó hÓgáin that the method he has chosen enables him to choose to not explain the contrasting theories or to go into them at all. Maier does not have this excuse. He mentions in his preface that “the history presented in this book seeks to do justice to the term ’Celt’ in all its aspects”. This does not exempt him from delving into the modern discussions that have arisen in recent decades. It is unlikely that he should be unaware of these controversies, so leaving them out of his study must be a conscious choice. We also find a possible reason for the method Maier has chosen in the above quotation. If we combine his wish to do justice to the term ‘Celt’ with his large focus on medieval times and beyond, it becomes apparent that Maier probably does not agree with much of the recent discrediting of island Celts, and has published his study as an opposing argument against these ideas.

The view Maier portrays in his study is one that has not been expressed in the last decade, especially not without any reference to the debate concerning Celts on the islands. Some modern studies use a variant of this theory, but it is then often moderated to include recent archaeological theories, meaning that they do not stand separate from the debate the way Maier’s study appears to do. However, as Maier focuses largely on the island Celts and the Celts of Brittany in this study, he cannot be said to avoid the debate – were that the case, he would perhaps be writing about mainland Celts, where the problems are fewer and less controversial. Instead, he has chosen to publish a study following a theory that has been demonstrated before, but is facing heavy criticism today and is usually adapted according to this. This is an aspect he has in common with Ó hÓgáin, though Maier is less extreme. There are also similarities between them in that they both published studies based on theories that

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Maier 2003: preface VII
are deemed no longer valid, and they did so without commenting on the arguments against their theories or the criticism concerning the validity of these theories.

As stated earlier Maier is a historian of religion but he does not delve into religious aspects in this study - he focuses on the historic aspects. As a scholar who has studied Indo-European connections to a large extent, one might expect him to write a thesis based on contrasting evidence that would throw light on the Celts in an Indo-European perspective. Instead, *The Celts* is mainly a study of history and culture, without comparisons to opposing evidence or studies.

As we have seen, category A can be seen to be somewhat fossilized, and to use the methods of this category today only serves a purpose when done in light of the recent debate. It is possible that Maier’s study has the same hallmark. One may get the impression from Maier’s work that he is ignoring the debate, and mainly writing alongside it, but as I demonstrated in chapter three on Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, it is not that simple. As Maier’s work can be said to stand close to Ó hÓgáin’s, though in a different category, is it possible that his work as well only shows its relevance when it is viewed in connection to the ongoing debate.

5.3 Maier and the debate

Maier’s work is a restating of a previously known theory concerning the Celts on the islands. However, he never mentions which theory this is, why he believes it credible, or whether or not there have been objections to it. He claims that the islanders are Celts in the very beginning of the study: “Part II covers the medieval history of the Celtic peoples of Ireland, Britain and Brittany, which was colonized from Britain.” This assumption is continued throughout the study, but still without any explanation as to why. We have also seen that Maier avoids commenting on or including questions that have been aimed towards this kind of theory. An example of this concerns the lack of evidence for the assumptions he makes.

It may look as though Maier is simply avoiding the debate altogether, and is merely trying to write a noncontroversial book about Celts. However, as stated concerning Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, it is very unlikely that a study that promotes a theory out of current favour would be published at this time unless it in some way would be connected to the debate. In light of this,

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74 Maier 2003: preface VII
we need to look closer at whether it would be advantageous for a study like this to be published at this time.

I demonstrated in chapter three that Dáithí Ó hÓgáin may be attempting to canonise a research theory. It is possible that Maier may be doing some of the same, as he is employing a method that has received heavy criticism in the last decade, and does so without moderating the theory to accommodate the criticism. However, the method Maier has chosen is far more up to date concerning modern research theory than Ó hÓgáin’s method, and while Ó hÓgáin has chosen to ignore recent research and opposing evidence when discussing his theory, Maier is merely ignoring the views that have been argued in the recent debate. It may seem as though he is trying to stay separate from the debate entirely, but as I argued above, were this the case he would have chosen another subject for his study. It is far more likely that this is another discreet protest against the modern debate.

It is an intriguing fact that this is valid for all three scholars that form the base of this study. Ó hÓgáin goes furthest, employing a theory that has been out of use for half a century; Collis seems to agree with the views argued in the debate, but is turning them against all the discussing parties. Maier is the most cautious of them, and his work may seem perfectly logical at first glance. However, his work is just as closely tied up to the debate as are those of the other two scholars, though in a less apparent way. It has quite possibly been published as a reaction against the debate; especially the parts of it that are directed towards the validity of the idea of island Celts.

While Maier doesn’t comment on the modern debate, he does spend a few pages on a discussion of the modern uses of the term ‘Celtic’, mainly in contrast with the term ‘Germanic’. Though this in some degree touches on the claim of the category C authors that the term ‘Celtic’ has become too wide to use effectively, it is not the same question: Maier does not discuss the validity of the term, but rather contrasts its uses with similar terms and comments on the differences. Maier also focuses mainly on the popular uses of the term, instead of the academic ones that category C authors focus on. He emphasizes the fact that the way the adjective ‘Celtic’ is used today has little or no connection to the ancient Celts, and rather more to do with modern views and attitudes: “The application of the term ‘Celtic’ to different phenomena from prehistory to the present thus owes more to the subjective viewpoint of the modern observer than to any fundamental inner unity between them.”\textsuperscript{75} In other words, ‘Celtic’ as a term has grown to encompass much more than what is viewed as

\textsuperscript{75} Maier 2003: 5
Celtic in academic circles, and many of these new uses of the term have originated in the public rather than the academic point of view.

Maier also contrasts the uses of the term ‘Celtic’ with the uses of the term ‘Germanic’, and some of what he says concerning this is worth mentioning here, as it demonstrates the distinct position of the term ‘Celtic’ in modern usage, both academically and publicly: “The serious differences between the history and emotional connotations of the terms ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’ are perhaps best illustrated by the fact that ‘Celtic’ is possible, and to a degree even positive, in many collocations where ‘Germanic’ would seem unusual and even ideologically suspect.” In the public view, this means everything from ‘Celtic music’ to ‘Celtic spirituality’ (which would both be deemed awkward, at the least, were we to use the term ‘Germanic’ instead), while the terms ‘Celtic culture’ and ‘Germanic culture’, in a modern context rather than an ancient one, could be said to demonstrate the same from an academic point of view. Both terms have value as an attributive, but the term ‘Germanic’ has a negative one while ‘Celtic’ has a positive one.

5.4 Maier and the Celts as a cultural text

It is possible that Maier also might be attempting a form of canonization. If this is the case, he is trying to canonise the cultural text itself, and he does not argue against the commentaries others have made on it (as was the case with John Collis). This is another similarity to Ó hÓgáin, though his attempt is most likely in vain; the theory Ó hÓgáin employed has fallen so far out of current use that it is probably impossible to implement it again. Maier’s method, however, is probably more representative of what is believed by the public and those who have little knowledge of the debate, and in this we might also detect a possible motive for the publishing of this work. Since this idea is already present in the minds of the public audience, it should be easy to reinforce.

A cultural text has normative and formative values. Were it to be changed, this could change the way people view themselves. It is up to the commentators to change the text, though any changes they implement may take some time in being adopted by the general public. If we look at Ó hÓgain’s case, it is unlikely that his commentary would lead to large changes in the public mind. That commentary makes more sense if seen in connection with other commentators, as they are more likely to be the target group for the commentary and

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76 Maier 2003: 250
hence more likely to be influenced by it. In Collis’ case, we saw the same: though his commentary possibly could be of interest to a wider audience, it is undoubtedly directed towards an academic audience and will be of most value to them. Maier’s commentary, on the other hand, seems more logical if considered for the general and not the academic audience, as the theory he discusses has not been long out of favour with scholars and is probably the best-known theory to the public. It is also a theory many will accept as fact, especially if they haven’t paid attention to the arguments put forward in the debate.

It is logical, then, to assume that Maier has written for the general public rather than the academic circles. This is also supported by his own words, when he writes that his study “...aims to help the general reader to make historical sense of the various facets of Celtic culture, while offering the specialist reader an overview of the present state of knowledge by means of detailed references to all sources.”

We can contrast this with Collis, who claimed to be aiming mainly towards other archaeologists.

According to Assmann, a cultural text could also be musical expressions and similar. This is especially interesting concerning Maier’s study, as he shows the distinction between the uses of the terms ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’:

“Whereas one could count on approval and understanding when referring to Irish, Scottish and Breton songs as ‘Celtic music’, advertising a concert of Danish and German melodies as a concert of ‘Germanic music’ would probably produce incomprehension, if not outright indignation.”

This quotation gives rise to some interesting questions. For instance, if the Celts as a cultural text include different items qualified by the adjective ‘Celtic’, ranging from archaeological remains to religion and music, then should not this also be the case for Germanic peoples as a cultural text? If the Celts can be understood as a cultural text, shouldn’t that also be the case for Germanic peoples? And if Celtic music is possible, shouldn’t Germanic music be the same?

It is also interesting to note that as Maier himself is German, the Germanic aspect would possibly be something he has a personal relationship to. One might expect him to have the same kind of relationship to the Germanic aspect of his country as a scholar from the islands might have to the Celtic aspect of their country. However, this is clearly not the case. It seems as though the Celts can be treated as a cultural text, but that the Germanic peoples cannot. This can also explain the differences between ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’ that Maier

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Maier 2003: preface VII
Ibid: 250
points out – if the Germanic aspect isn’t seen as part of a cultural text in the countries this aspect is relevant for, then there is no reason why residents of those countries should feel comfortable assigning the same values and ideas to this term as to the ‘Celt’ term. In fact, it might make them feel a little uncomfortable: “While stories of a journey through ‘Celtic’ Ireland might conjure up nothing more than images of rural idyll, remarks about a journey to ‘Germanic’ Norway would inevitably call forth memories of occupation and oppression.”

This does not mean that the idea of ‘Germanic’ does not have normative or formative values, but these values can be said to be negative instead of positive. This may also explain why the terms are so different in usage – there is no advantage in expanding a term that has negative connotations.

After reviewing the possible reasons for Maier’s method and argumentation, it is apparent that he is most likely aiming his study at the general public in the hope of establishing a set cultural text and combating the trends of discrediting the island Celts as seen in the recent debate. This would explain why he does not take these trends into consideration in his text: when trying to convince the general public in one direction, it is most unwise to give them contrasting evidence. As Maier is not writing for the academic milieu, it is unnecessary for him to include these trends at all. In later chapters, I will examine the situation of the Celts as a cultural text in Europe, and determine whether the aims and methods of the writers presented here have any effect.

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79 Maier 2003: 250
6. Contrasts and Comparisons

As we shall see later in this chapter, for instance in relation to John Collis, an author can be affected by outside influence to such a degree that he may abandon his original idea and change his method, motive or focus. His product then becomes a response to the influences that made him change his course. This may in turn also affect the influences that he responded to originally, and it is possible that the product of the author can change these outside influences. We can call this a circle of cause and effect. The influences can come from different spheres, both academic and non-academic, and the change in the author’s work may mirror where the influence came from. A specific influence may produce a specific response. It is interesting in this regard that all three studies were published at a time that coincided with the debate, which leads to the possible conclusion that the studies are tied in with it in some way, and that it may be a major cause that could initiate change in all three studies. I will come back to this later.

6.1 The importance of subject

The three authors covered in this study are representatives for three different fields of research, namely archaeology, folklore and religious history. Though modern academic authors benefit from being familiar with several fields of study, the studies produced will often follow the authors’ specified field of research closely, or demonstrate clearly that the authors belong in the respective field. However, all three studies covered here are deviating from the authors’ fields of research, either in method, source use or content.

