An Introduction to the
Celtic Languages

Paul Russell

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CELTIC LANGUAGES

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To Ben

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Abbreviations

A	adjective	m.	masculine
acc.	accusative	MB	Middle Breton
AgN	agent noun	MCo	Middle Cornish
AN	abstract noun	MIr	Middle Irish
B	Breton	MnE	Modern English
Cards	Cardiganshire	MW	Middle Welsh
CF	Cois Fhairrge	MnB	Modern Breton
Celtib	Celtiberian	MnCo	Modern Cornish
Co	Cornish	MnIr	Modern Irish
Conn	Connacht	MnW	Modern Welsh
dat.	dative	Mun	Munster
Det.	Determinative	Mx	Manx
Don	Donegal	n.	neuter
Eng	English	Neg.	Negative
f.	feminine	nom.	nominative
Gaul	Gaulish	NM	nasal mutation
GD	Gweedore	NW	Northern Welsh
gen.	genitive	OB	Old Breton
Goth	Gothic	obj.	object
Gk	Greek	OCo	Old Cornish
H	any laryngeal (see	OE	Old English
	Chapter 2, n. 16)	OHG	Old High German
Ir	Irish	OIr	Old Irish
IE	Indo-European	Osc	Oscan
Lat	Latin	OW	Old Welsh
Lep	Lepontic	part.	particle
lit.	literally	Pembs	Pembrokeshire
LN(N)	local name(s)	pl.	plural
LW	literary Welsh	PN(N)	personal name(s)

Pr-C	Proto-Celtic	SpM	spirant mutation
pres.	present	SpW	spoken Welsh
pro.	pronoun	subj.	subject
R	any resonant	SW	Southern Welsh
rel.	relative	T	any consonant
RN(N)	river name(s)	VN(N)	verbal noun(s)
S	any spirant	voc.	vocative
ScG	Scottish Gaelic	W	Welsh
S-EW	South-east Welsh	#	word boundary
sg.	singular	*	reconstructed form
Skt	Sanskrit	**	unacceptable form
SM	soft mutation		

The periods of the Celtic languages

All dates are AD.

Irish	Archaic Irish	500–700
	Early Old Irish	700–800
	Classical Old Irish	800–900
	Middle Irish	900–1200
	Early Modern Irish	1200–1600
	Modern Irish	1600–present
Scottish Gaelic	Early Modern Scottish Gaelic	1100–1700
	Modern Scottish Gaelic	1700–present
Manx	Early Manx	1600–1700
	Classical Manx	1700–1800
	Late Manx	1800–1974
	Revived Manx	Present
Welsh	Archaic Welsh	600–800
	Old Welsh	800–1200
	Middle Welsh	1200–1500
	Classical Modern Welsh	1500–1900
	Modern Welsh	1900–present
Breton	Archaic Breton	500–600?
	Old Breton	600–1100
	Middle Breton	1100–1659
	Modern Breton	1659–present
Cornish	Archaic Cornish	600–800
	Old Cornish	800–1200
	Middle Cornish	1200–1575
	Late Cornish	1575–1800
	Revived Cornish	Present

Chapter 1

The historical background to the Celtic languages

1.0 Introduction

Speakers of the modern Celtic languages, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx,
Welsh and Breton, are today only to be found on the western seaboards
of the British Isles and France. But they are inheritors of languages
which some two thousand years ago were spoken throughout Europe
and even in Asia Minor. It is, therefore, important and often useful to
retain a historical perspective when considering the Celtic languages.
The present volume attempts to provide a general introduction to the
Celtic languages for linguists unfamiliar with them. The Celtic lan-
guages can seem very difficult and complex to non-Celticists and one
good reason for adopting a more historical approach is to show that
many of those complexities arose by a comprehensible process of his-
torical development. For example, the phenomenon of the initial
mutations which marks out Celtic languages, discussed in Chapter 7,
can be shown to be the outcome of a series of reasonably well-under-
stood historical developments, none of which would startle a historical
linguist. It is beyond the scope of this volume to provide detailed dis-
cussion of every single aspect worthy of consideration, and there are
inevitable omissions.[1] However, the detailed bibliographical resources
should provide the necessary back-up and support to enable the reader
to broaden his or her knowledge in any area. Several multi-author vol-
umes have appeared recently, MacAulay 1992a, Ball and Fife 1993 and
Price 1992a, which offer discussions of the individual languages and
also, in some, discussion of the earlier stages.[2] Nevertheless, it is very
difficult in such a format to maintain a consistency of approach and
impossible to capture generalizations about Celtic languages as a group
or to discuss common features.

The rest of Chapter 1 considers the Celtic languages in their Indo-
European context with particular emphasis on the evidence for the early

Celtic languages of Continental Europe. Chapters 2–5 concentrate on the two main groups of the Insular languages, Goidelic and Brittonic. Chapters 2 and 4 consider the historical development of the two groups, while 3 and 5 examine in detail a modern representative of each, namely Irish and Welsh respectively. The remaining chapters examine a number of general topics – writing systems, mutations, verbal nouns and word order – topics which are often regarded as containing features characteristic of Celtic.

1.1   Celtic as an Indo-European language

The Celtic languages belong to the Indo-European group of languages, members of which include Latin and the Romance languages, Greek, the Indo-Iranian languages (including Sanskrit, Avestan and Persian) Russian, German and English.[3] Speakers of Indo-European languages can, therefore, be found from Iceland and the Hebrides to the mouth of the Ganges even before taking into account the historically more recent migrations to the Americas, Africa and the Antipodes. Even the most simple of lexical comparisons suggests a connection between these languages, e.g. OIr *bráthir* 'brother', Lat *fráter*, Gk *phrátēr*, Goth *broþar* (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 6); OIr *ech* 'horse', Gaul *Epona* < **ekuo-*, cf. Lat *equus*, Gk *híppos*, Skt *aśva* (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 3). The relationship between these languages, however, runs much more deeply than simple lexical correspondences. The Celtic languages show, for example, in various stages of disintegration, a nominal case system similar to that of the classical languages, with phonologically related elements, e.g. OIr *eich* 'horse' (gen. sg.) < **ekuī* cf. Lat *equī*, OIr *fiur* 'man' (dat. sg.) < **uirū* < **uirō*, cf. Lat *virō*, Gaul *-oui*, Gk *-ōi*; OIr *feraib* 'men' (dat. pl.) < **uirobis*, cf. Lat *-ibus*, Gk *-(o)phi*, Skt *-bhis*; etc. (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 166–7). Furthermore, they have a verbal system which, despite superficial dissimilarities, shares a number of features with the verbal systems of other Indo-European languages; for example, the alternation in Old Irish of *berid* : *·beir* 'he carries' < **bereti/beret* seems to continue an alternation of endings also seen in Skt *bharati* : *(a)bharat* (McCone 1979a: 26–32). Old Irish also shares a reduplicated perfect or preterite formation with Latin, Greek and Indo-Iranian (McCone 1986: 233), and a reduplicated future with Indo-Iranian languages (McCone 1991a: 137–82; for further discussion, see 2.2.6 below).

