

THE IRISH NATION



UIMHIR 1 BEALTAINNE 2021

THE TWO IDENTITIES NOTION

There was a time when some ideologues tried to tell us that there were two nationalities in Ireland consisting of an Irish nation, on the one hand, and an Ulster nation or at least part of a British nation, on the other. The problem with an Ulster nation was that all the proposed members of it (i.e. unionists) couldn't agree on the idea. The problem with them being part of a 'British' nation was that the English, Scottish and Welsh didn't see themselves as being included in such a phenomenon along with the people of Northern Ireland.

However, some of the population in the North persist in calling themselves British. Those concerned would probably also categorise themselves as unionist. But not **all** unionists would classify themselves as British.

In the discussion about Irish reunification, efforts are being made to come to grips with the issue of ethnic self-classification on the island and particularly in the six counties of Northern Ireland.

However, there is an increasing tendency for some nationalists and republicans to talk only about two identities, namely Irish and British, and just portray them as corresponding respectively to nationalists and unionists. This is a skewed attempt to recognize the differences which genuinely exist within Irish society in the context of

seeking to move towards a united Ireland. First of all, it is best to examine basic statistics which are readily available.

Sociological research reveals the following types of self-identification in the North:

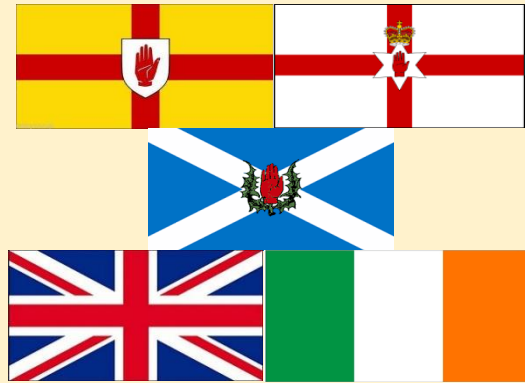
- a. Ulster,
- b. Ulster-Scots,
- c. Irish,
- d. Northern Irish.
- e. British.

Furthermore, these categories sometimes overlap. For example, there are nationalists who see themselves as Irish, Northern Irish and Ulster, all at the same time. Likewise, some unionists have overlapping identities from among the categories listed

In the *Belfast Telegraph* Centenary Poll, the following results for self-identification emerged:

1. British.....33%,
2. Irish..... .28%,
3. N Irish... ..33%,
4. Unclear ...06%.

It is quite obvious, therefore, that a crude British/Irish dualism does not capture the reality and variety of identity in the North. For example, one cannot move readily from the poll categories to a unionist/nationalist allocation. One might reasonably assume that all those in category '1' are unionist, but it cannot be assumed that unionists are not to be found to some extent in the other three categories.



And, even looking at the composition of the Northern Ireland Assembly, one cannot give an exact unionist/nationalist breakdown, taking account of the fact that, under some headings (Alliance, Greens, PBP, and Independents), there may be both nationalists and unionists. For instance, of the 90 seats in the Assembly, only 40 are explicitly unionist.

The result of all this is that, in seeking to accommodate unionists, one could of course concede certain things. These include, as desired, holding a British passport, having British as well as Irish citizenship, English and not Irish being chosen in official transactions, being a member of a new Irish Commonwealth Association, being governed locally by a devolved Administration and Legislature, and so on. But an exclusively British label does not have to be forced on all unionists.

Certain nationalists are increasingly slipping into expounding a simplistic dualistic notion. Not only does this involve a false reductionism, it is ironically foisting on some unionists a British identity which they do not claim or necessarily want. Moreover, there is thereby an abandonment of the aim of encouraging even self-classified 'British' unionists to examine the specifics of their culture and ask if they do not in fact have more in common with their nationalist neighbours than the peoples of the adjoining island.

It is one thing making the accommodations referred to above and another saying we do not see you as Irish.

There is a need to get back on the track of secular republicanism and steer clear of what is in effect a residue of Catholic nationalism, whereby a two identities notion supplants Tone's dictum of 'neither, Catholic, Protestant nor Dissenter but Irish' which can be reiterated, not in an impositional, but a modern, recognitional, inclusive and civic way.