The majority of Ó hÓgáin’s earlier works are concerned with Irish folklore, pre-Christian religion, early Irish history and medieval literature. The medieval literature is comprised of written sources, but contrary to the classical sources it is difficult to call these canonised, partly due to the fact that many of them exist in several versions which often show significant differences from each other and sometimes originated from different traditions, or show influences from both oral and classical traditions.

The classical sources Ó hÓgáin makes use of for The Celts also exist in several copies, but these are most likely copied from originally existing texts where an author often can be

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80 For instance The lore of Ireland. An encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance (1991), The hero in Irish folklore (1985) and Celtic Warriors: the armies of one of the first great peoples in Europe (1999). He has also written a variety of works on Irish names and placenames.
Celts and context in modern scholarly literature

identified. They are not written down from an oral tale as is sometimes the case with Irish medieval literature. Hence, though these copies also deviate slightly from each other they were never part of a developing tradition, and most likely the copyists were attempting to make the copies as accurate as possible according to the original. This means that the classical sources are very close to canonisation, especially after the research that has been performed on them. They cannot be changed in modern times, and though variances between several original copies are the norm, these variances are often appreciated as part of the history of the text rather than opposing versions of one canonised text.

Ó hÓgáin’s use of such old and nearly canonised sources is contrary to his field, which is normally concerned with oral traditions, but we see some connection in the fact that he does not use archaeological sources. As explained in chapter three, this is a help to him in category A, as it leaves him free to exclude modern contrasting research. However, we also see that this is logical when we take his field of research into consideration, as a folklorist will have little need to become involved in modern developments in archaeology. In fact, it is possible that it is not necessary for Ó hÓgáin to have up-to-date knowledge of this field, though he cannot have missed the evidence that appeared in the recent debate. It is also apparent from his earlier works that he is aware of the importance of archaeological evidence, and that he uses this in a manner typical of a category A scholar.

It is natural that a folklorist would make use of linguistics and history, as these are useful tools to one who studies the change of oral traditions in a longer time perspective. In this respect, his use of the indigenous medieval literature of the islands also seems sensible, as he would be accustomed to use these sources in other aspects of his research. However, his aim to discuss military prowess and conquest history does not fit in with his folklorist research traditions, as this is based on written evidence that we do not have other accounts of, and there is no oral tradition accounting for the same. In other words, Ó hÓgáin bases his study on nearly canonised text that has not developed significantly since written down, and that was never part of an oral tradition. This is contrary to his field of research. The Celts is not the first study Ó hÓgáin has published on a subject-matter that deviates from his field of research, but it stands out as it can be classified according to the norm of category A.

John Collis’ The Celts also shows significant deviations from what is usual in an archaeological study. This study does not explore recent archaeological discoveries or site surveys: rather, it is a study on modern archaeological research history. As such, it is less influenced by modern discoveries than by modern attitudes within the field of research. It does not include any new discoveries, or demonstrate recently developed theories. Instead, it

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is focused on the theoretical basis for the modern research. This study is very closely tied up to the debate in this respect, and will be looked further into later.

Bernhard Maier is perhaps the one who has moved the furthest from his field of research. Though he is a historian of religion, his *The Celts* rarely mentions discussions of religion, save where discussions of artefacts and similar touches upon the subject. According to his field of research, he should operate with a larger and often comparative picture. Instead, he mainly follows what has already been written in various history books and has been the accepted theory for a long period of time, without making new comparisons or including aspects not previously known. When discussing medieval history and more recent, he sometimes contrasts the country of discussion with the development of other countries, but this is a long step from the comparative analysis normally associated with someone who operates with Indo-European religion in long timelines. Granted, his tools in this study are the same as when he writes of religion: he employs written sources, linguistic sources and archaeology, which would be essential when he works with comparative religion as well. Thus, it is his method and focus that is deviant from his role as a historian of religion.

What is also interesting here is that the majority of Maier’s other works are mainly concerned with Celtic and German mythology and medieval literature. \(^{81}\) *The Celts* is the only larger study that is devoted mainly to historical development. In this we see a similarity with Ó hÓgáin, in that both of them changed their focus (though less so in Ó hÓgáin’s case) and method for the studies I have discussed here. As both these changes happened at almost the same time, it is tempting to believe that there may be a common cause.

All of these deviations are results of conscious choice. They also have in common that they do not present new theories or discoveries within the respective fields of research, and that none of the authors have the history of the Celts as their specialty, though they may be affiliated with other aspects of this population group. This indicates that there has to be a special reason for the wish of these authors to write of the history of the Celts and the traditions surrounding them at this time. The studies mentioned here were the first that Maier and Ó hÓgáin published on this focus, while Collis first included matters of the debate in his publications in the mid-nineties. \(^{82}\) However, there is not much more than five years between Collis’ first publication concerning the debate and its implications and the studies of Maier

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82 Earlier works include *The European Iron Age* and *Oppida: earliest towns north of the Alps* (1984) while his debate-influenced opinions can be found for instance in “Celtic myths” (1997).
and Ó hÓgáin discussed here, so it is very tempting to name a common cause that is at least partly responsible for these changes in the publishing patterns of the authors.

6.2 Matters of the debate

If we look back, all three authors are possibly motivated by the debate in their writing of the Celts. The connection is there, and can be found in different aspects of the studies. It is my belief that the debate is the most likely common denominator for the three authors’ change of motive in the same period of time, as shown above.

John Collis’ study is the clearest example of one that has been influenced by the debate. I will go so far as to say that the debate is a large part of the cause for the study. This is apparent both in the beginning and end of the book:

“This is a book about European ethnicity. This had not been my original interest when I began my work on the Celts, but in recent years for various reasons, questions of identity have become more strong, indeed racism has started to hit the headlines again, and archaeologists are forced to consider how their material is used, and abused, for political ends.”\(^{83}\)

“I hope this book has answered that, and I now pass the debate back to my opponents.”\(^{84}\)

There can be no doubt, then, that the study Collis has written was not the one he initially intended to write, and that the finished product is heavily influenced by the arguments that have been put forth in the debate, and by other socio-political issues discussed in the media. This proves that outside impulses can influence an author to such a degree that his work changes form and becomes something else than was intended – and this new form may be atypical or different from what one would expect from the author. Here, we have the explanations for the deviations of form and method of Collis’ study, and of why Collis has written a study of research history rather than a study that focuses on archaeological evidence supporting various theories of the Celts. As Collis’ focus was to discredit and discourage ethnic racism and discriminating theories, it is logical that he should choose the motive and focus that we see in the study.

Collis’ earlier work is worth a closer look in this respect. Up until the mid-nineties, his works are mainly of an archaeological nature, often concerning the Iron Age in Britain. After the mid-nineties, he published many works directly related to the debate, with for instance discussions of the Celts in modern politics and the research history that has led to the modern

\(^{83}\) Collis 2003: Introduction 9
\(^{84}\) Ibid: 231
theories. He continued this work after publishing *The Celts*, and many of his more recent articles are concerned with the same controversy.\(^{85}\) We see, then, that the change evident in *The Celts* began several years earlier, and at a time when the debate was coming into force.

Ó hÓgáin’s connection to the debate is less apparent, but as demonstrated above, this connection is as far as I can see the only reason why one should publish a category A study early in the twenty-first century. Again, we can assume that the form and method of the study are influenced by the debate, and that this way of writing was revived to act as a countermeasure to other contrasting viewpoints. As this study is different in method and content from other works by the same author, as shown above, it is my claim that the debate has been influential in that this study was written and published at the time when it was, even though Ó hÓgáin does not mention the debate in the study. As the break between the method of this work and the earlier ones by the same author is quite apparent, and the publishing of *The Celts* coincided with the debate, I believe that Ó hÓgain revived the category A-method solely because he reacted to the debate, and then chose a method that would serve him against the more extreme views he encountered in it.

Concerning Maier’s relationship to the debate, he hardly mentions it in his study, though the last chapter’s discussion of the application of the term ‘Celtic’ contrasted with that of the term ‘Germanic’ touches on the present controversies surrounding the terms ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’. Still, it is possible that also this study is influenced by the debate in some way: Maier consistently writes of ‘Celtic countries’ in circumstances up to the present, and it is doubtful that he would do this were it not to prove a point. His study is still the least conspicuous one of the three in this respect, as it does not stand out from other recent works on the Celts in any other way than this.

However, Maier’s study is also significantly different from his earlier works. He has written previous works on the Celts, but they have rarely had history as their main concern. The time of publishing of *The Celts* coincides with the debate, and as it was published in 2000 it is likely that Maier was affected by the debate as he was writing. To illustrate: Simon James published his volume in connection with the devolution of Scotland and Wales, and the academic discussions and news coverage leading up to this were extensive. It is likely that James was affected by the discussions around his topic while he was writing. Though Maier is German, it is safe to assume that he noticed at least parts of this process and was affected by it while writing – though, in his case, possibly less by the discussions in English media than the

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\(^{85}\) For instance "George Buchanan and the Celts of Britain" (1999), and “Celts and politics” (1995).
discussions in academic journals and milieus. This academic discussion would have affected the other authors discussed here as well, and some may be influenced also by the public coverage – we see examples of this in Collis’ study, where he quotes newspaper articles at times.

This indicates that the debate has influenced each of the three authors covered here to the point where it is apparent in their studies. We find a clear break from their earlier published works to the studies examined here, and this break can be established chronologically to the time of the debate (from the mid-nineties and on to the early twenty-first century), a time when the debate was given attention both in academic published works and in the media. Responding to this influence, the authors have all published works that show more relevance when connected to the debate than if we view them separate from it. This connection explains aspects of the texts that make little sense by themselves, for example Ó hÓgáin’s use of the category A method. It is safe to assume that the authors and the debate have a relationship of cause and effect – the authors are influenced by the debate, and then in their turn try to affect it again.

6.3 A place in a Celtic culture

There is another aspect of these authors that is worth taking into consideration, and that is their nationality. I have purposely chosen authors from three different countries in order to see if their nationality would influence them in their studies, and whether this would affect and be evident in their published works. As we shall see, these countries have different relationships to the Celts, and it is very possible that the nature of these relationships is traceable in the work of the authors.

Collis is English, meaning that he is part of a culture that has had long and lasting relationships, be they good or bad, with cultures that can be defined as Celtic. The relationships have evolved during the centuries, but in many cases the attitudes on either side have remained constant: meaning that although the members of the English culture no longer views the Irish culture as uncouth and ‘beyond the Pale’, the attitudes and expressions can live on. The majority of Celticists are familiar with the view that the English should in some way be prejudiced against the Celts, though they do not necessarily agree with it. This view has been claimed among others by Kenneth Jackson, and Sims-Williams argues that this is

86 See Ellis Evans ?, 20
very likely an underlying motive in Malcolm Chapman’s work. The same accusation was made against Simon James when he published his *The Celts*, supported by the British Museum, in connection with the devolution of Wales and Scotland. These negative attitudes also exist on the other side of the relationships. I mentioned earlier that James’ book was accused of being ‘modern, Anglo-Saxon propaganda’. The accusations of genocide made against him at the same time, and Ruth and Vincent Megaw’s claim that his book was an expression of an argument between English and Celt, are also rooted in the conception of the English as marauding vandals. It is worth to note that these attitudes can be found in all the Celtic countries that have had a relationship with England, and is then not restricted to the countries whose history with the English have been the most turbulent.

On the Irish side of the relationship, we find Dáithí Ó hÓgáin. The Irish have been subjugated by the English for a long period of time, and this has left its mark on the attitudes toward the English and their culture. However, the Irish have been very effective when it comes to promoting different aspects of Irish culture, and ideas that can promote Ireland as different from its neighbours are often embraced. These are often cultural aspects that Ireland does not have in common with England, and thus these aspects are often taken pride in, because they contribute to elevating the Irish culture. Hence, the attitude of the Irish toward the English can at times be condescending. This is the same attitude as we find in the quotation of Rhodri Morgan, also mentioned above:

> “Celtic and proud of it! It’s just English jealousy. We were civilised first. The earliest poem composed in a post-Classical language was Welsh. We were here when Caesar landed. It’s modern Anglo-Saxon propaganda.”