1.2   Continental Celtic

The evidence for Celtic speaking peoples in Continental Europe is widespread but variable in quality and quantity.[4] Our knowledge of the distribution of Celtic tribes is largely dependent on classical authors

who portrayed the Celts as one of the barbarian tribes who threatened the peace and stability of the Mediterranean world (Rankin 1987: ch. 6). Their testimony can be misleading; use of the generic term *Keltoi* in Greek or *Celtae* in Latin does not necessarily refer to speakers of a Celtic language unless decisive personal names or local names are present. Much of our knowledge of Continental Celtic depends precisely on such evidence. Celtic names in Continental Europe are identifiable by the fact that they contain elements also found in the later languages; for example, *Vercingetorix*, the name of a Gaulish tribal leader, is divisible into three elements *ver-* 'over, above', cf. Ir *for*, OW *guor*, MnW *gor*; *-cingeto-*, cf. Ir *cingid* 'he steps, walks'; *-rix*, cf. Ir *rí* (gen. *ríge*), W *rhi*, Lat *rēx*, etc. (D. E. Evans 1967: 121–2); the name may thus be interpreted literally as 'the king who walks over' but should perhaps be taken as 'Super-champion' *vel sim.* (Hamp 1977–8: 12).[5] The Gaulish personal name *Curmisagios* contains the elements *curmi-* 'beer', cf. Ir *cuirm*, W *cwrw*, and *-sagios* 'seeker', cf. Ir *saigid* 'he seeks', W *haeddu* and *-hai* 'one who seeks ...' (Ford and Hamp 1974–6: 155–7, Joseph 1987, Russell 1989: 38–9). The precise sense of the compound is unclear though the more legalistic 'beer-steward' is more complimentary than 'beer-seeker'.

A combination of ethnographers' accounts and the analysis of personal and local name elements allows us to identify the limits of Celtic tribal movements, at least in general terms.[6] The high density of Celtic name elements in Gaul, northern Italy and Spain shows that these regions were largely, if not entirely, Celtic speaking in the pre-Roman period, but the ethnographers also record migrations into the Italian and Balkan peninsulas and even as far as Asia Minor (Rankin 1987: 45–102). In the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, Celtic tribes migrated across the Hellespont and settled in Galatia in central Asia Minor (Rankin 1987: 188–207); the tribal name *Tectosages* and the place name *Drunemeton* (Strabo xii.5.1) 'oak-shrine' (compare Ir *drú*, W *derw* 'oak', and Ir *nemed* 'shrine, high noble', W *nefed* (Schmidt 1958)) testify to the Celticity of these immigrants (see Mitchell 1993: 11–58). The relationship between the languages of these different areas is discussed below (1.6). At present we may consider the evidence of these languages in more detail.

1.2.1 Gaul

The evidence of ethnography and naming practices can allow us to define limits, but within the major Celtic speaking areas of western Europe more evidence is available. Again much but not all the evidence is onomastic. The presence of a Greek colony at Massalia (Marseilles) made a writing system available to the inhabitants of southern Gaul even before the arrival of the Romans.[7] There is a significant number of Gaulish inscriptions written in Greek script (see Lejeune 1985 and

---

Kassitalos Ouersiknos dede bratou dekanten Ala[ ]*einoui*
'Kassitalos, son of *Ouersos, willingly gave a tithe to A.'

FIGURE 1.1   A Gallo-Greek inscription from southern Gaul. Lejeune 1985:
G-206 (pp. 284–7).

6.2.1 below); most seem to date from between the 2nd and 1st centuries
BC though some may be older. By far the majority of these 'Gallo-
Greek' inscriptions are graffiti on fragments of pots and consist entirely
of personal names. The stone inscriptions are fewer in number but often
longer and more informative about the language. Most consist of dedi-
cations to divinities and, in addition to personal and divine names,
contain several Gaulish phrases. Many are fragmentary but an almost
complete example (given in Figure 1.1) shows the nature of the evi-
dence. The phrase *dede bratou dekanten* has been convincingly
interpreted as 'gave a tithe in gratitude' by Szemerényi (1974 and
1991), where *dede* represents a perfect 3rd singular corresponding in
stem form to Latin *dedit* and *dekanten* is the accusative singular of a
noun based on **dekan* 'ten' (cf. Ir *déc*, W *deg*, Gk *déka* and Lat
decem). The inscription also demonstrates a very common feature of
Gaulish nomenclature, the use of a suffixed form of a personal name to
mark a patronymic (Russell 1988a: 136–7), hence the uncertainty over
the basic form of the name in the example in Figure 1.1. Whatever the
correct form of the final divine name, it is in the dative case with an
ending *-oui*.