To sum up, the republican formulation should not be -

We classify all unionists as British;
but rather -

We will accommodate British identity where it is asserted.

Even Arlene Foster in her resignation speech did not opt for a facile binary classification. Instead, she said: 'There are people in Northern Ireland with a British identity, others are Irish, others are Northern Irish, others are a mixture of all three and some are new and emerging.'

In summary, there are people born British, others who become British and now, it seems, others again who are having Britishness thrust upon them by, of all people, some republicans.

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh, May 2021

**AN
NÁISIÚN
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UNIONISTS AND THE UNION

Peter Robinson has suggested a united unionist study group on how to defend and promote the Union. But what is the Union?

In 1707, the First UK came into being from the amalgamation of the Kingdoms of Scotland and England (with the principality of Wales attached to the latter). In 1800, the Second UK, combining Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland, was brought about by the Acts of Union of that year. In 1922, the Irish Free State Agreement Act in effect allowed for the creation of the Third UK consisting of just Scotland, England (plus Wales) and a satrapy of 'Northern Ireland'. The official title of the Third UK is the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'.



If Scotland secedes from the Third UK, perhaps within the next five years or so, what will be left? There will be a polity comprised of the kingdom of England, the principality of Wales, and the satrapy of Northern Ireland. What this could be called, involving as it would only one kingdom, is a matter for conjecture.

A consideration which unionists will surely also have to address is that researched popular attitudes as well as leaks from the

establishments on the island of Britain indicate that the peoples and powers-that-be there are no longer genuinely committed to a union with Northern Ireland. In fact, Patrick Mayhew, in his day, let it slip in an interview with a German newspaper, which perhaps he did not expect to be translated into English and printed in the anglophone press, that Britain would be only too glad to see the departure of Northern Ireland from the UK.

If unionists thus came to consider an arrangement on the island of Ireland outside of a residual Union, nationalists have made it clear that this need only be on the basis of civic fellowship and continued devolution, and not requiring any changes of loyalty or identity. The latter dimension is,

anyway, complicated (as noted in the preceding article). Unionists seem to variously classify themselves as Irish, Northern Irish, Ulster, Ulster-Scots, and British. Of course, these identities, or some of them, need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, northern nationalists often classify themselves as both Irish and Ulster, albeit with the latter being always a subcategory of the former.

Interesting times lie ahead.

IRISH NATIONAL CONGRESS

COMHDHÁIL NÁISIÚNTA NA hÉIREANN

MAIN DECLARATION

The Irish people have the democratic right to freedom, unity and peace. The INC asserts that right, which is enshrined in the 1916 Proclamation, the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil.

The INC maintains that a policy should be adopted by the British of encouraging the development and establishment of an

independent, sovereign Ireland.

The INC also espouses the democratic right of the people to live and work in their own country, to full equality between men and women and, most importantly, to safeguard the future of our children. We assert the right to full access to our own culture, of which the Irish language is a vital part

EASTER RISING - MYTH AND TRUTH

There is a myth that the Easter Rising of 1916 was greeted with hostility by the majority of the Irish people and that they only became sympathetic to the rebels as a result of the stupidity of a British general in executing the leaders afterwards. Furthermore, it is asserted that the Rising had no mandate and was not democratically justified.

The evidence adduced for the first claim consists of a number of elements. Firstly, and most vividly, we are constantly told about how the rebels being led away following surrender were mocked on the streets of Dublin by ordinary people. Secondly, the elected representatives of the Irish Parliamentary Party denounced the Rising. Thirdly, many of the newspapers in Ireland expressed opposition as well.

However, objective and contemporary observers of the Rising do not substantiate the claim of popular hostility. A Canadian journalist who went to Dublin to report on the event (J F A McKenzie) wrote as follows: "I have read many accounts of public feeling Dublin in these days. They are all agreed that the open and strong sympathy of the mass of the population was with the British troops. That this was so in the better parts of the city, I have no doubt, but certainly what I myself saw in the poorer districts did not confirm this. It rather indicated that there was a vast amount of sympathy with the rebels, particularly after the rebels were defeated. The sentences of the Courts Martial deepened this sympathy."