Though this quote is an expression for a Welsh attitude, the same ideas can be found in Ireland, and often with similar arguments.

The last country represented here is Germany, with Bernhard Maier. Celtic Studies have a long history in Germany, perhaps especially in philology and linguistics, though the country does not have any direct relationships with modern countries that can be said to be Celtic (as England does). Still, this country has links with the ancient Celts and as such stands in a position where it can employ the Celts for its own advantage.

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87 See, for instance, Sims-Williams 1998: 5, quoting Kenneth Jackson’s statement “The ancient, deep-seated, and almost wholly unconscious English prejudice against “Celts” and all their works”


89 Thus, the image of a Celtic Ireland came to be used in tourism, for example.

Germany and the rest of the continent do not figure in the debate, as this mainly has been focused on the island Celts. As such, the debate has raged highest on the islands, where it has dominated academic discussions and media coverage alike. Both Collis and Ó hÓgáin will have been affected by this. In Germany, however, as in the rest of the continent, the debate will not have been public the same way as on the islands. One can assume that the interest will have been less. As a country that was predominantly Germanic in ancient times, but with a Celtic presence in some areas, Germany does not stand the risk of losing the inheritance of the country, regardless of the outcome of the debate.

Still, this lack of interest can be enlightening in this case. Which effects will this have on an author? We have seen that Maier’s study most likely is at least in part a result of the debate, but might the fact that his discussion is more subtle in this respect than the other two be explained by this lack of interest in his country of origin? The Celtic interest in Germany could mainly be restricted to the academic milieus, which means that the cultural text called the Celts would possibly not be susceptible to change here. In which case, is his study mainly an aid to solidifying this cultural text, cementing it in the mind of the public?

There are large differences in the milieu of the three authors, and that there are indications that they wrote the studies discussed here as a response to the debate. In chapter eight, I will look closer on questions that arise in this respect, to determine whether an author’s cultural, political or historical context is visible in his product. To what extent can an author’s relationship to a certain cultural text be influenced by his cultural context? Can a person’s relationship to a certain cultural text be changed by public opinion, and can this then be a motive for an author to make their own view available to the public? Is there a connection between a cultural text and certain cultures? I will come back to all this later.
7. The Celts as a cultural text in Europe

Depending on which theory one finds credible, the Celts populated vast areas from the Black Sea in the East to the Atlantic Coast in the West. Most of these areas are still populated today, and in many cases the Celtic heritage has a place in the culture of the present population group. But if the Celts were, according to some, spread over such large areas, it is natural to assume that the role and place of the Celts in the modern cultures may differ from place to place.

The Celts were not the only people populating these areas. However, other groups do not seem to have left such a lasting imprint and influence on modern cultures, or to have gained the same fame in popular culture. We do not find the idea of Germanic tribes as the “spiritual fathers of an enlarged European Community”\textsuperscript{91}, for example, though this has been said of the Celts. Neither does including the word “Scythian” to a book title increase the sales the way including the word “Celtic” might.\textsuperscript{92} So why do the Celts inspire such fascination in modern cultures? And what forms does this fascination take?

7.1 The Celts in the general public

Towards the end of chapter 5 I stated that Maier contrasts the use of the term ‘Germanic’ with the term ‘Celtic’. Where the term ‘Celtic’ is positive, the term ‘Germanic’ is negative, and there is more willingness in the general public to accept something as Celtic than to accept something as Germanic, especially when it comes to non-academic objects and situations. And though one would expect these terms to have similar applicability, there are also large differences in the degree of usage of these two terms today. I will explore these questions more closely here.

There can be no doubt that ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’ both originally were names for ancient peoples, and to some degree their languages and cultures. Today, both terms are used for scientifically determined language families, both including several languages. These terms are then at present identifiers for the linguistic aspects of a population. We might say, for instance, that Breton is a Celtic language, or that Dutch is a Germanic one. However, neither term is used academically for the population groups using these languages: we do not say that a Dane is Germanic, for instance - and the term ‘Celtic people’ is mainly used concerning the

\textsuperscript{91} Sims-Williams 1998:1
\textsuperscript{92} For this idea, see Collis 2003: 204
ancient Celts. Part of the reason for this is that the users of a Celtic or Germanic language and the population group that might be classified by the same term are not the same in modern times, and it’s not certain that they ever were. It is also necessary to point out here that as these terms describe language families and not individual languages, we cannot assume that there was uniformity among the peoples using them even in ancient times, much less today. We cannot expect this anymore that we can expect all users of Romance languages to belong in the same population group – this would mean placing for instance the French, Catalan and Romanian people in one uniform group. It is obvious that such a grouping would be so imprecise that it would be useless for all practical purposes.

Should we examine this question with focus on the individual languages rather than the language groups, there are other factors that complicate the use of these terms. Though the Germanic and Celtic languages are numerous and widely used, the users of a certain language might not always consider themselves part of the corresponding population. For instance, people in Germany may speak German, but some of them may consider themselves English or Chinese; they live in the same area as those who would define themselves as Germans and speak the same language, but they see themselves as belonging to a different nationality. For the same reason, it is likely that it is now more practical to group people according to their nationality rather than a certain population group, and sometimes further subdivision may be needed.

With the Nationalist Socialist Party in Germany using such terms to describe people during the Second World War, it has also become necessary to be careful with the usage of such terms, and as a result this use is often avoided entirely. Using such terms today may be viewed as racist or discriminatory. This is part of a development where many words describing race, looks, and tribal connections have been rendered useless and with negative connotations. For instance, a word like ‘Negroid’ will today be responded to with anger and resentment, though its origin was as a description of a person’s physical features. This is the main reason for the negative associations of ‘Germanic’ – this term was used to such a degree in connection with justification for the Holocaust, and as a result, it has been abandoned in any modern political context.

Arguments against racism has made the concept of race pariah in the modern society, and though words like ‘Caucasian’, ‘Black’ and ‘Hispanic’ are still used, their use is often scrutinized for any hint of racism or discrimination. Again, we come back to nationality as the best way to group people today, though this grouping at times give little or no information about a person’s physical features, cultural classification or tribal connections. Examples of
this are, for instance, various China Towns around the world, where the inhabitants might consider themselves both Chinese and, for instance, English or American.

Concerning the term ‘Celtic’, the recent discussion on the validity of the term has also lead to large scepticism toward whether or not it is appropriate to use the term to describe modern peoples. With arguments claiming that the term is too wide to even be used for ancient peoples or modern languages, using it as an academic term to describe or classify modern peoples is bound to meet resistance – not to mention that it would be imprecise, as migration and other movements of people, large or small, will undoubtedly have changed the population groups, leaving whatever Celtic fraction present in a certain area watered out with anything from Franks to Mongols.

Academically, then, the term is mainly used describing language families. Concerning ‘Germanic’, this is uncontested, though ‘Celtic’ has been argued against in the recent debate, mainly by scholars representing the theories that I identified in chapter one as category C. Still, this usage of ‘Celtic’ as a classifying term for the language family is by far the most accepted one, and as John Collis writes, “if we do not use these names, we will only have to invent new ones!”93 And such new terms are difficult to create, because, as we saw above, modern cultures are intermixed to such a degree that any term meant to describe an aspect of them will need to be very specific in order to be usable. We see examples of this in the struggle to create acceptable terms for second- and third generation immigrants, and that terms that are specific enough and at the same time not insulting are often so long and detailed that it renders them ridiculous and unlikely to ever be used in practice.94 This means that practicality dictates that this usage is continued. There is also strong evidence supporting the usage of the term in this respect.

But what of the public uses of the terms? Beyond classification of languages, the occurrences of the term ‘Germanic’ are few. ‘Celtic’, however, is used in connection with many cultural aspects, including for instance music, decoration styles, writing fonts, cultural heritage and religion. Most of these occurrences are not academic in origin, and some are quite recent. It is also worth noting that many of these have little or no similarities with the academic uses of the term, past or present: “popular accounts of ‘Celtic’ religion often place sculptures and inscriptions from Roman Gaul side by side with specimens of literature from

93 Collis 2003: 226.
94 See http://www.morgenbladet.no/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081107/OAKTUEL/528314710, for an example discussion of the difficulty surrounding such terms.
medieval Ireland, giving no thought to the logic of this procedure\textsuperscript{95}. Some of these aspects seem so far removed from what is academically defined as ‘Celtic’ that it is doubtful whether the two should be mentioned in connection with each other at all.

We arrive, then, at a preliminary conclusion that ‘Germanic’ is mainly used academically and then primarily to identify languages. ‘Celtic’ is also used academically, though recently there has been heavy criticism against such uses of the term, both concerning its validity and to which aspects of a culture it can be assigned. This term is very popular in the public sphere, however, and here it is used widely and uncritically. ‘Germanic’, on the other hand, is rarely if ever used in the same circumstances. Hence, the terms are popular in opposite fields, and neither can be inserted for the other. For instance, were we to exchange ‘Celtic poetry’, a notion that is used in popular culture\textsuperscript{96} (though not always accurately or correctly, with ‘Germanic poetry’, it would not be understood within the same sphere. Similarly, the criticism ‘Germanic’ would receive if used as ‘Celtic’ for public aspects would probably be similar to the reaction that ‘Celtic’ received academically in the recent debate. For example, an academic reaction against ‘Celtic music’ would be similar to a public reaction against ‘Germanic greeting’ – both would be seen as nonsensical.

Considering the fact that both terms had the same basis, it is interesting indeed that one has grown to contain so much more while the other has shrunk to be used of only a limited field. Why the term ‘Celtic’ should be so popular for public aspects, and the term ‘Germanic’ should not, can be discussed on many levels. One of the differences between them in this respect is that ‘Celtic’ is, academically, mainly associated with things that are past, while ‘Germanic’ is also associated with the present - through the well-known language family, through its similarity with current terms (such as ‘German’ and ‘Germany’), and through recent history. As Celts and Celtic culture is to many a thing of the past, and is not associated with any single country, it may be easier to add a touch of myth and mysticism to these aspects than to anything ‘Germanic’.\textsuperscript{97} This is a good example of how a term may be taken to mean several different things – today’s Germans have little in common with the Germanic peoples of the Classical texts and archaeological remains.

It is also quite possible that the comparison of Irish medieval literature to Celtic culture as described through archaeological and classical written sources has added to this change. In this process, known written material is assigned to certain populations where

\textsuperscript{95} Maier 2003: 250. A certain criticism is apparent here, and reasons for this will be discussed in chapter eight.

\textsuperscript{96} See http://www.thepoeticsarret.com/celtic1.html for an idea how this publically defined aspect of ‘Celtic poetry’ looks.

\textsuperscript{97} Megaw & Megaw 1996, page 180
indigenous written sources have not survived. It may have contributed to the popularity of the Celts in the general public, in that the medieval literature is easily accessible for general readers – it is not necessary to be familiar with Celtic history, linguistics or archaeology to be able to read these texts in printed translations. By some readers, these texts may be treated as fiction, and as such they could be viewed as separate from the academic tradition. It is also possible that not all readers of these texts check their sources or examine other academically defined Celtic aspects after having read these texts.

The fact that some such publications of translated medieval literature were published during a time period when the invasionist theory was the height of research and few challenges were issued against it may also have contributed to this accessibility. If a reader of the text were to seek more knowledge of the Celts, most of the reference literature used would portray the same theory, making it easier for that reader to gain some sort of idea of the Celts. It is also worthwhile to remember here that these theories were established in a period when scholars were seen as authorities and more readily listened to than today, and this “permitted (...) ideas to become universally accepted so quickly.”98. Today, however, they do not enjoy the same status, and this makes it harder to spread and gain acceptance for new ideas. This again means that members of the public who believe the invasionist theory to be correct are less likely to be convinced of anything else, especially considering the mass amount of contrasting theories published today.