However, by far the largest and most important Gaulish inscriptions
are not written in a Greek script but in Roman cursive. In January 1971
a lead tablet was found at the site of a sacred spring in Chamalières
(Puy-de-Dôme) containing a Gaulish inscription of 336 characters, at
the time the longest continuous Gaulish text. Interpretation of the text
continues to be debated but it seems probable that it was intended as a
curse-tablet (the Latin term is *defixio*) directed at the names listed in the
text.[8] Twelve years later in August 1983 a much longer text of 1000
characters and more than 160 words was discovered near Aveyron; it is
known as 'le plomb de Larzac'.[9] Again it seems to be a magical text
but on this occasion involving women, some of whom appear to be
magicians (Lambert in Lejeune *et al.* 1985: 176). Some of the text
remains obscure but it makes several significant additions to our knowl-
edge of the Gaulish lexicon and grammar. Notably, since the text deals
with women, we acquire a much clearer understanding of the first
(*ā*-stem) declension in Gaulish together with the Gaulish words for
'mother' and 'daughter', *matir* and *duxtir* respectively, e.g. *Adiega
matir Aiias* 'Adiega, mother of Aiia' and the converse *Aiia duxtir*

Adiegias 'Aiia, daughter of Adiega' (Lejeune *et al.* 1985: 166). *Matir* is entirely expected and corresponds to Ir *máthair* as well as Eng *mother*, etc. On the other hand, *duxtir*, phonetically /duxtiːr/, which is cognate with Eng *daughter* and Gk *thugatēr*, etc., has only previously been traced in the archaic Irish name element *Der-/Ter-* where it was unaccented and therefore reduced from the expected but unattested **duchtair* (O'Brien 1956).

In addition to the long inscriptions there is much material in the form of personal names in Latin inscriptions and graffiti on pottery.[10]

1.2.2 Northern Italy

On the other side of the Alps there is also evidence for Celtic languages spoken in northern Italy (the Roman province of Cisalpine Gaul). The valley of the Po began to be Romanized from about the 2nd century BC onwards but the onomastic and inscriptional evidence together with the anecdotal evidence of classical writers suggests that Celtic naming patterns and the language survived for some centuries (Rankin 1987: 153–4). The term used for the earliest Celtic language of Cisalpine Gaul is Lepontic.[11] Lejeune 1971 distinguished two types of Celtic in northern Italy; first, there is a body of evidence from around the Italian lakes which is taken to be a form of Celtic. It is this which he calls Lepontic. Recent finds (Gambari and Colonna 1988) and re-assessment of earlier evidence suggest that the earliest evidence for Lepontic texts dates from as early as the 6th century BC, thus making them the earliest records of Celtic by some way. Secondly, there are a few inscriptions in Italy in Gaulish, which is thought to have been brought into Italy by migrants from Gaul from the early 4th century BC onwards; they are written in a script borrowed from the Lepontic region and it is this group which is presented in Lejeune 1988. The linguistic differences between the two types are slight and it may perhaps be better to think in terms of a gradual infiltration and assimilation by Gaulish speakers rather than full-scale migration. A degree of bilingualism and cultural assimilation among speakers of Gaulish and Latin in northern Italy is implied by one of the most important Cisalpine inscriptions, the bilingual inscription of Todi.[12] The stone which is dated to around 150 BC contains two versions of the same inscription with the Lepontic coming after the Latin; side B is less damaged and is given in Figure 1.2 overleaf. There is a clear difference in word order which indicates that the Lepontic word order was not merely copying the Latin (Koch 1985a: 16); it is also probable that the Latin was translated from the Lepontic and not vice versa (Lejeune 1988: 49–52). As in Gaulish, a patronymic suffix is used, again *-kno-*, in contrast to the Latin *Drutei filius* (Russell 1988a: 136–6). The verbal form *karnitu* seems to be based on the noun found in Irish and Welsh as *carn* 'pile of stones, cairn'. The ending *-tu*, with an apparent plural *-tus* also found in

Latin:
[ATEGNATEI DRVTEI F COI]SIS DRVTEI F FRATER EIVS
MINIMVS LOCAVIT ET STATVIT
'Coisis, son of Drutos, his youngest brother, placed and established (this) for Ategnatos, son of Drutos'

Lepontic:
ATEKNATI   TRVTIKNI   KARNITV   ARTUAŠ   KOISIS   TRVTIKNOS
For A.   son of T.   assembled   stones   K.   son of T.
'Coisis, son of Drutos, assembled (these) stones for Ategnatos, son of Drutos'

FIGURE 1.2   The bilingual inscription from Todi (side B). Lejeune 1988: E-5 (pp. 41–52).

Lepontic and in Celtiberian, is problematical (D. E. Evans 1979: 529) but does not seem to have any correspondent in the insular languages.[13] The word for 'stones', *ARTUAŠ*, which corresponds to *LOKAN* 'grave' on side A, seems to have a correspondent in OIr *art* 'stone', a rare glossary word which occurs in a parallel context (Russell 1988b: 29; but cf. Lejeune 1988: 49).

1.2.3   The Iberian peninsula

Apart from Gaul and northern Italy, the third area which provides clear evidence of Celtic speakers in the historical period is the Iberian peninsula. It is, however, very difficult to separate the Celtic elements from other, possibly Indo-European, languages in the region (D. E. Evans 1979: 513–16). Finds of Hispano-Celtic material centre on an area bordered by Burgos in the west and Zaragoza in the east, i.e. central northern Spain. The identifiable Celtic material consists of a large number of names, and fragments of names, on tesserae, two relatively short inscriptions from Peñalba de Villastar and Luzaga (Lejeune 1955), and a recently discovered long inscription from Botorrita.

The attention of Celticists has in recent years largely concentrated on the last of these, an inscription found at Botorrita, near Zaragoza, in April/May 1970. It probably dates from around 100 BC and the text may well have been influenced in style and content by local Roman municipal laws.[14] The script, which is partly syllabic and partly alphabetic, is unique to the Iberian peninsula where it was used to write many of the pre-Roman languages (Eska 1989b: 7–10; see also 6.2.2 below). It seems clear that the text is juridical or quasi-juridical in content; the phrasing *neCue . . . liTom . . . neCue liTom* seems to represent a prohi-

bition. In addition, some of the verbal forms seem to be subjunctive or at least modal in form. However, it is still uncertain whether the text on side A is related to the list of names on side B; if they are related, it is perhaps difficult to understand how the tablet was displayed (Russell 1992b: 177), although a wooden frame leaving both sides visible would not be an impossibility. Linguistically, the text not only provides a large number of lexical items and particularly verbal forms but it also offers some valuable insights into the syntax of Celtiberian; the use of -*Cue* 'and', e.g. *Tocoitoś-Cue śaŕniCio-Cue* (side A, lines 10–11) 'of T. and S.', traces of which survive in Old Irish (Binchy 1960), may be familiar from Latin but cannot have been imitated as Latin only uses the single -*que*. Similarly, -*ue* 'or' follows each member of the phrase, e.g. *PouśTom-ue Coŕuinom-ue maCaśi[a]m-ue ailam-ue* (side A, lines 4–5) 'the cow stable or (animal) enclosure or wall (of an enclosure) or (outer) wall' (following Eska 1989a: 179). While there is considerable debate over the interpretation of the inscription as a whole, it is generally agreed that it is Celtic. This agreement is based on a number of lexical items; for example, *Camanom* (side A, line 5) 'road, path' is Celtic in origin, cf. Ir *céimm*, W *cam* 'step', but was borrowed into Latin as **cammīnum*, which gave French *chemin*, Spanish *camino*, etc. (Eska 1989a: 53–4).