And further on, he stated: "People were leaning from their windows waving triangular flags and handkerchiefs. 'They are cheering the soldiers', I said to my companion. ... As the main body

approached, I could see that the soldiers were escorting a large number of prisoners, men and women, several hundreds in all. The people were cheering not the soldiers, but the rebels." (*The Irish Rebellion – What Happened and Why*, 1916.)

A Frank Thornton was imprisoned with Seán MacDiarmada in Richmond Barracks. He recalls that on the way to Kilmainham on 9th May 1916: "We marched along the road and with every yard there were indications of the changed attitude of the people. The open trams passing by always brought a cheer from somebody, even though rifles were pointed at the offender on every occasion, and old men stood at the street corner and saluted despite being pushed around." (*From Behind a Closed Door*, Brian Barton, 2002.)



Of course, it is true that some people (mainly female) did come onto the streets of Dublin to mock the rebels, but it is not difficult to understand how the wives and

mothers, in particular, of soldiers serving in Flanders and elsewhere, and receiving remittances for their separated ones, were not enamoured of the rebels. But that is a long way from establishing that the majority of the people were opposed to them. And it does not take a great deal of wit to realise that supporters of the rebels were not inclined to rush onto the streets and hail them in the face of armed and angry British soldiers.

As for the Irish Parliamentary Party, it was the representative of the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie and its MPs were not elected as a result of universal franchise, which was only introduced for all adult males, and adult females (above the age of 30 fulfilling

certain property qualifications), in 1918. With regard to the news media, this was in the possession of the bourgeois classes.

On the question of democratic mandate, is it seriously suggested that the British would have allowed revolutionary candidates to stand for election, even on the severely restricted franchise of 1916, or have permitted a plebiscite, on independence? There is also the point that, when a foreign power invades one's country and occupies it, the principle of justifiable resistance comes into play.

A simple analogy might help here: if one shares a house and it is burgled, is one expected to try and take a democratic vote

on whether or not the burglar should be resisted? There are examples of an answer to this question such as in the case of the French resistance to Nazi Germany.

For all that has just been stated, the myth of the unpopular Rising was established early on and has been repeated, time and time again, since that fateful year of 1916, by lazy journalists and anti-national academics who thus behave more as right-wing propagandists than as persons of intellectual and moral integrity. It should be the task of all committed nationalists and republicans to destroy this myth, once and for all, and enshrine the truth. As some are wont to say: the truth shall set you free.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IRELAND

The republican position is that the six north-eastern counties of Ireland, known in British law as "Northern Ireland", are an invalid political entity. This is because they were set up by arbitrarily carving out of Ulster, and therefore Ireland, an area for domination by unionists. The democratic principle requires that majority rule rest on a valid electoral constituency. In the case of a State, that is the national territory. Ireland was effectively recognised in British law as a national territory up until 1922 and the Irish Free State Agreement Act.

Before that statute, Ireland was one of three original kingdoms combined in the United Kingdom, the other two being Scotland and England (with the principality of Wales attached to the latter). In 1920, the Government of Ireland Act, which first instituted the six-county unit, at least only designated it as in effect a devolved entity within the administrative area of Ireland. In 1922, that situation was effectively superseded and a quasi-republic was established in 26 counties, while six counties were retained in a State then reduced to the two original kingdoms of England and Scotland and a province of "Northern Ireland" attached thereto, thus

giving the new "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland".

Ireland may be seen as being currently inhabited by two populations - a fully fledged Irish nation and a grouping of colons descendants, namely unionists. A nation may be defined in various ways, taking account of history, geography, language, culture, folk customs, and psychology. The latter involves, among other things, a subjective acceptance of nationality. Unionists contemporaneously amount to an anomaly in this context. And this is not an unusual phenomenon, given the distortional interferences of imperialism in other countries. In many ways, unionists have come to be indistinguishable from nationalists in Ulster in general terms of common language (Hiberno-Scots English), broad culture, and basic folk customs. But, while some of them do not totally disavow Irishness, they wish to be part of a pan-British community coextensive with the UK State.