There is also a possibility that much of the recent interest has been sparked by authors of fiction inspired by Celts and Celtic culture. Most likely, such authors would examine their sources properly and seek help from scholars with knowledge of that field, were they not scholars themselves (such as J.R.R. Tolkien). The readers of the fiction, however, probably did not. Thus we see a scenario where, for instance, a reader encounters elements from Irish or Welsh medieval literature or culture in a work of fiction, and then uncritically embraces anything he can find on the subject.

It is my opinion that including such aspects of any culture in a work of fiction eases their passage into popular culture, as readers who become familiar with such aspects through works of fiction are presented with these aspects in a setting they do not naturally belong in. For instance, in his book *American Gods*, author Neil Gaiman introduces Macha as a young girl.99 Macha is a figure from the Ulster Cycle and is sometimes portrayed as part of a triad of war goddesses including Badb and Morrigan, and at times she seems to be synonymous with

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98 James 1999: 143
99 Gaiman 2001: 500
the latter. Her appearance as a young girl is uncharacteristic. I do not mean to say that Gaiman has not thoroughly checked his sources for her appearance in the novel, but simply that his readers may not do so. In portraying her as a young girl, Gaiman changes her and makes her fiction, though it is important to mention here that he keeps the war goddess aspect and introduces her as “of the Morrigan”\textsuperscript{100}. Macha as a young girl may now easily make her entrance into other popular spheres, as she has already been removed from her natural setting as a strong woman and possible goddess. Once cultural aspects are removed from their original setting and placed in an artificial one, it is much easier to manipulate them further. The aspects take on a life of their own, formed by the ideas of the public.

Once a subject has become accessible in this setting, this aspect of it will grow, and probably to the degree where it expands beyond its academic roots and becomes a separate idea. This may explain somewhat why certain aspects associated with ‘Celtic’ seem so distant from the Celts and the Celtic culture known through Celtic Studies – so different, in fact, that some may be insulted by the very use of the term and claim that the public aspect in question has no right to use it. This is part of the discussion of the validity of the ‘Celtic’ term.

The aspects further removed from the academically defined ‘Celticity’ are not likely to be susceptible to modern academic ideas on the Celts in any form\textsuperscript{101}, as what these distant aspects are employing has only remote connections and similarities to the academically defined ones. Such aspects include the ideas of ‘Celtic tattoo art’, where the term is a label for a certain artistic expression and has little to do with whether or not the Celts existed or in which countries we find traces of them. It is clear that the public aspects originated in the academic ones, but since then their developments have been separate. Their relationship can be seen somewhat as the same as that between Protestantism and Judaism, and trying to influence the one by means of the other can be compared to trying to change a Protestant view on specific aspects of faith by changing the Torah. It is highly unlikely that this would be effective in any way.

These radical differences between some of the publically and the academically defined aspects of ‘Celtic’ mean that there are several different cultural texts known as ‘Celt’ or ‘Celtic’, and that these have different values to the ones who use them. It is also interesting that the majority of the publically defined cultural texts are common outside the areas that can be academically defined as having been Celtic at some point. The followers of these different texts may harbour animosity towards each other’s cultural text. For instance, a person

\textsuperscript{100} Gaiman 2001:500
\textsuperscript{101} Sims-Williams 1998: 6
believing in the academically defined versions of the Celts may be insulted or infuriated by the publically defined cultural texts, and vice versa. If we consider the normative and formative values of cultural texts, this makes sense: the reactions these followers may have towards the other cultural texts are the same as the reactions Simon James received when he published *The Atlantic Celts*. And as we have seen, these cultural texts have at times very little in common aside from the term ‘Celt’ or ‘Celtic’, and changes in the one will not often reflect in the other.

7.2 The island perceptions of the Celts

The academic cultural text entitled ‘Celts’ has several forms, but it is restricted to the academically defined aspects of ‘Celts’ or ‘Celtic’. In contrast, there are several completely different publically defined cultural texts associated with ‘Celts’ or ‘Celtic’. Some of these are possibly chiefly associated with USA, and are less popular in Europe. But are there regional differences in the way the Celts as cultural texts are viewed in Europe?

In the early twenty-first century, Simon James claimed that the theory denying the existence of island Celts was mainly argued by British archaeologists, and had yet to be adopted by other fields. As I pointed out earlier, this theory is one way of viewing the Celts as a cultural text. It is safe to say that, due to the extent of the discussion on the validity of the Celts, this view is now known in academic milieus elsewhere in Europe as well as the UK, though it is uncertain whether or not it has grown more popular on the continent. The theory has also become popular and is adhered to in Ireland, though it is important to stress here that we cannot generalize that only one theory is used in one place at one specific time. There will always be several ideas in use at any one time. Regardless, it seems as though this cultural text is mainly popular on the islands. Why this may be is worth discussing further.

Though the Celts can be placed throughout a very large part of Europe, it is possible that there is an increased association with this population group on the Atlantic coast, and then maybe especially on the islands. As at least part of a Celtic culture seems to have survived here, namely the languages, the Celts may have an increased importance in this area. A valid point may also be that the island peoples who can be to some degree associated with the Celts for some time dominated their own countries, and that this has led to the Celts having national value to these peoples.

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102 James 1999: 16
It is important to stress here that though the earlier inhabitants of the islands did not think of themselves as Celts, the people of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century thought of them in this way, and thus assigned this value to those inhabitants. This means that though the Celts were not used contemporarily in actual struggles for independence or freedom, the term was used by later inhabitants of these countries as a qualifying term for themselves and for those who had been suppressed sometimes centuries before. Thus, this struggle was very quickly described as a struggle between heroic and persecuted Celts on the one side and marauding Anglo-Saxon, English or Norman invaders on the other. This view is unique to the islands. Though the Celts have been employed in politics elsewhere, the line between invaders and invaded was never this clear, nor was the struggle this recent.

This picture of Celts against marauding forces may have contributed to the popularity of the category C cultural text, especially amongst English scholars. Discrediting the Celts in this setting may contribute to reducing the differences between the two fronts, or between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Ironically, it can be and has been seen by the other side as “modern Anglo-Saxon propaganda”\(^\text{103}\), and thus, though it may be an attempt to remove the line between the two fronts, it is quite possible that it has emphasized it.

In addition to this, removing the Celts from the picture removes a dimension from the culture of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, albeit a dimension varying in size. These countries have enjoyed the popularity of ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’, and in many cases have employed these terms to their own benefit. As the terms are consistently seen in a positive light by the general public, it is practical for the countries associated with them to use this to promote their own interests. Were the category C cultural text to become dominant, the advantages connected to the use of the Celts, for instance in tourism, may disappear.

Lastly, there is a possibility that, were this cultural text to be the dominant one, it may change the way the English culture is viewed, and probably improve this view in some cases. I stated above that using the Celts retrospectively on struggles for independence has contributed to creating a front between the English and those on the other sides, be they Welsh, Scottish or Irish, and that this struggle very quickly developed into a case between Celts and invaders. This view has to some degree been relevant in later struggles between Irish, Scots or Welsh against the English government as well. This view did not reflect positively on England, who was then portrayed as something of a "big bad wolf". Removing

the ‘Celt’ aspect may reflect positively upon England, because this picture of noble Celts fighting marauding English would lose its potency.

7.3 The continental perceptions of the Celts

On the continent, as remarked above, these clear conflict cases between ‘Celts’ and others are absent. In addition to this, while the population of the islands may be said to have links to the ancient Celts in the form of language, these links are nonexistent on the continent. The exception to this is Brittany, though the cultural links to the ancient Celts here came by way of the islands.

This means that, most likely, there is no modern Celtic presence that can be connected to the ancient Celts. Quite possibly, there are people on the continent as well as on the islands who perceive themselves as modern Celts, but this may be due to the increased popularity of the term, as mentioned earlier. James claims that modern Celts exist, but their origin is not the ancient Celts: rather, the idea of modern Celts was invented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and subsequently adopted by people who felt they had a claim to it. Thus modern Celts are a modern construction, whether they live on the islands or on the continent.

Collis argues that there are descendants of the Celts alive today, “but they now speak Galician, Castilian, French, Italian, German, Hungarian, various Slav languages, and Turkish”, and since he operates with language as the primary Celtic identifier, none of these would qualify as Celts in his view. Similarly, according to his criterion, one would expect anyone who called themselves a Celt today to be able to speak one of the languages, and if they did not, then they were not Celts. But would this then mean, if we think back to the earlier discussion on ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’, that anyone who primarily uses a Celtic language can be defined as a modern Celt? As argued earlier, this definition is insufficient, as the users of a language are not necessarily of the nationality where that language is dominant. We are again back to the discussion of the validity of the term.

Maier’s theory, a less controversial one that the category C approach, may be more typical for the continent. I need to specify here that I do not mean to discuss the entire European continent, but rather the areas where there is evidence to support the presence of the ancient Celts. In these areas, there is no need here to emphasize the existence of the Celts – there is evidence for their existence, and thus the discussion of whether they existed or not has

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104 James 1999: 137-8  
105 Collis 2003: 230
less meaning here. That Maier focuses on historical times and historical sources may also be relevant in this context, as it may mean that the category C approach has not achieved leeway on the continent. Sims-Williams argues that “French and German archaeologists are perhaps still content with it [the equation of Hallstatt and La Tène with Celtic] because they are not troubled by living in the British Isles or Iberia, which are rich in evidence for Celtic speech but relatively poor in Hallstatt and early La Tène material”. This may very well be valid in Maier’s case, and may partly explain why it is assumed in his study that this link exists. On the continent as on the islands, it is likely that there is more than one theory in use at the same time – in fact, this is more likely on the continent, due to the large area covered and the distances involved. However, there is one thing many areas on the continent have in common, namely that the ancient Celtic presence is almost certain.

There is an interesting aspect to the usage of the Celts on the continent, and that is that the Celts often seem to be used in connection with a united front: “it is the European links which are promoted rather than narrower state interests; individual countries have been happy to use archaeology to enhance their European image, and this is even more true of individual archaeologists or groups of archaeologists”. These common bonds are often linked to the European Union in some way, as we saw above concerning the Celts as an early European community.

This difference between the continent and the islands is interesting: we see that on the islands, there is a large emphasis on the differences that separate the populations from each other, also between various ‘Celtic’ factions. On the continent, however, there is emphasis on the links to other countries, and where there is some focus on ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’ in individual countries, it is not built by contrasting with other countries, as is done on the islands. Rather, the contrasts emphasized are between different ancient populations, such as the Roman Empire. I must emphasize here that there are areas where the population claims to be descendant of ancient Celts and use this in struggles against what is viewed as oppressive forces. Galicia and Brittany are examples of this. However, these are not individual countries struggling for independence from an oppressive superior force, but rather regions of a country trying to emphasize their own identity. According to John Collis, “‘Celtic’ is a very potent force in expressing and maintaining regional identity.”

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106 Sims-Williams 1998: 30
107 Ibid: 204
108 Collis 1996: 26
John Collis gives some examples of how some countries use Celts in their national politics, showing the islands, France and Spain as the most active in this field. In France, the focus is, logically, on the time before the Roman invasion or the resistance this invasion met. However, there is a large focus on the Celtic aspect in Brittany, though as a reason to resurrect the indigenous Breton culture rather than as an argument for independence. Brittany also lacks the violent past and the conflicts between the indigenous population and outsiders that characterize, for instance, Ireland and Scotland: the Breton population and the French have instead been connected through systems of feudalism and unions between the different noble houses, often in the form of marriage. Brittany has the same problems maintaining the Celtic aspects of its culture as the other Celtic areas, essentially to sustain the Celtic language and heritage.