It has been reported that a second inscription has been discovered at the Botorrita site; at present it awaits decipherment and analysis (Meid 1992: 57, n. 102).

1.3 Insular Celtic

The Insular Celtic languages are those which are or were spoken in the British Isles. This customary definition also includes Breton spoken in Brittany in mainland Europe. The insular languages divide into the **Brittonic** group, consisting of Welsh, Cornish and Breton, and the **Goidelic** group, made up of Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx. The details of the relationship between the groups are discussed below (1.6, 2.1.2 (Goidelic), 4.3 (Brittonic)). First, the distribution of the languages requires consideration. The insular languages are the main object of study of this book and at this point only the barest outlines will be given; further details are found in Chapters 2 to 5.

1.3.1 Britain and Brittonic

In addition to the Celts' activities in Europe, the classical authors also record the close linguistic and tribal ties between Gaul and Britain; Julius Caesar used as one of his excuses for invading Britain the support given to rebellious Gaulish tribes by their relations across the Channel (*de Bello Gallico* (Handford 1951: 119)), while Tacitus noted the close

similarities in religion and language between Britons and Gauls (*Agricola* (Mattingly and Handford 1970: 62)). Our evidence for the languages in Britain before the Roman occupation is, as on the Continent, necessarily filtered through the classical writers. During the Roman occupation (from AD 43 onwards) inscriptional evidence provides further information but nevertheless the evidence is still largely onomastic, consisting of personal names of British tribesmen, e.g. *Boudicca*, *Catuvellaunus*, etc., divine names of local cults, e.g. *Maponus*, *Sulis*, etc., and place names mainly from itineraries and early maps.[15] Until recently it had been assumed that Britons in the Roman province of Britain who wished to express themselves in writing would have used Latin since there was no tradition of writing in British (Jackson 1953: 99–100). However, among the large number of curse-tablets found at Bath there are two which may contain Celtic texts (Tomlin 1988: nos. 14 and 18). They are not just lists of names and are clearly not in Latin; the assumption is that they are British although at present they await further analysis (Tomlin 1987; see also Lambert 1994: 174).

The language spoken by the Britons in Roman-occupied Britain, often termed British, was the ancestor of Welsh, Cornish and Breton. To what extent Latin took over from British in the Roman province would have depended on a number of socio-linguistic and geographical factors, such as the degree of Romanization in a particular area, the social status (and therefore level of Romanization) of individual Britons, etc. (cf. Mann 1971, Hamp 1975a). It is highly probable, for example, that in the later centuries of Roman occupation less British would have been heard in the south-east of Britain than in the south-west. However, the large number of Latin loanwords in Welsh, Cornish and Breton indicates a sustained period of contact with Latin which went well beyond the period of Roman occupation.[16] On the other hand, the relatively small number of Celtic loanwords in Old English suggests that the Saxons landed in a south-east Britain which was linguistically Romanized.

Further north it is clear that forms of British survived well into the sub-Roman period. The area of southern Scotland, south of the Forth–Clyde line, and northern England consisted of three kingdoms, Strathclyde (most of south-west Scotland), Gododdin (south-east Scotland between the Forth and the Tyne) and Rheged (Solway basin and Eden valley) (see generally Price 1984: 146–54). Place name evidence from this area indicates a Celtic language, probably related to Welsh, etc., which is termed Cumbric or Pritenic, e.g. *Lanark* (= W *llanerch* 'glade'), *Pencaitland* (cf. W *pen* 'top, summit', *coedlan* 'copse'), *Melrose* (= W *moel* 'bald', *rhos* 'moor'), etc. (Price 1984: 148–9, Jackson 1963). In addition, Cumbric is represented by three lexical items preserved in the *Leges inter Brettos et Scottos* (Loth 1930:

389–400): *galnys* 'blood money for homicide' (= W *galanas*), *mercheta* 'tax paid to a lord by a father on his daughter's marriage' (cf. W *merched* 'girls'), *kelchyn* 'tribute paid when a ruler goes on a progress' (cf. W *cylch* 'circuit').[17] The Brittonic language of northern Britain seems also to have had a strong literary tradition which is reflected in early Welsh literature in the works attributed to Taliesin and Aneirin.[18]

With the westward movement of the Angles in the north and midlands and of the Saxons in the south during the 6th and 7th centuries AD, British speakers were gradually isolated and pushed back into the western peninsulas. Such was the pressure in the south-west peninsula that there was a series of migrations of British speakers across the Channel to Brittany, where a form of British has survived as Breton (see Chadwick 1965 and 1969).[19] Cornish was under constant pressure from English from the 7th century onwards and it therefore comes as some surprise that the last-known native speaker of Cornish died in 1777 (Price 1984: 136). On the other hand, Welsh has survived to the modern day though under considerable pressure from English.