However, sociological research has shown, over and over, that most people on the island of Britain do not see themselves as being part of such a community inclusive of

unionists. At the same time, nationalists have indicated that they wish to be part, with unionists, of what the historian Robert Dudley Edwards once dubbed a Community of Ireland. In political terms, this points towards what the Good Friday Agreement envisages, namely some form of united Ireland. And this could still allow for devolution within Ireland and indeed power-sharing within a devolved unit. Moreover, different emphases of identity can be accommodated within a Community of Ireland, for example nobody need be restrained from expressing a feeling of Britishness, however defined, through holding dual citizenship, choosing a passport, and so on. An all-Ireland polity does not require having to accept a particular nationality or ethnic classification, but rather would the aim be to build a sense of civic fellowship.

The question might be raised, as it has been on occasion before, of "why not simply repartition?" And perhaps with an independent North if the mainlander British no longer want to be associated with it? The answer is that one has to take account of the reality that unionists are not grouped homogeneously in a particular area; rather are unionists and nationalists interspersed throughout the six counties. Therefore, if one is not to have forced movement of population or 'ethnic cleansing', as this has sometimes been described, the only democratic solution is in fact some form of reunification or what might also be called a reconstruction of Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement provides for a mechanism by which this may be brought about. That is, a border poll in which a majority of 50% plus one of the valid vote would initiate a process of reunification. That does not, by definition, entail a majority of the electorate and not even of those casting a ballot when spoiled or invalid

votes are taken into account. In particular, it does not need a majority of the unionist electorate or even of all those unionists casting valid votes. Therefore, we have travelled far from the simplistic 'unionist veto'. The question then arises as to whether or not, in current or imminent circumstances, a pro-unity majority could actually be achieved in a border poll, even if, in principle, such a majority should not be required insofar as the valid electoral constituency for determining the constitutional status of Ireland remains the whole island.

A number of factors have arisen in recent times which would point towards the possibility of realising a united Ireland by means of a border poll. The most fundamental is demographic, whereby the nationalists will soon outnumber unionists within the six counties. (This is, in part, due to the fact that unionists now seem to be emigrating more than nationalists.) However, given what has just been observed about the specifics of a poll, an



absolute majority of nationalists in the electorate may not be necessary in order to secure a pro-unity outcome, which may also be assisted by a certain number of unionists coming to accept the inevitability of a united Ireland on reasonable terms.

The factor which has already been identified of the mainland British, including it now seems the Establishment, no longer wishing to continue the Union is also a driving force in this matter. A third factor is no less than geopolitical and connected with the end of the Cold War, whereby Northern Ireland has lost much of the strategic significance which it possessed for Britain hitherto, therefore making its detachment now from the UK, and incorporation in an unthreatening polity, of little or no concern, and thus particularly affecting the Establishment attitude just

referred to. A fourth factor is the elimination of an overweening influence in the affairs of State in the 26 counties on the part of the Roman Catholic Church.

It has been alleged by dissidents that Sinn Fein's current promotion of a border poll means an abandonment of republican ideology regarding the invalidity of the northern statelet, through acquiescence in a principle of consent in respect of the six counties concerning reunification. In fact, what is involved does not endorse such a principle of consent, but rather utilises the **method** of consent in the North, in circumstances which have developed since 1922 and offer the prospect of actually delivering a united Ireland. It is political madness not to recognise all the changes which have come about over the past century and the possibilities which they offer of realistically achieving the Irish national objective. The dissident position is in reality more akin to dogmatic theology than practical revolution. It also involves obsessively gazing at the past rather than intelligently looking to the future.

And, as for the Good Friday Agreement, if it is read carefully, it can be seen that it does not embody a principle of consent regarding the North. It is not without accident that, nowhere in the document, can the phrase 'principle of consent' be found at all. There are various qualified references to "consent", "agreement" and to "legitimate" or "legitimacy" in relation simply to "wish...aspiration...choice" or to balloting procedure, but these are all compatible with republicans employing the method of consent in the North. The key criterion in the Agreement is "that it is for the people of Ireland alone ... to exercise their right of self-determination". In fact, that is the only self-determination right referred to in the Agreement.