In Spain, interestingly, it seems that the Celts have mainly been employed in relations with the public: “In more recent times the Celtic past has been promoted in a range of popular images, such as names of football teams, selling milk or cigarettes (Celtas Cortos, also the name of a well-known pop group)”. This is an attempt to make use of the popularity and familiarity of the term, and thus it is possible that this use of the term is more influenced by the public uses of the term rather than the academically defined ones. We find similar public brand names including ‘Celtic’ in other countries – for instance, football teams Celtic (Scotland) and Galatasaray (Turkey).

Concerning Spain, it is also necessary to discuss Galicia. Again, the struggle here is not to free the region from Spanish oppression and make it independent, but rather to stand apart from the rest of the country as a region with a markedly different identity. The Galicians attempt to include themselves in the small and select group of modern Celtic countries, though not necessarily with success: they were not allowed to host the International Celtic Congress due to the fact that there is no living Celtic language in Galicia. Interestingly, they are not the only group in Spain employing the Celts for their own benefit: “the Castilian areas are also eager the [sic] promote their Celtic past, especially for tourism”.

We see, then, that the publically defined aspects of ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’ are popular both on the islands and on the continent. These aspects are perhaps more known than the academically defined ones, for as we saw earlier, it takes time before the aspects make this

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109 Collis 2003: 196-203
110 Maier 2003: 187-189
111 Collis 2003: 202
112 Ibid: 201
113 Ibid: 202
transition from academic to public spheres, and modern academic ideas take much time before they are universally known. The academically defined aspects of ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’ are known in most academic institutions throughout Europe, due to the relatively active contacts between these institutions, but these aspects do not have the power to change the publically defined aspects. Thus, the publically defined cultural texts cannot be disposed of, simply because they have a life of their own. In this, we may see some truth in the charges of genocide that were directed at Simon James after he published *The Atlantic Celts*: such a radical attempt to discredit something people believe to be true will inspire strong reactions. The publically defined aspects of ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’, such as modern Celts, Celtic music, and Celtic languages, are equally as powerful cultural texts as the academically defined ones — perhaps more, as they are already embraced by the public.
8. Celts and context in modern scholarly literature

There are strong arguments that support the idea of a scholar’s context, whether cultural, historical or political, influencing the scholar to a degree when changes occur in his work, and these changes are traceable to outside influences he experienced while writing. He will, for instance, be affected by discussions in the media, political development, or the culture he is a part of. He may then attempt to affect these influences in turn. I called this a circle of cause and effect. Such responses to outside influences are common in all areas of society, and are not restricted to scholars. The influences are not necessarily monumental questions or events, but can also be smaller, everyday occurrences. The response to the influence need not match it in scale. In the cases discussed in this study, it is probable that the scholars have been affected by a large discussion of Celts on the islands that has been given much attention in academia and in the media, and their works show heavy influence from this.

The scholars discussed in this study have one main aspect in common, and that is that they are writing commentaries on a cultural text, namely the Celts in Britannia and Ireland, or acting as commentators in regards to such commentaries. Assmann’s definition of a cultural text is that it has normative and formative values\(^{114}\), and as such, it forms a society’s view on itself and gives its inhabitants norms to live by and an ideal to live up to. The three scholars discussed in this study have three different views on this cultural text, and through their studies are treating it in three different ways, all three attempting to reinforce or change the current cultural text. I concluded earlier that these attempts to change current academic theories could be rooted in a wish to change the opinion of the public, and as a cultural text has strong links to the public, it is impossible to separate the public from the text or assume that the two do not affect each other. Changing a cultural text will change the way a population that is connected with this cultural text views itself, and changing the public opinion may change the cultural text. This may in itself be a motive for attempting such a change.

In this chapter, I will discuss the three scholars separately in order to determine how large an effect their context, whether political, historical or cultural, has had on their products. As affect by outside impulses cannot be avoided and true objectivity is practically impossible, there is no question that such an influence exists, and thus it is more interesting to determine the reactions these impulses inspire and whether or not the reactions can be determined to be

\(^{114}\) Assmann 2006: 104
the result of any specific influence. Though the three studies are very different in content and manner, it is probable that the same impulses have shaped all three of them. The results of these outside impulses are different, and in these results parts of the motivation of the scholars may be traced.

8.1 Dáithí Ó hÓgáin

In chapter three, I demonstrated that Dáithí Ó hÓgáin has employed a thirty-year-old theory in *The Celts*, that it is based mainly on sources that can no longer be said to be valid as historical information, that he excludes large areas of research, and that he ignores counterarguments against the theories he employs in his study. I claimed that the reasons for this way of writing could be found partly in his choice of method, and that this again could be influenced by the debate. However, it is probably that this is a simplified basis, and we need to look closer on his cultural context to examine this further.

Firstly, Dáithí Ó hÓgáin is a folklorist. This indicates that he should be working on traditions that have been passed on orally for a longer period of time. His sources should be tied up to this, as should his method: medieval literature, traditional myths and legends, and narrated traditions would form a large part of his repertoire, and his primary fields of study to employ in his discussions would be linguistics and history. Though he employs the same fields of research in this study, his topic is atypical, and so are his sources.

Secondly, he has ignored a large group of evidence that contrasts to his theory. Though a folklorist does not need to discuss his material based on archaeology (which is the larger part of evidence he has left out), the fact that he follows his classical written sources almost to the letter and does not give contrasting evidence at any point indicates that he has no wish to show any contrasting evidence. He is also subscribing to an outdated view on history, which shows that he has no interest in demonstrating recent historical development.

Thirdly, he is attempting to influence the modern view of the Celts. As demonstrated, Ó hÓgáin’s using outdated information and presenting it as current, and this information stands in stark contrast to other recently published theories. He is avoiding counter-arguments that may be used against him by writing according to a theme that dictates his use of sources and the forms of his discussion – in this case, Celtic military prowess. This effectively removes the basis for any counter-argument against his discussions, as what he set out to do was to write a study based on battle strategies and military history, which must by necessity be based on written sources. It is then difficult to argue that he should have included other
views or historical evidence. This theme also allows him to ignore contrasting evidence, leaving his discussion free of opposing views and thus more convincing to readers with little previous knowledge of the Celts. It is then more likely that the view of history he portrays in *The Celts* should be accepted as correct by this group of readers.

So which possible influences are indicated by Ó hÓgáin’s theory, sources and way of writing? This study was possibly published as a contribution to the debate, and the debate has been the main impulse that inspired its writing. It may not be the only such impulse, however, or it may have a wider effect on the scholar than its arguments and claims would dictate. It is necessary to examine the author’s possible motives to look for traces of outside influence. Again, we can group the arguments into three.

Firstly, his use of atypical sources and method can be attributed to each other. The method chosen may have been employed because Ó hÓgáin intended to use classical sources, and he may have chosen the sources because he intended to use this method, but this argument is circular and thus not good enough. Instead of using it, we need to look for an argument that would incite him to use both of these, an underlying argument that can be found to be the reason for both source use and method. His choice of method and sources may very well have been inspired by the debate, as I argued earlier. The change from the method and themes of his earlier works to those of *The Celts* is sudden and prominent, and as the timing of the publishing of *The Celts* coincides with the debate, it is probably that he was inspired by the debate to write and publish it at this time.

Secondly, we see a desire to change the current cultural text in his excluding contrasting evidence. Leaving out contrasting evidence and opposing theories makes the text both more accessible and more easily believable by the general public. With such limited arguments and singular focus in his discussions he cannot expect to convince other scholars that the theory he presents is correct – the most he can hope for in that respect is to remind other scholars of what is written in the classical and medieval sources, and it is possible that his lack of contrasting evidence will seem like sloppy scholarship by some. The general public, however, with less previous knowledge of the Celts, may very well be swayed by Ó hÓgáin’s reasoning and arguments, at least in part. If his goal is to counteract the more radical arguments of the category C authors in the minds of the public, it is much more likely that he will succeed in this if he presents his theory as uniform and unopposed.

Thirdly, he manages to evade any contrasting evidence that may be given against his discussions. This can make his theory seem unassailable, especially by members of the public with limited knowledge of the Celts. As he manages to write an almost inconspicuous account
of the classical sources, it is very difficult to find any points in his discussion that can be argued. This makes it less likely that he would receive any arguments against his study, making it even more uniform in the eyes of the public. Since it would benefit someone who attempted to change a cultural text to have as few as possible opposing views, this is undoubtedly to Ó hÓgáin’s advantage in this respect.

It is possible to tie these different motives together. When we follow the arguments set out above and in chapter three, we see that the logical underlying motives and impulses for Ó hÓgáin’s discussions and theories in *The Celts* are, on the one side, to form a strong response to the more extreme views presented in the debate by scholars as Simon James and Malcolm Chapman. In doing so, his study becomes a counterweight to these views. And on the other side, we find the aim to influence the general public and reinforce the view of island Celts as the generally accepted theory by this group. By doing this, he will support the Celts on the islands as a cultural text. Opposing the category C views in the debate will also serve this end. We can then draw a preliminary conclusion that Ó hÓgáin’s study seems to contain a desire to maintain a Celtic past on the islands, and to make sure that this is the cultural text that is predominant in the minds of the general public.

The next question is why such a desire can be found in this study. Are there any indications of influences that could cause such a response in Ó hÓgáin’s cultural or political context? One of the possibilities here is that he is a member of a society long considered to have a Celtic past, and this belief has been operative for a longer period of time. As argued, Ireland is one of the few areas that have adopted the idea of modern Celts based on a relationship to ancient Celts, and the country has employed the notion of its own Celticity in many cultural aspects. If the Celtic past were to be detached from the Irish culture, several cultural aspects would lose part of their foundation as well as a large part of the tools they possess in marketing themselves. Ireland has been made Celtic to such a degree that the two have become synonymous: Celtic has become Ireland. The country has adopted the Celtic for its own and employs it in a series of cultural aspects. As a result, in the public eye, Celtic is often synonymous with Irish. This is apparent as the two terms can often be interchanged in public use without disturbing the meaning of the phrase.  

We see, then, that there can be a cause to oppose the category C theories for many Irishmen, and some may oppose these theories simply because they’re mainly fronted by the

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115 For examples of this, see for instance [http://www.engagement-rings-tips.com/celtic-engagement-rings.html](http://www.engagement-rings-tips.com/celtic-engagement-rings.html) or [http://www.celticirishmusic.com/](http://www.celticirishmusic.com/), where this synonymy between the two terms enables the creators of the sites to market as both.
English. Were the category C theories to be dominant eventually, large parts of Irish culture would be left less than it is. As Ireland has been made Celtic to such a degree, a dimension of the public’s cultural understanding of Ireland would possibly disappear. As a result, one can sometimes encounter a defensive attitude among the Irish against these theories, as stated. This resistance would also be encountered by other attempts to dismantle what is perceived as the Irish cultural past. Is it possible that it is this influence we find in Ó hÓgáin’s study? As an Irishman, he will have been aware of the aspects mentioned here. It is possible that what we detect in Ó hÓgáin’s study is a trace of this defensive attitude.

There is another aspect of Ó hÓgáin’s profession that is worth discussing in this context. As an Irish folklorist, he has at times worked with material and traditions that could be connected with the Celts, such as the Irish medieval literature. His *The Sacred Isle. Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (1999) has strong connections to the Celts, as does his *The Lore of Ireland. An encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance* (1991). Though he promotes the Irish aspect of his material in the titles of these books, the Celtic aspect is apparent throughout the texts. It is possible, then, that part of the reason for Ó hÓgáin’s opposing of category C lies in a desire to maintain the Celtic aspects of the traditions he works with. And to turn it around: a desire to maintain the Irish aspect of the traditions as well. As some of the work he does concerns Celtic material more than Irish material, it is possible that he has purposely chosen to support the cultural text that allows him to treat Celtic material as though it was Irish.