1.3.2 Ireland and Goidelic

Ireland never felt the impact of Rome in quite the same way as Britain; the effect of this is that we have little evidence for the language of Ireland before literacy was introduced in the sub-Roman period. The earliest evidence we have is the list of names on Ptolemy's map (illustrated at Rivet and Smith 1979: 107). They comprise coastal landmarks and river and tribe names; some can be equated with later Irish names, e.g. *Bououinda* /buːuinda/ = OIr *Boānd* (the modern River Boyne), *Auteinoi* = the OIr tribal name *Úaithni*, but many are obscure.[20] Despite Ireland's geographical isolation beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire, there is increasing evidence of regular and continuous contact with both Roman Britain and Roman Gaul (Stevenson 1989: 130–3). A familiarity with Latin both as a spoken and as a written language is implied by recent interpretations of the archaic script called Ogam in which the early inscriptions are written (see McManus 1991, and 6.3.1 below). Irish remained for centuries the main language in Ireland despite invasions by Vikings and the English; it continues to be spoken at least in parts of Ireland to the present day. The related languages of Manx and Scottish Gaelic were established through the migration of Irish speakers from Ireland to the Isle of Man and western Scotland respectively.[21] In Scotland the key event was the establishment of a permanent colony of the Dál Riada from northern Ireland in Argyll and Bute in around AD 500 (Price 1984: 49–50). From there and by further migrations from Ireland Irish speakers spread through the islands and mainland of western Scotland. Jackson (1951:

74–5) has argued that the languages did not begin to diverge significantly until the 10th century or even later (but see 2.3 below). Similarly, settlers seem to have arrived in the Isle of Man from the fifth century onwards (Price 1984: 71–83). Scottish Gaelic still survives although with difficulty in some areas, while the last native speaker of Manx died in 1974.[22]

1.4 The distinctive features of Celtic languages

It is conventional to reconstruct a notional Proto-Celtic ancestor language which is phonologically and morphologically distinct from other Indo-European dialects. The following list of features is not exhaustive but will give some idea of the nature of Celtic languages. Many of the features are found in other Indo-European languages (for example, loss of *p is paralleled in Armenian) but it is the sum of these features which goes to define the Celtic languages.

1.4.1 Phonology

Reconstructed Proto-Celtic represents a stage at which a range of sound changes has already taken place which distinguishes it from other Indo-European languages and is common to all Celtic languages. It is not intended here to present a full historical phonology; four distinctive changes may be used to illustrate the process.[23]

1.4.1.1 Long vowels and diphthongs

Proto-Celtic inherited a system of five long vowels and a series of diphthongs, as presented in Figure 1.3. Within the Proto-Celtic period, i.e. the changes are shared by both Goidelic and Brittonic, this arrangement was re-adjusted in four ways (see Table 1.1). The effect of these re-adjustments was to maintain a five long-vowel system but to reduce the number of diphthongs in Proto-Celtic (see Figure 1.4).

	/iː/				/uː/
		/eː/		/oː/	
			/aː/		

u-diphthongs:	/eu/	/au/	/ou/
i-diphthongs:	/ei/	/ai/	/oi/

FIGURE 1.3 The inherited system of long vowels and diphthongs

TABLE 1.1   Proto-Celtic developments to the long vowels and diphthongs

(i) /e:/ > /i:/, e.g. OIr *rí*, MW *rhi*, Gaul *-rix* 'king' < Pr-C **rīks* < IE **rēks* (cf. Lat *rēx*).

(ii) /o:/ > /a:/ in non-final syllables, e.g. OIr *már*, W *mawr* 'great', Gaul *-maros* < Pr-C **māros* < IE *mōros* (cf. Gk *-mōros* 'big, long').

BUT /o:/ > /u:/ in final syllables, e.g. OIr *cú* 'dog' < Pr-C **kwū* < IE **kuṓ(n)* (cf. Gk *kúōn*). Nom. sg. *-u* < *-ō*, e.g. Gaul *Frontu* < Lat *Frontō*.

(iii) /ei/ > /e:/ replacing original /e:/ which had given /i:/ in (i) above, e.g. OIr *día* (gen. sg. *dé*) 'god', Gaul *Devo-* < Pr-C **dēu̯o-* < IE **dei̯u̯o-* 'divine' (cf. Lat *dīvus*, etc.).

(iv) /eu/ > /ou/ > /o:/, e.g. OIr *túath*, MW *tut* 'people' < Pr-C **tōtā* < **toutā* < IE *teutā* (cf. Osc *touto*, Goth *þiuda*, Lithuanian *tautà*, etc.).

It has been conventional to include /au/ in this development; but see now Lambert 1990 who argues that /au/ survived as a diphthong into the separate Brittonic languages.

1.4.1.2   Loss of /p/

One of the most striking features of Celtic phonology in an Indo-European context is the absence of an inherited /p/ (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 26–7; see Table 1.2 overleaf for examples). However, the loss of /p/ may well have been relatively late in Proto-Celtic since in some environments it left traces (McCone 1991b: 46–6, 1992: 14–15); for example, in the cluster /pt/ which gave /xt/, e.g. Ir *secht*, W *saith* 'seven', Gaul *sextametos* 'seventh' < IE **sept-*, Ir *necht*, W *nith* 'niece' < IE **neptī-* (cf. OHG *nift*, Skt *napti-*), in the cluster /pn/, e.g. Ir *dúan* < **dapno-* (cf. Lat *dapes*, etc. (C. Watkins 1976)), where /p/ survived long enough to create a diphthong in Irish when it was lost (see 2.2.2), and in clusters of /p/ + liquid, e.g. *ebraid* 'he will give' < **pipr-*, *eblaid* 'he will drive' < **pipl-* (cf. Lat *pellere*). Furthermore, Ir *cóic*, W

(/e:/, /i:/ >)	**/i:/**		**/u:/**	(< /u:/, final /o:/)
	(/ei/ >)	**/e:/**	**/o:/**	(< /ou/ (including /eu/))
		/a:/	(< /a:/, non-final /o:/)	

dipthongs:
/au/   /ai/   /oi/

FIGURE 1.4   The Proto-Celtic long vowels and diphthongs

TABLE 1.2   Examples of loss of /p/ in Celtic

Ir *athir* 'father' < IE *patēr* (cf. Lat *pater*, Goth *fadar*, etc.)

Ir *én*, W *edn*, OCo *ethen* 'bird' < IE *pet-* (cf. Lat *penna* 'feather', Gk *pétomai* 'fly')

Ir *for*, OW *guor*, W *gor-*, Gaul *uer-* 'over' < *u̯or* < IE *uper* (cf. Gk *hupér*, Latin *super*)

Ir *íasc* 'fish', W RN *Wysg* < *eisko-* < IE *peisko-* (cf. Lat *piscis*, Eng *fish*, etc.)