It is also important to note that, unlike the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, the Good Friday Agreement was not formally signed. Rather was it accepted as a basis for moving

forward by the various parties in question. Of course, unionists have one view of what that should involve, while nationalists and republicans have another. It is subject to interpretation and all are not agreed on what that interpretation should be. However, the crucial point is that the text does not cut across republican principle, no matter what dissidents and unionists may say to the contrary.

It is also necessary to refer here to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. Initially, opponents of these simply sought their deletion. However, the opposition mounted to this ensured eventually that the issue should be one just of possible redrafting. This was never a problem for republicans, because there is always more than one way of saying the same thing. The vital consideration was to retain the assertion of Irish national sovereignty in opposition to the residual Act of Union. The important Article in the Irish Constitution is Number 3 and the first sentence thereof, which now reads as follows:

"It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island."

In the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement, various redrafts were submitted to republicans, but these were deemed not to be compatible with republican principle. Then, at the last moment, the above wording was produced. The significant change from that which had immediately gone before was that the phrase "in each jurisdiction" was replaced by "in both jurisdictions", as highlighted. The difference was that the final draft, while allowing for separate ballots 'North' and 'South', permitted arguing for their aggregation in order to ascertain the will of the people of

Ireland. In fact, some unionists have since remarked on this and have raised objections accordingly.

At the beginning of the Good Friday Agreement, we have seen that it was stated that it is "for the people of the island of Ireland alone ... to exercise their right of self-determination" and it is further stipulated that this be done "without external impediment". The British have presented this as them becoming neutral on the issue of disengaging from Ireland. In truth, this does not follow from the phrase in question. It is ridiculous to suggest that the peoples of the island of Britain (>64mln) cannot have a policy on whether or not to retain the Union with Northern Ireland (<2mln). Republicans have been remiss in not highlighting this point and vigorously

pursuing it. Indeed, given this consideration and the evidence which has been regularly forthcoming from opinion surveys, republicans should be calling, not only for polls in Ireland on the question of reunification, but for a referendum in Britain on whether or not the peoples there wish to maintain the Union with the North. There is little doubt as to the outcome of that.

As for persuasion and reassurance of unionists, that should indeed continue apace, but one ought not to be naïve and think that that alone will bring about change. Pressure as well as persuasion is always necessary in politics, particularly when dealing with bullies, which are unfortunately still to be found in a not insignificant number among unionists.

CELTOGENESIS

In an article for *Carn* (periodical of the Celtic League), I critiqued what I called 'celtophobia'. By this, I meant the efforts made, principally through certain kinds of journalism, to deflate or discredit celticism, particularly in Ireland, by citing recent archaeological and archaeogenetical research. This research seemed to indicate that Gaelic Ireland was not the result of immigration by Celtic people from the continent sometime in the first millennium BCE, contrary to what had been taught up to university level for decades previously.

Instead, it was suggested that Ireland could thus only have become Gaelic-speaking due to trading and cultural contacts rather than population movement between the continent and the island. I expressed caution about relying on some of the research and conclusions derived therefrom. In any event, even if the conclusions were correct, the implication that we cannot therefore be regarded as truly Celtic is a *non sequitur* if one's identity depends on culture rather than blood,

however that culture came about. In other words, is one a culturalist or a racistist?

The journalism in question was inspired by an academic tendency which was itself dubbed 'celtoscepticism'. Scepticism, as distinct from cynicism, is a healthy state of mind whereby one doubts and tests everything in the hope of eventually arriving at better judgements. From the 1990s onwards in particular, academics from various disciplines contributed to celtoscepticism, and the debate is ongoing. The archaeologists insisted that there was no serious material evidence of Celtic immigration and the archaeogeneticists informed that the population of Ireland had not changed substantially in its genetic character at least since the Bronze Age.