According to this line of reasoning, there is no doubt that Ó hÓgáin is affected by his cultural context, and that this can be demonstrated through reactions this context has caused in his work. The impulses listed here are probably not his only sources of motivation, but neither can they be ignored as minor or insignificant. I claim that his being Irish has to a large degree determined which theory he has subscribed to. As the Celtic aspect of Ireland is very dominant, it cannot but have coloured the Irish perception of the debate, and there is no reason to believe that Ó hÓgáin is exempt from this. His work is closely connected to the Celtic aspect of Ireland, and the Irish aspect of Celticity, and were these aspects to be separated, his research on these aspects – especially the Celtic – would lack a dimension, and would lose its connection to the folklore he studies. As a result, there is possibly a higher motivation for defending the Irish culture against the category C theories in Ó hÓgáin’s case than we would find in the general Irish public.
8.2 John Collis

I explained earlier that though Collis has been placed in category C, he is more focused on discussing the foundation for theories based on archaeology than on discrediting theories that are based on history, classical sources or linguistics. In addition to this, he does not discuss any specific theory, or demonstrate which theory he follows concerning the arrival of the Celts on the islands – his views on this have to be interpreted in light of what he argues concerning other areas, such as from his discussion of Iberia. He does not discuss the Celts specifically, as both Maier and Ó hÓgain do, but instead devotes his discussions to the earlier research that has been done on the Celts, pointing out errors, loopholes, circular arguments and the lack of argument or scepticism altogether.

Collis’s study is focused toward the different scholars and sources available to modern scholars interested in the Celts. As such, he often describes individual authors. The political context of the scholars who in the nineteenth century devised the theories that are followed today, both in archaeology and in other fields, is a large part of his discussion in The Celts, as is the influence this context had on their theories. Collis is very aware of the effects contemporary events had on the work of these scholars, often bringing up scholarly consequences of public or political situations. Regarding this, it is especially interesting to note his discussions on the influences colonialism had on the scholars:

“Language and race tended to be equated; so, it was argued, speakers of non-Indo-European languages should be distinguishable from the Indo-Europeans in terms of their physical characteristics.”\(^{116}\)

“The dissemination of Greek philosophy and art, or Roman government and justice, were used in the justification of the empire builders of the nineteenth century, but so were classical attitudes towards native populations, the creation of ‘the other’, with stereotyping of native peoples as backward, bizarre, uncivilized, unchanging unless change was forced upon them by the superior civilisations of Europe. All these were attitudes which were reflected in archaeological theory and explanation.”\(^{117}\)

It is necessary to add here that he criticises this development rather fiercely:

“Yet the two have coalesced to produce an idealised ‘Celtic’ society on the grounds that they spoke related Celtic languages, with priests, bards, a warrior elite, and an oppressed common people. This then is imposed on the interpretation of hillforts in southern Britain such as Danebury, even though it has no support in the archaeological record. This is the vision of the ‘timeless Celt’ peddled in most of the general books on the Celts, even those written by archaeologists, and yet it is a totally false construct. (...) It is a construct based on

\(^{116}\) Collis 2003: 59
\(^{117}\) Ibid: 61
It is apparent from this that Collis is aware of the amount of influence a scholar’s political and cultural context and experiences can have on his work, and the possible results of this influence, and he employs this in his discussions. As discussed, he has based many arguments on this phenomenon, and it is a relevant part of his conclusions, where he assumes that modern theories rest on a flawed methodology. Collis argues that a nineteenth century scholar’s political context creates large ripples in his work. This will produce a flawed methodology that should be abandoned in modern research, as the theory retains impulses and elements from the political context of the scholar that devised it, and this includes aspects of theories that has no place in modern society, such as racism.

However, Collis seems to not see this problem in the results of and reactions to his own political context in his study. We see an example of this in his last chapter, where he criticises racism both in the official and in the public sector. This would not perhaps be as noteworthy were it not for the fact that he starts his study with a comment on the discussions of racism in the media. This means that we find the same relation between Collis and his contemporary events as the relations he criticises in the work of the nineteenth-century scholars he discusses. He is affected by political elements of the society he lives in, as were the nineteenth century authors – while they retain traces of colonialist attitudes in their work, his work retains traces of the anti-racism and liberalism that has coloured the latter half of the twentieth century. Though the similarity between the two is apparent, he does not draw the conclusion from this that he himself is affected in this way by what happens in the world around him. Still, to a reader it is evident that he is shaped by these discussions of racism in the media, and that this is one of the main reasons for his discussions of racism in the last chapter.

It is interesting in this respect that he claims that his book is meant to help clarify the background of the theories employed today, and to contribute to the exposure of racist and otherwise flawed methodology. Part of the background for the impreciseness of these methodologies is, according to Collis, that they retain too many traces of the political context of the scholar, and that the political context of the scholars is continued in their theories. This means that the attitudes of the nineteenth century are implicit in the theories of the twenty-first, as the latter are built upon the basis created by nineteenth-century scholars. Collis

\[118\] Collis 2003: 214
discusses this thoroughly. One would expect that a scholar who focused to such a degree on this situation in the works of others would notice when the same situation occurred in his own work, especially when his own work demonstrates quite clearly that the effect of contemporary political context on a scholar’s work is still valid. No scholar is completely objective and separate from his context, but as Collis discusses this thoroughly in connection with nineteenth-century scholars, one would expect him to at the least make a mention of his own subjectivity. However, no such mention is made.

As discussed, Collis focuses on research history more than on distinct modern theories, and on dissecting the theoretical basis for modern theories rather than criticising the theories themselves. He at times comments other theories, mainly then ones by other archaeologists such as Simon James, often pointing out aspects he does not agree with or that are based on older, biased theories. An interesting aspect of this is his discussion on James’ arguments in connection with James Lhuyd and the “sense of ‘other’, especially on the part of the Welsh and Scots”\(^{120}\), where Collis argues against this view. According to Collis, James is overplaying the differences here to a degree, and the differences between Scots and Welsh on the one side and English on the other side had less to do with alienation than with politics. Again, we see that Collis fails to notice an impact of context on a modern scholar: as James was commissioned by the British Museum to write this study, and as this was to coincide with the devolution of Scotland and Wales in 1999, it’s of little wonder that he chooses to emphasize the nationalist angle Collis objects to.\(^{121}\) Interestingly, James himself had earlier claimed that “the questioning of Celticism is not a reaction against, for example, moves toward home rule in Wales and Scotland”\(^{122}\), which indicates that the opinions of his commissioner for The Celts may have dictated the way of his discussion in no small manner.

At this point, we need to find out if there are possible backgrounds for why Collis would ignore any contextual influence in the writings of modern scholars. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Collis seems to be influenced by the debate, and that this probably is why he has written a study on research history. This means that the debate has also influenced him to a degree where it is apparent in his work, as had the discussions of racism in the media, as we saw above. Collis does not deny being influenced by the debate, but neither does he explicitly say it; however, he ends his study with “I hope this book has answered that [namely Cunliffe’s claim that scholars writing critically of the Celts lacked depth in scholarship], and I

\(^{120}\) Collis 2003: 71  
\(^{121}\) See for example Rekdal 2002 for a discussion on this.  
\(^{122}\) James 1998: 204
now pass the debate back to my opponents\textsuperscript{123}, which shows quite clearly that he knows he is writing as a response to the debate. In which case, we are no longer talking about contextual influence the scholar is unaware of, but of a conscious choice the scholar has made. This choice has influenced everything Collis has discussed in his study, because it has determined how he should write it. There is no doubt that this choice is determined by the debate – Collis had decided to focus on the arguments put forward in the debate, and work according to what he wished to prove or disprove.

However, this does not explain why Collis does not see the influence of his own political context or why he does not recognize it in the work of another. As he’s affected by the debate, and his study is a contribution to it, one would expect that he had recognized the need to determine whether his opponents in the debate, and his fellow debaters for that matter, were influenced by their political or cultural context in the arguments. Since Collis and other category C authors has been accused of arguing based on political views by, amongst others, Ruth and Vincent Megaw, as he shows in his final chapter,\textsuperscript{124} it is strange that he should not be more aware of this and be able to spot it when it appears. However, this is clearly not the case, and we find here an example of the weakness that characterizes many of the category C arguments: their logic can be turned towards themselves. Accordingly, we can accuse Collis’ study of being influenced by his political context, since this has coloured the way he writes and what he includes in his study. His criticism towards flawed methodology and the basis it was constructed on is based on his political context, which means that he shares this aspect with the theories he discusses. Whether this double-edged logic is a general problem in all category C arguments, or whether this effect leaves the arguments pointless, are questions that have not been answered yet.

I concluded earlier that Collis does not comment the cultural text of the Celts on the islands directly. Instead, he discusses the commentaries other scholars have made on this cultural text. I argued that this was an attempt to counter the possible canonisation of a cultural text he does not agree with. This angle is also quite probably determined by Collis’ relationship to the debate. As stated, Collis’ focus toward other scholars meant that the criticism in his study would not be reacted to by the public. He claims in his introduction that the book is aimed towards public and scholars alike, but he does not argue to convince the public – he argues to convince the scholars. We can claim, from this, that his main concern is

\textsuperscript{123} Collis 2003: 231
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid: 225
not what happens in the minds of the public, but in the minds of the scholars. He is not attempting to change a currently established cultural text in the minds of the public.

It takes some time before what has been argued by the scholars reaches the general public, and even longer before it is accepted as true. With scholars such as Simon James, who directs his study towards the general public both in content and in the setting of the study, this process may go a little faster. It is possible that what Collis is doing here can be described as indirectly affecting the public, by influencing the theories portrayed by other authors. Were his arguments to be followed by other scholars, it is possible that there would be an increase in scholars and publications that demonstrated scepticism to the theories that were created in the nineteenth century. This could mean that the basic theories of these, that many modern scholars have employed as methodology, would need to be reformed. And if enough scholars were sceptical to earlier theories, this scepticism would eventually permeate through the general public.

In Ó hÓgáin’s case, it was possible to find a clear connection between the theory he has chosen, and his nationality and the place the Celts have in the Irish culture. It is necessary at this point to determine if the same connection between product and context, whether cultural or political, is present in Collis’ case. As an English archaeologist, he is representative of category C in more than just his choice of theory – it was mainly English archaeologists who created the theories identified here as category C. In addition to this, if we remember the discussions in chapter six, there have been avid accusations of anti-Celtic attitudes against English scholars who follow the category C theories.¹²⁵ Category C is the most political of the categories, in this respect – it is the only category where publications and arguments based on political views and contexts are expected by the opposition, as we see in the response given by Ruth and Vincent Megaw to Simon James¹²⁶. This goes some way towards explaining Collis’ aim toward other category C scholars, as this may make what he argues more acceptable to those who claim that he is arguing based on a Celt-hostile context. Thus, his publication is less likely to be criticised on this basis.

Another indication of the political aspect of this category is pointed out by Collis himself: “Typical comments (...) make strong allegations of right-wing nationalism against us (...) As almost all of us who have been pursuing these new interpretations tend to be on the liberal left wing of politics, and generally pro-European, one finds this attack somewhat

¹²⁵ Such as the quotation from Rhodri Morgan, mentioned above, shows. See also Sims-Williams 1998:5 for a discussion of this.
¹²⁶ Collis 2003: 225
bizarre."\(^{127}\) This demonstrates yet again that there is a strong link between the category C scholars and politics, not necessarily because many of the scholars share the same political view, but because the need to counter a political accusation with a political defence is there. We can claim that scholars who follow these theories, and enter the debate with publications on these theories, are intrinsically influenced by their own political context in this respect. Both Collis and James have published studies with a high level of political argument, and both studies can be demonstrated to be influenced by the political context of the author – for James’ study, the line to the devolution of Wales and Scotland is obvious, while Collis demonstrates a relation to the debate of the island Celts that had been going on for the better part of a decade when he published his study.