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pimp 'five' < *k^wenk^we* < *penk^we* (cf. Gk *pénte*, Skt *pañca*) show an assimilation of *p...k^w-* > *k^w...k^w-* which would have occurred in Proto-Celtic before the loss of /p/ (see 1.7 below). In theory, therefore, it would be possible for an early Celtic dialect still to retain /p/, although, since loss of /p/ is so embedded in the definition of a Celtic language, it might be difficult to incorporate such a language into any broad definition of the Celtic group.

In later stages of the languages, /p/ re-occurred; in Brittonic languages it arose from /k^w/ (1.5.1 below), while in Goidelic it first arose from the simplification and devoicing of consonant clusters and then entered the language in loanwords from Latin (2.2.5 below).

1.4.1.3   IE /g^w/ > /b/

The labialization of /g^w/ is regular, e.g. OIr *bó*, W *bu* 'cow, ox' < IE *g^wou-* (cf. Lat *bous*, Gk *boûs*, Skt *gauh*), Gaul *bnanom*, OIr *ben*, W *benyw* 'woman' < IE *g^wenā* (cf. Gk *gunē* (dialect *bana*)).[24]

1.4.1.4   IE */r/ and */l/ > Celtic /ri/ and /li/

In positions between consonants /r̥/ and /l̥/ are vocalized in all languages though the quality of the vowel varies significantly. In Celtic they are vocalized as /ri/ and /li/, e.g. W *rhyd*, Gaul *Ritu-* 'ford' < *pr̥tu-* (cf. Lat *portus*, Eng *ford*), OIr *lethan*, W *llydan*, Gaul *Litano-* 'broad' < *pl̥t-*(cf. Gk *platús*) (de Bernardo Stempel 1987).

1.4.2   Morphology and syntax

There are also morphological features common to all the Celtic languages. Most of these are preservations of features found in other Indo-European languages and again it is the combination of features which is diagnostic. There are, however, some features which are unique to Celtic.

1.4.2.1 Nominal inflection

Only the Goidelic languages preserve a case system and show reflexes of the Indo-European system; for some examples, see 1.1 above.

In addition, both the neuter gender and the dual inflection are preserved in the earlier stages of the languages, particularly in Old Irish; for example, *láa mbrátha* 'Day of Judgement' shows the nasalization of *brátha* (gen. sg. of *bráth* 'judgement') which reflects the original ending *-on* of the word 'day', an ending characteristic of the neuter (cf. Lat *-um*, Gk *-on*). Dual forms still occur after OIr *da* 'two', e.g. *da chlaideb* 'two swords' (nom. pl.) beside *claidib* 'swords' (nom. pl.).

1.4.2.2 The verbal system

There is no doubt that Celtic inherited a full range of categories of tenses and moods (McCone 1986 and 1991a). Diagnostic features are reduplicated futures, e.g. OIr *cichset* 'they will step' : *cingid* 'he steps' (McCone 1991a: 137–82), the use of an *r*-ending in passives and impersonal forms, e.g. *berair* 'it is carried' : *berid* 'he carries', MW *kerir* 'it is loved', which is shared by Latin, Hittite and Tokharian (Cowgill 1983), the use of a *-tio-* suffix for passive past participles and preterite passives, e.g. *mórthae* 'praised' < **mōr-tio-* : *móraid* 'he praises', MW *honneit* 'known' (Schmidt 1971).

Celtic languages also reflect the workings of 'Wackernagel's Law', which requires that enclitic, unaccented elements, usually sentence particles or pronouns, go in second place in the sentence after the first accented element (Collinge 1985: 217–19). There is, however, a Celtic refinement sometimes known as 'Vendryes' Restriction'. The Celtic refinement seems to require that pronouns, or sometimes in the archaic language sentence connectives, should either be infixed into compound or negative verbs or, in archaic Irish only, suffixed to simple verbs (Breatnach 1977), e.g. OIr *fom-gaib* 'he seizes me': *fo-gaib* 'he seizes', *ním-ben* 'he does not strike me' : *ní-ben* 'he does not strike', *beirthi* 'he carries it' : *berid* 'he carries' (Watkins 1963a, McCone 1979a). There are traces of the same pattern in early Welsh, e.g. MW *dym-kyueirch* 'he greets me', *rym-goruc* 'he has made me', etc. (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 206–7, D. S. Evans 1964: 55–7). A striking feature of Celtic languages which seems to be related to this is the regular initial verb; this is discussed below (Chapter 9). Whether this is a feature of all Celtic languages or just a feature of Insular Celtic depends on the interpretation of Continental Celtic forms, such as *to-so-kote*, *tio-in-uoru*, *to-med-eclai*, etc. (Lambert 1994: 67–8).

1.4.2.3 Possession

No Celtic language has a finite verb signifying possession equivalent to English *have*. The constructions used are parallel to Latin *est mihi* or

Greek *estí moi*, both meaning literally 'there is to me'; compare Irish *tá airgead aige* and Welsh *mae arian gyda fe*, both 'he has money' (lit. 'there is money with him'). The use of prepositional forms, it seems, has replaced the use of the dative infixed pronoun. In both Old Irish and early Middle Welsh infixed forms are found, e.g. OIr *ros·mbia lóg* 'they shall have a reward' (lit. 'a reward shall be to them (-*s*)') (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 196–7), MW *chwioryd a'm bu* 'I had sisters' (lit. 'sisters were to me') (D. S. Evans 1964: 57). However, in Cornish and Breton the infixed pattern survived, e.g. MCo *am bes*, MB *em-eus* 'I have' (lit. 'there is to me') (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 210, 213).

1.5   The distinctive features of Goidelic and Brittonic

Most of the features which distinguish Goidelic from Brittonic are phonological. There are morphological differences but they tend to be differences of degree; for example, despite the general loss of final syllables in late Insular Celtic (i.e. not in Continental Celtic nor in Ogam), Goidelic languages retain a functioning, though eroded, case system to the present day, while even in the earliest evidence for distinct Brittonic languages the case system has vanished. The reasons for this are complex and in part at least involve phonological differences between the language groups (compare 2.2 with 4.2 for further discussion). At this point, two examples which distinguish Goidelic from Brittonic will be sufficient.