While there are many journalists who have an admirable sense of balance, there are those who are either tempted by sensationalist exaggeration or motivated by a political agenda. In the latter instance, there are quite a number of an anti-

nationalist bent to be found in both Britain and Ireland. Both of these are the types who drew on celtoscepticism in order to give rise to celtophobia, which was characterized mainly by portrayal of celticism as bogus and baseless. However, it also has to be said that some of the academics, mainly English as it happens, are not altogether untainted at times by celtophobia as well. Moreover, there is the coincidence of celtoscepticism and celtophobia with the resurgence of Celtic nationalism as a threat to the present United Kingdom.

In my *Carn* article, I implied that Ireland may in fact have become Gaelic, not through any massive population movement at one juncture, but consequent on a degree of what the archaeologists call 'elite takeover' and consequent 'elite dominance'. That is to say that, perhaps, only a small number of Celtic warrior chiefs and their bands came to Ireland over a period and gradually achieved ascendancy over the native population in both governance and language.

This could have been due to superior military technology or a more sophisticated culture or both. Also, Ireland was probably sparsely populated at the time and so no great demographic disturbance might have been involved. Elite dominance also often leads to recruitment of already existing local elites and their clients in turn, all of which leads to a new language spread and new language model to be aspired to by everyone.

This would be in contrast to extensive elite dominance owing to actual invasion and pervasive hegemony as with the Romans in Gaul. Incursive rather than invasional elite dominance is what is increasingly held to have happened in Anglo-Saxon Britain where archaeogenetics shows the modern English to have on average only about 10% traces of Germanic or Scandinavian genetic inheritance.

If a similar process occurred in Ireland with incursions of small Celtic bands, no great change in genetic composition would have been involved and archaeological traces of intrusion might be quite slender. But the archaeologists are maintaining that there should still have been some traces of even this limited phenomenon which have not been found either. This point is made by them in view of the fact that dominant elites, being by definition aristocratic, are inclined to leave identifiable and prestigious, even if not numerous, indications of their presence.

(But one must also note here that a recent study by Stephen Oppenheimer argues that what happened in England was not entirely invasional elite dominance by Anglo-Saxons as there was an already not insignificant teutonic presence from previously unattested prehistoric immigrations.)



There is yet another hypothesis that lies between mass migration and elite dominance, and that is phased familial entry. In other words, over a long period, Celtic families may have trickled into Ireland and it is families that are more likely to foster language change through their children, and their influence in turn, rather than change coming from warrior elites. By contrast, we know that Viking and Norman warrior elites, especially when they intermarried with the natives, became 'more Irish than the Irish' and ended up, along with their offspring, speaking Irish rather than Nordic or English.

It could also be postulated that familial intrusions would be less likely to generate distinctive archaeological remains, especially if the families were not of aristocratic status and had no problem in adopting the material culture which was already there in Ireland. But it is still a big ask to have us accept that even that process could have led to Gaelic becoming the exclusive language of Ireland over two millennia ago, especially as linguistic

assimilation rather than language dissemination is more likely to occur in the case of immigrants of a lower social ranking.

It has to be said that, as archaeological work is intensified, still without material traces of any sort of notable Celtic immigration coming to light, and archaeogenetical technique continues to be developed, additionally underlining the assessment of genetical constancy in Ireland since the Bronze Age, further questions have been posed about even incursionary elite dominance or gradual familial entry as possible explanations for the emergence of Gaelic Ireland. And, pace archaeologists, between their approach and that of archaeogenetics, the latter carries more weight. That is because the archaeological case against Celtic immigration rests on negative data, i.e. absence of evidence which does not necessarily mean evidence of absence. Archaeogenetics, on the other hand, has more to do with scientifically establishing continuity or change in population genes, albeit depending upon adequate sampling and comparative criteria.

And the argument of language substitution due to imported acculturation by way of maritime contact in a prehistoric context, rather than population movement of any significant kind, continues to have least credibility.

Apart from the hypotheses of imported acculturation, elite dominance and familial entry, there is another one that has been gaining ground over the past decade. And that is what might be termed the 'Atlantoceltic' hypothesis.