However, based on his study there is no reason to believe Collis to be anti-Celtic. The argument that the English should be prejudiced against the Celts does not seem to be relevant in this case – this may be because Collis has angled the study away from the discussion of Celts, and possible negative attitudes are less apparent. However, he makes a point of saying that he has received support from areas that can be classified as Celtic – both from scholars and from the general public,\(^{128}\) which indicates that he is aware that this is an argument that may be used against him.

Based on Collis’ study, it seems as though the influence his context has had on it has been mainly in a political form, and then not one that is based on segregation between Celt and English, but rather on the discussion of the validity of the concepts ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’. If we contrast with Simon James, this picture becomes even clearer. James is also politically influenced, in that he has undertaken to write a study that denies the existence of the Celts at a time when some of the Celtic countries were separated from English rule. However, his study is part of a trend in theory and method that has been called anti-Celticism or Celtoscepticism, and his vehement claims that there was no such thing as insular ancient Celts has certainly met with this argument on numerous occasions, as Collis attests. In addition to this, the timing of Simon James’ study and the circumstances around it means that his study seems to argue from a specifically English point of view, and against the countries achieving devolution. This means that the study is more likely to meet opposition at this point. Collis, on the other hand, has argued the same theory for the better part of a decade, and has avoided linking his publications to specific events. It is especially beneficial to his goals that he has avoided the link to events that can seem to widen the gap between Celt and English. In addition to this, his

\(^{127}\) Collis 2003: 225
\(^{128}\) Ibid: 231
The Celts is aimed away from the confrontations that are plentiful in James’ work, meaning that he is less likely to be opposed on this point.

Though there may be little cause to oppose Collis on the grounds of being anti-Celtic, there is little doubt he is heavily influenced by his political context. His English background is made apparent in the final chapter, where he claims that “I consider myself first and foremost as an Englishman, and British only in terms of the citizenship which provides me with protection when I travel around the world, it is not because I am anti-Scottish, Welsh or Irish, indeed the opposite, seeing Britain more as a union of equals.”129 If we connect this with his statement that many of those who argue this theory, himself included, see multinational solutions, such as the EU and UN, as the next step forward130, we see quite clearly that Collis is influenced by the politics of his time. It is possible that the political context in this case is equally as influential to the work of the scholar as was that of the scholars of the nineteenth century.

8.3 Bernhard Maier

As the only continental scholar discussed, Maier holds a unique position in this study. I concluded in chapter five that his study is aimed toward the general public, and that it is an attempt to reinforce the current cultural text and counteract the category C arguments of the recent debate. He argues out of an assumption that the islanders were Celts, but never give any explanation for which theory he follows or for why this would be, and he continues to use the terms ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’ of the islanders in his discussions of times up to the middle ages, which can be seen as another attempt to reinforce the view of the islanders as Celts. He never mentions the debate in his study, and he avoids recent contrasting evidence. However, the theory he discusses was considered valid on most points until fairly recently, when the arguments of the debate began to be taken into consideration. This means that although he avoids including the arguments of the debate, and other recent contrasting evidence, he includes arguments made up till that point. In other words, he does not exclude whole areas of study, as Ó hÓgáin does, and his omissions are quite subtle and may not be noticeable at first glance. The version of history as Maier explains it is also the one most known in the general public.

129 Collis 2003: 226
130 Ibid: 225
As such a large part of Maier’s study is concerned with the development of the Celts from the time of the Roman Empire and onwards, he manages to avoid the debate and its arguments somewhat. The debate is mainly focused on the Celts and in which manner they arrived on the islands, or whether they did at all, though it sometimes touches on the validity of the concept of modern Celts. Maier focuses on historical times through the majority of the study, and he early defines the islanders as Celts. However, he makes the transition to using terms such as Irish, Welsh, and Scottish in the latter parts, thus also avoiding the complications around modern Celts.

There are several interesting implications detectable in the way Maier has chosen to write his study. First, he avoids modern contrasting evidence, for instance concerning the interpretations of the archaeological evidence in Ireland. He also ignores important arguments put forth in the debate. As this often is evidence he should be aware of, leaving it out is most probably a conscious decision. Some of it has been discussed previously by scholars he has used as sources for his study, and often in the exact book he has been employing as a source, which lends strength to this argument. Leaving this evidence out makes his study appear more uniform, and more in coherence with what is perceived as the correct version of events by the general public. However, as his study follows a version of history that was left behind by many scholars up to ten years ago (and more, in the case of Colin Renfrew and a few others), it is likely that other scholars could react towards Maier’s presentation of events.

Secondly, his focus is historical. We see a similarity to Dáithí Ó hÓgáin’s argumentation in this, as they both have a main focus on the time from the Roman invasion of Britain and on to the middle ages, and Maier goes up to the end of the twentieth century. It is possible that this is an attempt to refocus the attention of the public and of other scholars to more recent times. His discussion of modern times, and the early identification of the islanders as Celts, may also lend strength to the argument of modern Celts, since it demonstrates the link between the modern population and the ancient Celts. It is possible that this was not intentional from Maier’s point of view, though it probably further reinforces the cultural text, at least on the side of the islands. The historical focus may also serve to divert attention from the more radical arguments of the debate and over to what is actually known through written sources and archaeology, or, to say it differently, over from what may be

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131 As discussed in chapter five, we see examples of this in the way he ignores evidence given by Barry Raftery and Barry Cunliffe, both of whom are included in his source list.
viewed as speculation to historical fact. As far as reinforcement of the current cultural text goes, this is exactly the effect that would be desirable.

Lastly, Maier does not explain at any point which theory he follows, though this is apparent in his discussions. Nor does he mention the debate. This is remarkable, considering that the debate has made such an impact on Celtic scholars and on the general public. However, it is likely that this was done with a specific goal in mind. Leaving the debate and the theorising out of the discussions makes his study accessible to the general public, and a uniform study will more easily be believed. As stated, it seems as though the general public is his main target group, rather than other scholars. He does not clarify his main target group in the study, though it is possible to draw this conclusion based on his discussions and arguments.

Another indicator that his study is aimed towards the general public is his focus on the public uses of the words ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’. Maier discusses this in detail, which indicates that this is a large concern for him, and that he is interested in the public uses of these words. This is apparent already from his introduction, where he devotes much room to the discussion of what the term ‘Celt’ entails today. Based on his study, it is probable that Maier attempts to counteract the radical category C arguments that have been posted in the recent debate.

I argued that Maier may be attempting to strengthen the cultural text that is demonstrated by category B authors. This cultural text has been based on the theories blossoming up to the nineties, theories with little input of archaeological nature and based on the migrationist point of view. It is the version of history most widely accepted by the public. As Maier’s study mainly contains evidence and theories that were previously known and were assumed to be correct up to the time of the debate, one might say that he’s attempting to canonise this cultural text in the minds of the public. If this cultural text were to be affirmed as current by the public, it would quite likely be more difficult to change it for other scholars. As discussed, it takes longer time today for theories put forth by scholars to permeate the public, and it would thus be harder to influence the opinion of the public when another idea had already gained acceptance. Canonising the cultural text Maier presents would also ascertain that the islanders remained Celts, and that the link between the modern cultures and the ancient Celts stayed valid. This again would make sure that modern cultural expressions, such as for instance language, music and art, could be described by the term ‘Celtic’.

However, if we look closer at Maier’s discussion surrounding ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’, it seems at times as though he’s criticising the public uses of the term ‘Celtic’. He compares
the “inflationary trend in the use of the adjective ‘Celtic’”\textsuperscript{132} with the “unusual or even ideologically suspect”\textsuperscript{133} use of the term ‘Germanic’, and concludes that ‘Celtic’ is predominantly positive, while ‘Germanic’ is negative in most connotations. Based on this, I concluded that ‘Germanic’ is a cultural text where the formative and normative values are negative rather than positive. There are traces of this in Maier’s argumentation on this field. Though it may seem as though he’s merely commenting on the status of the terms today, we can notice certain phrases and words that indicate otherwise. For instance, we see the idea that ‘Celtic’ has taken over what was once ‘Germanic’:

> “Whereas in antiquity the Celts were primarily the focus of collective fears, today they appear as an ideal screen on which to project individual and collective yearnings. Whereas in the political ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they were enlisted for the glorification of national histories, with the decline of nationalism and the rejection of the Third Reich’s celebration of things Germanic, the idea of Celtic culture as the secret cradle of the West has gained ground.”\textsuperscript{134}

What we see here is an idea that due to ‘Germanic’ falling out of grace after the Second World War, ‘Celtic’ was adopted instead, and that this is part of the reason for the popularity of the term today. As it became necessary to make a break with ‘Germanic’, which up to the Second World War had been employed as a noble background for the development of the modern German-speaking European countries (as Maier indicates in the above quotation), another ancient group was chosen, one that had little connections to the majority of modern European countries. As the Celts were given this attention politically, both nationally and in connection with larger European organisations, the positive connotations the term was endowed with could have led to it being accepted in use by the public, which may again have led to the term being employed in areas where it normally wouldn’t belong. After all, once governments and international agencies started employing the ‘Celtic’ term for their own ends, there is no reason to believe the public would not do the same.

What is interesting to note here is that Maier is not discussing the use of the term on the islands at this point: he’s discussing the way ‘Celtic’ is used on the continent, and in European politics. This brings his discussion back to the area he’s familiar with outside of the study – back to his own cultural and political context. As a German, he would be familiar with the results of the use of ‘Germanic’ for political purposes, and it is thus not unexpected that he would be interested in the similar uses of ‘Celtic’. This may be part of the reason why the use

\textsuperscript{132} Maier 2003: 251
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid: 250
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
of ‘Celtic’ in public context would be a point of concern for him. However, it is important at this point to emphasize that this probably was not a conscious choice from Maier’s point of view.

The Germans hold a unique position with regards to political and societal uses of cultural definitions. After the Second World War, the research traditions in Germany changed. Increased scrutiny was applied to the work of scholars to make sure that any term that could be linked to the ideologies of the National Socialist Party would be omitted. In the same manner, discussions that could touch upon the same field were carefully avoided, and topics that were similar were treated with extreme caution. Ethnic or racist criteria were abandoned.\textsuperscript{135} For example, German archaeologists avoided drawing conclusions about artefacts they examined, preferring instead to simply make detailed descriptions.\textsuperscript{136} As archaeology had contributed heavily to the construction of the nationalist theories of race, it was necessary to make a clean break to that tradition, and to not be associated with it. The same was true for other fields of study. Due to this, the research traditions changed direction, and became far more critical and subdued.

This increased scrutiny would have established a tradition of extra caution toward any field or discussion that seemed to entail similar themes as those that were used by the Nationalist Socialist Party during the Second World War. Scholars would have learned to be wary when dealing with these kinds of subject. Here, then, we may have the reason why Maier is sceptic towards the political and public uses of ‘Celtic’. As a German, he belongs to a researching tradition that had to change radically to avoid negative associations and hostility. This change was so fundamental and thorough that it still characterises the German academic milieu, and possibly in a wider European milieu as well. As a result, one would expect to find a critical attitude in scholars of that milieu toward any discussion that touches on arguments of race, links between historical definitions and political constructions, or naïve connections to ideology and politics. As part of such an academic tradition, Maier has learned this scepticism, and it is possible that this is what we can detect in his discussion around ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’.