1.5.1   P and Q Celtic

The most obvious phonological distinction involves the outcome of the unvoiced labiovelar */kʷ/. In phonetic terms it was delabialized in Goidelic in most environments and merged with /k/, but was fully labialized in Brittonic and gave /p/, e.g. Ir *cethar*, W *pedwar* 'four' < *kʷetu̯ores* (cf. Lat *quattuor*), Ir *cía*, W *pwy* 'who?' < *kʷeis* (cf. Lat *quis*, etc.), Ir *fliuch*, W *gwlyb* 'wet' < *u̯likʷo-* (cf. Lat *liquor*, etc.). In the environment of /u/, /kʷ/ was delabialized even in Brittonic, e.g. Ir *búachaill*, W *bugail* 'cowherd' < *gʷou-kʷol-* (cf. Gk *boukólos*). Primitive Irish in Ogam script still shows the retention of /kʷ/, e.g. *MAQ(Q)I* 'son' < *makʷkʷo-* (cf. Ir *macc*, W *mab*), *QRITTI* < *kʷritu-* (cf. Ir *cruth*, W *pryd* 'form, shape') (McManus 1991: 121–2).

This basic difference has given rise to the unfortunate terms P-Celtic and Q-Celtic for Brittonic and Goidelic respectively. It is immediately recognizable but in phonological terms it is relatively trivial (Hamp 1958). The same change occurs in Italic, where Latin preserved -*qu-* but in Oscan and Umbrian */kʷ/ gave /p/ as in Brittonic. In Greek */kʷ/ gave /p/ before /o/ and /a/, /k/ in the environment of /u/, and /t/ before /i/ and /e/. In other words, */kʷ/ is potentially unstable and prone to simplification, and its significance may have been over-rated.

TABLE 1.3   Accent mobility in Gaulish tribal names reflected in modern place names

Rennes < Rédones	: *Redon < Redónes*
Condes < Cóndate	: *Condé < Condáte*
Bourges < Bitúriges	: *Berry < Bituríges*

Furthermore, Whatmough (1963: 110–11) pointed out that acoustically /kʷ/ and /p/ are very similar and it is highly probable that they may have existed as allophonic variants in Proto-Celtic. The close acoustic similarity is supported by the early Irish treatment of /p/ in loanwords as /k/, e.g. *Cothriche < Patricius* (see 2.2.5 below).

1.5.2   Word accent

There are more fundamental differences than *p* and *q*. In Goidelic, accented words are stressed on the initial syllable, while in Brittonic the stress was on the penultimate syllable (H. Lewis and Pedersen 1961: 69–80). This difference produced major variations in word shape and prosodic patterns. Accentuation in Indo-European and thus in Proto-Celtic was extremely complicated but essentially it seems to have had considerable freedom of movement. Evidence for the mobility of the accent is found in the different French reflexes of Gaulish tribal names (see Table 1.3).

The fixing of the accent on the initial syllable in Goidelic produced a reduction and syncope of unaccented syllables in surrounding syllables; for example, compare *samail* 'similar' with the compounded *cosmil* 'similar' which shows syncope of the vowel between the *s* and *m*. Long vowels were reduced, e.g. *marcach* 'horseman' /ˈmarkəx/ < *márkāko-* (see 2.2.2).

In Brittonic, accentual matters were complicated in different ways. The penultimate stress accent was fixed before the loss of endings. Subsequently, with the erosion of final syllables, the accent shifted back to the new penultimate (see 4.2.3, 4.2.5).

1.6   The inter-relationship of the Celtic languages

The details of the relationship of the languages within Goidelic and Brittonic are discussed below in Chapters 2 and 4. As a preliminary, and with no justification, the traditional family tree is given in Figure 1.5.

Of more importance at this point is the relationship of the Insular Celtic to the Continental languages. However, a prior question concerns the Continental group itself; for it is not clear that there is any agreement about their inter-relationship. Certain isoglosses do present themselves but the evidence for the languages is so fragmentary that lit-
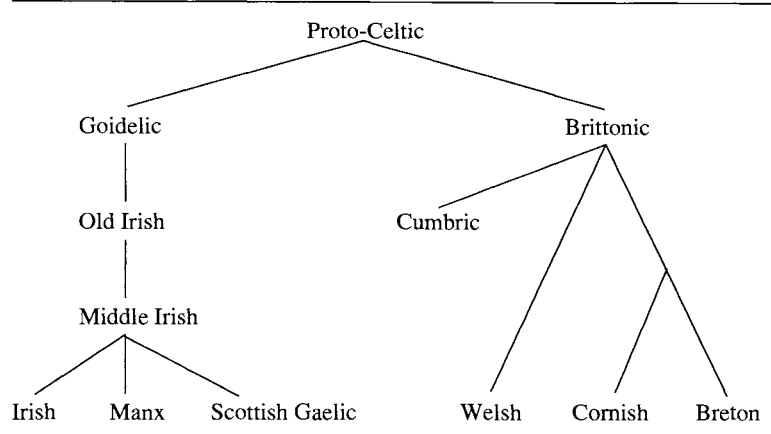
FIGURE 1.5   The traditional family tree of the insular Celtic languages

tle weight can be placed on them. This is particularly the case when one of the isoglosses in question is the vexed *p/q* distinction discussed above (1.5.1). In Gaulish and Lepontic */kʷ/ and */ku̯/ as a rule gave /p/ as in Brittonic, e.g. Gaul *Epo-* 'horse', *petru-* 'four', Lep *-pe* 'and' (cf. Lat *-que*, Gk *te* < **kʷe*), while in Celtiberian it remained as a labiovelar, e.g. *-Cue* 'and', *neCue* 'neither'. But the apparent clear-cut distinction is blurred by a number of Gaulish forms in *-qu-*, e.g. *equos* and *quimon* from the Calendar of Coligny (Duval and Pinault 1986), and the local and tribal names *Sequana* 'Seine', *Sequani*, *Quariates* 'Queyras', etc. The validity of *p/q* could be rescued by appeal to archaism; that is, the Gaulish forms with *-qu-* could be archaisms, especially those preserved in the Calendar of Coligny, which pre-date the change of /kʷ/ to /p/ (Schmidt 1978–80: 197–8, 1988: 232–5). But it is very difficult to argue for archaism or innovation when it is impossible to establish any dates or relative chronology, or indeed whether these forms should be considered Celtic at all.