This hypothesis is not just about how Ireland came to be Celtic, but also about how the Celts emerged in the first place. In

other words, it is about celtogenesis and is truly revolutionary in that it virtually inverts the traditional hypothesis for this. In place of Celts being held to originate centrally or elsewhere on inland Europe and spreading out from there, it is maintained that they first arose from Indo-European speaking peoples present from the Bronze Age in a western Atlantic zone. That zone, of which Ireland was a part, comprised the coasts and their offshore islands and hinterlands from Scotland to Iberia. And it has been averred that perhaps the seeds of proto-Celtic were sewn in the latter where Q-Celtic persisted until the demise of Celtic languages in the peninsula. The formation of proto-Celtic in the zone is also perceived as possibly having been enhanced through the need for a lingua franca among the peoples in question, given their local Indo-European dialects, and owing to intensive trade and other interactions.

A modification of the hypothesis suggests that proto-Celtic might have not only started in Iberia, and also have developed and matured there, before spreading linguistically up the coasts and out to Ireland and Britain.



Traditional Migration Thesis

However, given the level of maritime interconnection within the zone concerned, a more all-round type of evolution ought to be considered, whatever about a possibly Iberian initial stimulus. John T Koch has

cautioned against a simplistic 'Out of Iberia' theory and, while the originating data so far tends to derive mainly from Iberia, he indicates that proto-Celtic probably involved a general linguistic interaction of western Indo-European with western Palaeo-European on the Atlantic coasts and in their hinterlands and, moreover, there might have been more than one proto-Celtic to begin with. Furthermore, there is now an increasing tendency, when examining the ancient world, to think in some regions not

alone of territory, but also 'maritory', whereby people are seen as bound together not just by land, but decidedly interlinked by sea. Such a maritory, about 2000 years ago, could well have amounted to an Atlantic Celtica, i.e. a socio-cultural area with a basic language of its own. Such a maritory could also have significantly been brought into being by the Bronze Age, taking account of the location of copper and tin deposits within Atlantic Celtica and the corresponding interactive needs for extraction and exchange.

In time, proto-Celtic led on to the language which came to be known as Q-Celtic. According to one theory, this may have then spread from the Atlantic zone eastwards through riverine networks towards central Europe. And, in the course of this, coming into contact with other languages, particularly non-Roman Italic, Q-Celtic was modified in certain areas into P-Celtic. This then gradually spread back westwards, probably inspired to an extent by an influential Hallstatt-LaTène cultural core, and perhaps with some intraceltic demic movement, such as between the continent and Britain. Eventually P-Celtic included most of Britain, but not the more peripheral island of Ireland, while Iberia also remained pristine behind its Aquitanian wall. Another theory is that Celtic morphed into an innovative P bloc in some places, with Q-Celtic simply enduring in peripheral regions in Ireland and Iberia respectively. In fact, both processes may have been taken place, to one extent or another.

Over time, both Q- and P-Celtic further diversified into a number of discrete Celtic languages. (It was Irish Gaelic intrusion later into western Scotland and the Isle of Man in the 6th century CE that finally established Q-Celtic there.)

The Celts also went on to expand in the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE from central Europe, southwards and eastwards, as well documented by the Romans and Greeks, recording events such as the sacking of Rome in 390 BCE and Delphi in 279 BCE. In the subsequent years, they moved on to their furthestmost destination in Anatolia, manifesting themselves there as Galatia.

As for the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures just referred to, these congealed in central Europe from around 700-500 BCE and their craft and artistic influences radiated afar - north, south, east and west. The furthest west was Ireland and, not surprisingly, this phenomenon was least impactful there, given the distance involved and the time it took for it to reach the island. Nonetheless, the effect on Gaelic art became obvious in works such as the Book of Kells.

Finally, it should be said that the Atlantoceltic hypothesis is not just one of default for explaining the gaelicisation of Ireland, as it more and more possesses archaeological, archaeogenetical and linguistical evidence in its own right throughout the Atlant-ic peripheral zone concerned.