John Collis noticed another aspect of this. In his \textit{The Celts}, he compares German Studies to Celtic Studies, claiming that while German Studies had outgrown the use of the race concept, and left such flawed methodologies behind, this has yet to happen in Celtic

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{135} Trigger 2005: 401.
\textsuperscript{136} As the ethnic interpretations had been exploited by the nationalist socialists, similar interpretations were avoided after the war. Instead, artefacts were grouped according to archaeological cultures, but without including race or ethnicity. See for instance Jones 2005: 3; or Olsen 2002: 41, 44.
\end{footnotesize}
Studies. We see a similar idea in Sims-Williams’ claim that both Celticists and Germanicists have extended the linguistic “family tree model beyond language”, and seen it as showing relations between races and cultures as well.\footnote{Sims-Williams 1998: 9} This connects directly to what I discussed above, namely the German need to make a break between the current tradition and the one employed up to the Second World War. That Collis, who is so concerned with discrediting racially based methodologies, should notice this, proves that this concept is something the German scholars strive to avoid.

This means that it is possible that to a German scholar, being sceptical about such discussions is second nature. In light of this, it is easier to understand Maier’s apparent aversion to the public and political uses of the ‘Celtic’ term. We can see this clearly in Maier’s discussion of ‘Celtic’ versus ‘Germanic’: “outside the professional milieu, any critical discussion of the term ‘Celtic’ and its problems has so far remained in its infancy, with the result that uninformed non-partisanship, naïvete and ideological blindness still flow easily into one another.”\footnote{Maier 2003: 250} This is a good example of the scepticism that has permeated German academic milieus.

It is possible that we can draw this scepticism even further based on Maier’s study. I mentioned earlier that he has avoided including the arguments of the debate. This may be because some of these arguments, especially those of category C, have very close links to politics. German scholars have avoided such links since the end of the war. As part of such an environment, Maier could possibly be especially aware of such links, and do his best to avoid them.

There is another aspect of Maier’s discussion of ‘Celtic’ and ‘Germanic’ which is worth looking into here. Some phrases and words indicate that he’s doing something more than simply discussing the differences between them, and that in some cases, he comes across as critical to the public uses of ‘Celtic’. The above quotation of “ideological blindness” may be one of these cases. This critical attitude to the public uses of the term may be related to what was discussed above: having become accustomed to being critical of links to politics and similar, it is possible that he has transformed this specific critical attitude to a more general one, where he is critical not only to the subject-matter, but also to those that discuss it. This would lead to a heightened level of awareness when it comes to the uncritical use of ideas or terms that can easily be transferred from one sphere to another (such as from the academic to the public sphere). This again could lead to a situation where he is critical on a general basis,
to the debate in its entirety and especially to the public aspects of it, where people may be
discussing things they do not know anything about.

Maier’s study may be inspired by a desire to counter the debate, but the way he has
written it points to influences that have arisen out of his own research environment, and out of
causes that lie fifty years in the past. These impulses may also have affected his choice of
theory, in that he attempts to shift the attention away from radical arguments that in some
cases have close links to politics and public discussion. It is possible that Maier is showing
reluctance to support a cultural text where the bonds between modern politics and ideology
and ancient people are as strong as is indicated in category C arguments. This means that
Maier is affected both by his political context and by his historical one, and to such a degree
where both are present in his study. He has not made conscious choices based on them, as
John Collis has done, but the influence is visible in his argumentation even so.

8.4 Celts and Context in modern scholarly literature

In the nineteenth century, a link between race, culture and language was established.
This supposed that the three were the same, and that if a culture was found at one certain
place the language and race were also bound to have been there at one point. Accompanying
this was the view that savage populations were unlikely to develop on their own, and that
larger civilisations were needed to supply this to the natives. From this sprang, for instance,
the Celtic migrationist theories, which supposed that new developments in Britain and Ireland
were due to migrating or invading groups of more highly-developed Celtic tribes from the
European continent. From this sprang also the idea that as European cultures were highly
developed, they were superior to the cultures that were less developed, which led to the idea
that the developed cultures were biologically superior.139 And from this sprang, ultimately, the
thought that the most highly-developed cultures and its people had a higher worth than the
less-developed countries140, and when this was linked to specific countries, it led to the idea
that one race were entitled to eradicate others.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, ideologies based on race were abandoned,
and because of the Nationalist Socialist Party’s use of links between current and ancient
populations, German scholars especially stopped identifying archaeological cultures with
ethnic groups. Over time, this has developed into a situation where even the word racism is

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139 This view was held by, among others, Darwinists, and is discussed in Trigger 2005: 112-3.
140 As for instance was argued by Gustaf Kossinna in favour of Indo-Europeans. Ibid: 163-167
negative, and implies precisely such attitudes as marked the nineteenth century. These attitudes are today treated with disdain, and any public adherence to them is immediately criticised.

However, for many fields of research the nineteenth century was a time of defining, and many theories and fields were given their final form in this time. As a result, the attitudes that characterised the nineteenth century live on in academic theories that are in use today. This is not necessarily obvious, but as John Collis demonstrated, the attitudes are present in the methodologies that form the foundation for many modern theories.

The problem explored in this study has been whether the context of a scholar, whether cultural, political or historical, is traceable in his study, and which forms this contextual influence takes. We have seen in this chapter that it is certain that contextual influences can be traced in the study of a scholar – not only that, but the three scholars discussed here have all been influenced by phenomena that were initiated or had its background in the nineteenth century. For Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, the idea that Irish and Celtic to a large degree are described as the same, and that the Irish culture is Celtic to such a degree that a dimension of this culture would be lost were the two aspects to be separated, we find the background in the nineteenth-century idea that presence of language meant presence of race, and that Ireland was a country where this presence was still strong. The link between ancient people and modern population meant that the Irish were still Celtic, which enabled the Irish culture to claim the Celtic for its own; this is somewhat the same attitude as could be found in the link between Germanic peoples and Germans, and which was buried to such a degree after the war.

In John Collis’ argumentation, we see an attempt to break the tradition of research that equalizes language with race, and to prove that one could exist at a certain place without the other. Collis’ main protest is against the concept of race, as it was used in the nineteenth century, and the concept of ethnicity, which can become too similar to the concept of race in modern uses. In a situation where the United Kingdom has started to show cracks, and the differences between cultures are at times demonstrated through references to ancient populations, Collis is attempting to defuse this argument and leave it invalid.

Bernhard Maier’s link to the nineteenth century concepts of race and culture exists in the expression these concepts formed in the early twentieth century, and which culminated in the Second World War. The resulting break in tradition has led to a new version of academic scholarship in Germany, where the attitudes of the nineteenth century are forsaken, and the link between ancient people and modern culture broken. A result of this is a prevailing critical attitude towards links between ideology or politics and ancient peoples.
Context, historical, political or cultural, always influences the work of an author, and can be traced in it, whether to a large or small degree. The three authors examined here have made conscious choices of which form of their cultural text to present, partly as a reaction to the times they live in, but the influence of their context is apparent in the way they discuss, in the arguments they use, and in the problems they emphasise. Celtic Studies is going through a paradigm-shift, away from the methodologies of the nineteenth century. Until this process is finished, it is likely that the influence of reactions toward these methodologies will be present, if subtly, in the work of modern scholars.
9. Conclusions. Implications for the modern age

Whether the ancient Celts existed or not, the modern Celts are separate from them in time and place, culture and history. Ruth and Vincent Megaw give an example of this, when they claim in an article that a major part of the inhabitants of Australia is often referred to as “Anglo-Celtic”\textsuperscript{141}. It is hardly possible to get further away from ancient Celts than to the idea that Australia should be Celtic due to the large amount of Irish, Welsh and Scottish people that migrated and were deported to Australia. Still, the Megaws seem to adhere to this term, though neither linguistic nor cultural evidence link these two aspects of ‘Celt’. Rather, the reasoning in this case is apparently based on genetics and history. The Megaws seem to claim that as the modern population of Australia is descended from immigrants that may be called Celtic, the modern population must be Celtic also.

This claim brings up a range of interesting possibilities. Does it mean that Australian culture also is able to employ the term ‘Celtic’ as its own, and to market itself as Celtic? It should mean that, because as long as it is acceptable that modern Australians can be termed Celtic, then it is equally acceptable that the Australian culture is described in the same way. From this, we can assume that modern Australian music is Celtic music, that Australian literature written by descendants of these immigrants is Celtic literature. Or can we? If we are operating with linguistic criteria for the defining of Celts, then we cannot. However, if the criterion for the defining of someone as a modern Celt is that the person perceives himself as a modern Celt, then this becomes more possible. However, it still would not mean that the cultural products of Australia were altogether Celtic any more than that they were altogether Aboriginal.

What has happened here is that the Megaws have applied their own cultural context onto the cultural text they are writing of. They are inhabitants of Australia, a culture that has learned to value its ancient culture, and in light of this it is logical that they criticise the category C “destructive denial of possible past ethnicities”\textsuperscript{142}. Thus, to them, the Celts are an ancient people that should be valued, much as the Aboriginal culture is. The recognition of the value of the Aboriginal culture seems to have coloured the Megaws’ view of the Celts. No Aboriginal would be, or should be, standing passive while their ethnic past is taken apart, and hence this is unacceptable for other ancient cultures as well.

\textsuperscript{141} Megaw & Megaw 1996: 175
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid: 180
The Megaws are not alone in presenting a cultural text in light of their own cultural context. That is what every author presented in this study has done. How apparent this is in the work of the scholars varies, but it can be identified. Hence, Bernhard Maier is sceptical toward the use of a cultural text that includes strong ties between ancient history and modern ideology, and John Collis reacts strongly toward any suggestion of eighteenth-century residue in modern scholarly text. How we react towards the ideas of other scholars is also determined by our cultural context. This is apparent in the discussion between the Megaws and Simon James mentioned in the introduction to this study, and James himself puts it into words:

"We should indeed look at the political contexts and subtexts of what we do; but we also need to understand the drives which lead each of us to see the past, the present, and our fellow practitioners as we do. A may do something for one set of reasons, which may or may not have been impeccable, but A's motivation may be misread by B according to B's agenda – and B's prejudices about how A thinks."143

In other words, the treatment of Celts in modern scholarly literature is intrinsically tied up to the cultural context of each scholar. This context determines how we react not only to our material, but also toward the presentations made of it by other scholars.

9.1 The impact of a cultural text

I mentioned earlier the idea that language and music could also be a cultural text, if we expanded the definition given by Assmann. A cultural text is believed by the people who adhere to it, and this is a powerful tool for those who wish to employ this cultural text. For instance, the idea that the Germans were superior to other races, by nature of being modern descendants of Germanic tribes, could be used as an argument for the eradication of other races. If a person believes in a cultural text that claims that his culture has been a noble rebel against other cultures for centuries, it becomes more likely that this person can be asked to rebel against the same cultures in the name of his own culture.

On the same note, what would happen if a certain cultural text were dismantled and replaced with another? This has happened numerous times. We see it, for instance, in the attempt to discourage use of the Irish language in Ireland in the nineteenth century. When it became necessary to use English to get by in everyday situations, Irish became a negative value, and one that should be abandoned. As this was enforced not only by the English, but by the Irish as well, this was all the more effective, and the Irish language came close to

143 James 1998: 206
extinction. In recent years, this has started to change, and Irish has yet again gained a positive value.

This means that a cultural text containing the use of the Irish language in the Irish culture became a cultural text with negative values, much as the cultural text of the Germanic people has become in modern Europe after the Second World War. In its place was established a positive cultural text that employed the English language. Such a change can be implemented by outsiders, but is all the more effective if it is possible to convert followers of the earlier cultural text to the new one, and then use these followers to convert others. We see similar processes in the spread of major religions, both historically and today.

Is it possible for a scholar to change a cultural text? Certainly, but it requires work and time. However, cultural texts are by nature required to change, as they reflect a changing society. This change can be guided, and this is a more natural matter for a scholar to choose to pursue. Which text to follow, and which change to encourage, is a matter of choice, and one that each scholar has to make. Regardless of what we believe ourselves to be, we are all shapers and commentators of cultural text, and we will all make choices concerning this based on our own cultural context.
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