

The Celts, the French and the Germans

The Celts in Ireland

Prior to the year 500 BC, the Celts had settled in Central Europe – from Southern Germany to Switzerland, Austria and yet further east. Further migration occurred when the tribes learned the benefits of using horses. During this phase of migration, the Celts more quickly reached countries which were far away – Ireland included. Today, the original languages of the Celts are represented by Gaeilge (Éire), Gàidhlig (Alba – Scotland)), Breithnais (Wales) agus Briotáinis (Brittany).

It was we, the Gael, wandering soldiers of fortune, who went to the frontiers of the Known World. We gave the name of a princess from our folklore to to this island: Éire (Ireland). It was a place where spirituality rather than militarism could flourish. The territory was small and it had no iron deposits. After St. Patrick had come here, there blossomed a golden age of civilization and the light of Christianity. Missionaries left the coast of Ireland in the second half of the first millenium, to combat the deprivation of the Dark Ages on the Mainland.

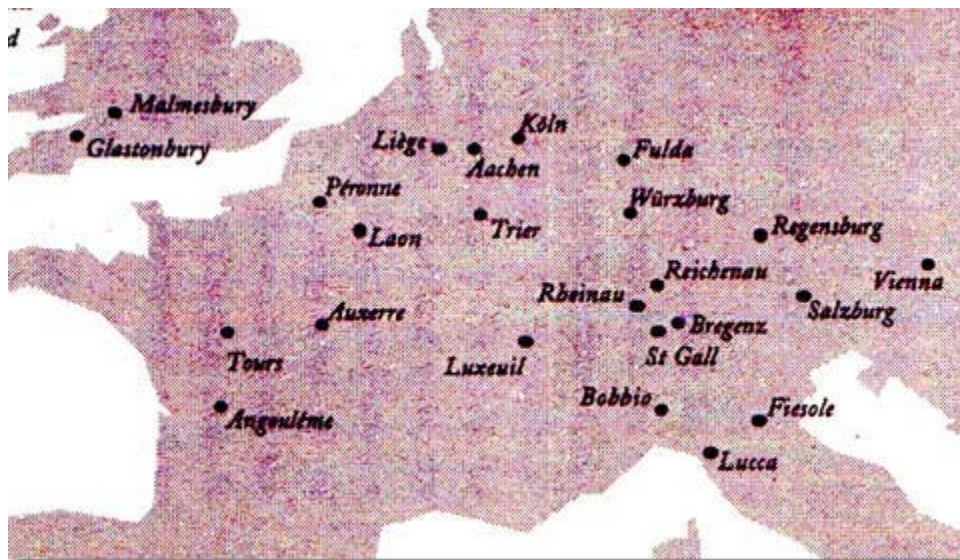


Putting their lives at risk, Irish monks returned to what had once been the homelands of Celtic peoples. Their purpose was to spread the Good News, and to give their learning mainly to the peoples of France, Southern Germany Switzerland, Northern Italy (south to Rome, of course) and of Austria. Their Faith inspired them to go forth, through untamed places, as far east as Kiev.

In the year 585 A.D., St. Columbán, an idealist and an ascetic, went to the Frankish territories, together with twelve companions. He founded around six monasteries, beginning with those in Annegray and Luxeuil. With assistance from the monks and from local people, he both built new buildings and refurbished old ones. Towns grew up around these Irish centres of learning.



Columbán and his monks travelled on the Rhein, singing their marvellous boat-songs as they rowed. They built a monastery in Bregenz, beside Lake Constance, a town associated with the Celtic goddess Brigid, who also culled in Ireland. West of that, a town was called St. Gallen, in honour of that disciple of Columbán. For hundreds of years, most European monasteries followed the disciplinary rule of St. Columbán. As Pope Pius XI said: "as a result of the work of St. Columbán, Christian virtue was reborn in large parts of France, Germany and Italy".



The writings of these monks, who were as strong in advocating peace as they could have been in advocating war, attracted the attention of German academics during the first half of the 20th century. In point of fact, Germans were amongst the first scholars to piece together the Old Irish language.

The political and justice system in Ireland remained strong, despite our worsening difficulties with the neighbouring island. In the year 1603, however, the historic Gaelic Order (or civilization) ended, when the Ulster Chieftain Ultach Ó Néill yielded to the English. Four years later, one-hundred of Ulster's Chieftains fled to the Spanish Netherlands and to Rome.

In the year 1691, the Treaty of Limerick was concluded between Pádraig Sáirséal (a man of Norman background, on the side of the Irish) and the Protestant William of Orange, King of England. Some 14,000 Irish soldiers were allowed safe passage to the European Mainland. The Crown granted civil and religious rights to the ordinary people of Ireland but the British Parliament broke the Treaty. In the following hundred years, or thereabouts, a sizeable stream of nobles fled from Ireland. These were called **the Wild Geese**, who left in their wake a broken wasteland so that they might continue their struggle on the European Mainland.

The Celts in France

Gaul was the classical home of the Celt. Migrations to this country, now called France, came from the Rheinland and the Alps. They came in independent military units. As time passed, they formed stronger political ties. When the Roman Empire prevailed in Gaul in the first century, however, it struck a proud people hard. The Celt was a courageous person. But his romantic courage was unable to prevail against the organization and strategy of the Roman army. The brave Celtic tribes had to reinvent themselves. There was no other choice.

Political power, national pride and personal valour was exchanged for the right to enter European markets, which were controlled by Rome, and to take a central part in the most developed culture of its age. This was how the noble French nation was born. At all levels of society, French and Irish people have always shared a natural sense of brotherhood. This, something which came to the fore between the Wild Geese and French troops on every battlefield in Europe, cannot be broken.

Of course, France has not lost every sign of its Celtic culture. There is a strong and lively community in Brittany in the northwest of France today: another source of Europe's ancient cultural heritage.

The Celts and the Germans

The Celtic Cimbri and a German tribe – the Teutones – came to the fore c100 BC, to the north of where the main historic Celtic settlement had long existed, in Central Europe. The two peoples co-operated to mutual benefit. It was the destiny of the Germans gradually to grow and strengthen and establish a fine homeland for themselves, in the midst of various other tribes.

There is a form of the word 'Teuton' in Irish, which kept its basic meaning. This is the word 'Tuath', which means 'northerners'. Both Irish and German have retained an impressive number of their Indo-European word roots.

Both the Celts and the Germans exercised an influence on present-day European culture. In the beginning of the Middle Ages, the free, powerful spirit of those who lived north of the Alps reinvigorated what was left of the Roman Empire. The Celts were good at rhetoric orators and the Germans were masters of the practical.

Folklore indicates that the Germans and the Irish think similarly about life and that they both hold similar views on the value of culture in daily life. In addition to that, the place which Cillian gained in German history showed the positive development of the two peoples in the Christian era.

As a result of the pressures of history, the cultural interactions between the Celts and Germans fell away for a long, long time. Now, under the new order of the European Union, it is high time to renew our old friendship.

Despite the vagaries of history, a robust understanding persists between the Irish, French and German peoples. We, in the Living Communities, believe that the bond, which links us, should have a growing importance in today's world.