The difficulty with any hypothesis for celto-genesis is getting archaeologists, philologists and archaeo-geneticists all to agree on it. This has yet to be achieved, apart from the fact that they often do not even concur within their own disciplines on the origin of the Celts. What is agreed is that Celtic was one of the early offshoots of Indo-European, along with the other main ones then developing as Balto-Slavic, Germanic and Italic. The issue is in what location or zone and among what peoples Celtic emerged. And, if the hibernocentric challenge is to explain how Ireland became Gaelic in the absence of substantial inward



migration since the Bronze Age, then the Atlantoceltic hypothesis proves to be probably the most credible of the lot to date.

In other words, the problem up to now in getting the right answer may arise from the classic shortcoming of not asking the right question. Why does it always have to be assumed that Celtic grew out of Indo-European just on the continent and then spread directly, or maybe to some extent indirectly through Britain to Ireland, or alternatively otherwise through Ireland to Britain? Why could it not have grown out of an Atlantic Indo-European bloc inclusive of Ireland and Britain? That is what the Atlantoceltic hypothesis points to. The tendency to think otherwise may be just anachronistic in that we are imposing our modern sense of jurisdictional boundaries on prehistory and failing to identify an ancient cultural bloc consisting of areas interconnected rather than separated by the main means of communication at the time, namely water. Of course, there may have been some demic movement within this bloc, but that is far from the intrusion of a different culture into Ireland as painted by earlier historians.

If the Atlantoceltic hypothesis is upheld in the years to come with further investigation and research, it could be seen as rendering Ireland more Celtic than ever! Because the answer to the question of 'Did the Celts come to Ireland?' would indeed be 'No'. And that is because the Celts would be seen to have come from Ireland - as well as, of course, from elsewhere on and offshore the main west European littoral, thus including the five other Celtic areas in existence today.

However, at the end of all, it does not really matter in principle to modern lay, as distinct from academic, celticists in Ireland which hypothesis is correct or whether none can ever be proved and if we are permanently left with a question mark. What is not

questionable is that Gaelic and Celtic Ireland has existed, to one extent or another, for over two thousand years and that is the historical bedrock on which Irish celticism rests.

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh, May 2021

References

For 'gradual familial entry', refer to Donnchadh Ó Corráin quoted in *In Search of Ancient Ireland*, C McCaffrey & L Eaton (2002). Also refer, relatedly, to Patrick Sims-Williams *An Alternative to 'Celtic from the East' and 'Celtic from the West'* (2020) in 'Cambridge Archaeological Journal 30:3'.

The Atlantoceltic hypothesis was foreshadowed quite early on by Abercromby (1912), subsequently by Crawford, Loth and Hubert, and then more latterly by such as Myles Dillon (in *The Celtic Realms*, 1967) and by Colin Renfrew (*Archaeology and Language*, 1987), albeit different precise junctures were variously cited for its manifestation. The hypothesis has been developed more recently in interdisciplinary detail by John T Koch and Barry Cunliffe (in the *Celtic from the West* book series 2010-21). It has since been accepted by a number of other academics in the relevant fields

Archaeogenetical technique (or aDNA method) and up to date conclusions therefrom can be assessed in: *Multiple Genetic Markers & Celtic Origins of the Atlantic Facade of Europe* (2004), Brian McEvoy et al; *Neolithic & Bronze Age Migration to Ireland* (2015), Lara M Casey et al; and *The Irish DNA Atlas* (2017), Edmund Gilbert et al. Also relevant are: *The Beaker Phenomenon & the Genomic Transformation of N Western Europe* (2018), Iñigo Olalde et al; and David Reich's *Who We Are And How We Got Here* (2018). However, while the DNA approach is located in the 'hard' sciences, its application in archaeo-investigation has neither been a matter of consensus over the years in the genetic field, although the contrast between the earlier and later efforts means that the latter, cited here, should of course be more relied on.

In any event, the Iron Age 'Celts from Central Europe' thesis now seems to have been effectively debunked, whatever alternative explanation is adopted. McEvoy puts it in a nutshell: "What seems clear is that neither the mtDNA pattern nor that of the chromosome markers supports a substantially central European Iron Age origin for most Celtic speakers - or former Celtic speakers - of the Atlantic facade. The affinities of the areas where Celtic languages are spoken - or were formerly spoken - are generally with other regions in the Atlantic zone from northern Spain to northern Britain."