In recent years several scholars have suggested that there is evidence, which goes beyond the *p/q* distinction, that Gaulish and Lepontic and the Brittonic group are more closely related so that one can speak of a Gallo-Brittonic group (Fleuriot 1978, 1980: 51–79, 1988, Koch 1985b: 49–67, D. E. Evans 1988: 220). On the other hand, it is not clear that Celtiberian can be paired with Goidelic despite the fact that both preserved */kʷ/ and */ku̯/. For example, Goidelic has been seen to be distinct from all the other Celtic languages in its treatment of vocalic */m̥/ and */n̥/, e.g. OIr *imb* 'around': W *am*, Celtib/Gaul *ambi-* < **m̥bhi-* (cf. Gk *amphí*, Lat *ambō*, etc.) (McCone 1991b: 57).
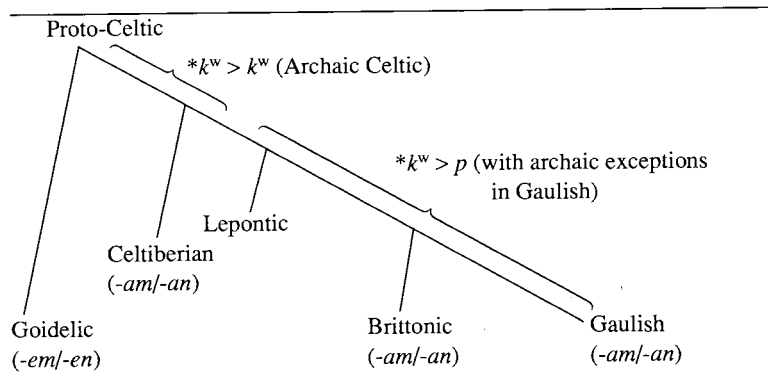
FIGURE 1.6   The emergence of the Celtic languages according to Schmidt 1988

Schmidt 1988 has argued that the Celtic languages emerged in the order presented in Figure 1.6. There are a number of difficulties with this reconstruction. First, it puts a great deal of weight on the p/q distinction when this could well have been allophonic for a considerable period. Secondly, it is not clear how significant the Goidelic feature of */m̥/ and */n̥/ > -em/-en really is; this change has been questioned by some who have argued that */m̥/ and */n̥/ gave -am/-an in Goidelic which subsequently changed to -em/-en in certain environments (McCone 1991b: 53–69, cf. Szemerényi 1991), while others have argued that */m̥/ and */n̥/ gave -em/-en in Gaulish as well (Szemerényi 1978). On balance, the evidence tends to support the former argument; if so, Schmidt's scheme in Figure 1.6 seems fatally damaged.

The range of possibilities is not exhausted by the above discussion. It is at least theoretically possible that all the sub-groups of the Celtic group are to be derived directly from Proto-Celtic, as in Figure 1.7, and
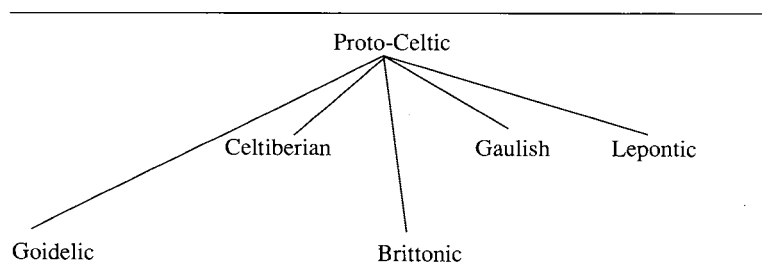

FIGURE 1.7   An alternative view of the relationship of the Celtic languages

that any striking parallels between sub-groups is due to subsequent con-
tact between speakers. To point to one historically documented case,
we know that speakers of Brittonic and Gaulish were in contact in the
1st century BC (see 1.3.1). The difficulty is then merely displaced to
deciding which features represent a genetic relationship as opposed to
those which are simply due to language contact.

The methodological problem with a discussion of this type is to
decide which features are significant; we have seen that much of the
discussion has centred on very fragile alternations. To go further it
would be necessary to consider more thoroughgoing aspects of mor-
phological and syntactic structures. But despite the growing corpus of
Continental Celtic material, these areas of study are still bedevilled by
the fragmentary nature of the evidence and by difficulties in dating the
material. The distinction between the Insular and Continental languages
is purely one of geographical convenience, though still useful, and
probably does not reflect any genetic difference.

1.7   The Italo-Celtic hypothesis

While it is universally agreed that the Celtic languages form part of the
Indo-European group, there is less agreement about whether Celtic
belonged to a sub-group within Indo-European. The prime candidate
for partnership has been Italic (Latin, Faliscan, Oscan, Umbrian). It is,
however, important to establish what kind of connection is being postu-
lated and what kind of evidence can be used to prove or disprove the
hypothesis. Two language groups can share features because of a com-
mon genetic origin, i.e. they had a common ancestor at some point in
prehistory. Alternatively, the phonological and morphological struc-
tures of two language groups, which have no common genetic ancestry,
might converge on account of geographical proximity. Various inter-
mediate situations can also be envisaged where two related languages
also go through a period of geographical proximity. The question is not
even as simple as deciding between these various scenarios. For Italic
and Celtic it is agreed that they are genetically related through an
ancestral Indo-European and that for some considerable period they
were geographically contiguous, but do the similarities suggest a closer
connection between them than between either of them and other Indo-
European languages? In other words, is there any justification for the
relationship posited in Figure 1.8(a) rather than the one in 1.8(b)?[25] To
these basic questions can be added the structural objection raised by C.
Watkins 1966a that any particular feature must be seen within its own
linguistic system and not just extracted and examined in isolation, as,
for example, with the Celtic and Italic *ā*-subjunctive or *b*-future.
Moreover, at least as much effort should be expended on the differ-
ences as on the similarities.