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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ix

Preface and Acknowledgements xi

A Note on the Text xvii

A Note on the Celtic Languages xix

Abbreviations xxi

Introduction 1

PART I 25

1 Source Traditions: The Celts from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era 27

2 Celtic Linguistic Antiquarianism: Paul-Yves Pezron, Edward Lhwyd, G. W. Leibniz, and Their Legacies 59

3 Gods, Druids, and Stonehenge: Mythography and Archaeology 92

4 Civilization, Savagery, and the Celts: Ossian, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Celtic Literature 118

5 Celts in the Age of Revolution and Empire 150

PART II 183

6 From Philology to Ethnology: The Celtic Race and the Indo-European Idea 185

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7 The Celtic Past in the Age of Romantic Nationalism 216

8 Race, History, and the Irish Question: Politics and the Limits of Anti-Celtic Racism 258

PART III 289

9 *Nos ancêtres les Gallois*: The Rise of pan-Celticism in Wales, Brittany, and France 291

10 Politics and pan-Celticism: Land and Nation in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales 313

11 Celtic Daybreak: E. E. Fournier d'Albe, Pan-Celticism, and the Celtic Association in the *Fin de siècle* 332

12 From the Pan-Celtic Moment to the Present 363

Notes 397

Bibliography 485

Index 531

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Introduction

In the summer of 1898 the Welsh National *Eisteddfod* was held in the picturesque slate-mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog in northern Wales. There on 20 July a map was published and circulated depicting the very northwestern corner of Europe, including most of Britain, all of Ireland, the Isle of Man, and Brittany (Fig. 1). A note at the top reads 'Map of the Celtic Countries, showing the distribution of the living Celtic languages', and areas are shaded according to the concentration of individuals speaking a Celtic language.[1] Boldly titled 'Celtia', the map pays little attention to the contemporary borders of the United Kingdom—England is not even labelled—instead delineating an imagined community consisting solely of the 'Celtic countries'. Few probably would have suspected that the cartographer was an Englishman, a physicist named Edmund Edward Fournier d'Albe (1868–1933), who at the dawn of the twentieth century led the international Pan-Celtic nationalist movement. Fournier founded the Dublin-based group, named the Celtic Association, and edited its journal, also titled *Celtia*, which began appearing from 1 January 1901. The map appeared on the inside front cover to remind its readers of the future for which they were striving. This vision of 'Celtia' was the amalgamation of a number of ideas—some ancient, some modern—whose origins, interactions, and consequences it is this book's purpose to examine and understand. It accounts for how and why these places and peoples came to be called Celtic, why that mattered then, and why this idea is still meaningful today.

The 'Celts' and all things 'Celtic' are of perennial interest in both academic and popular culture.[2] This is despite the fact that there is only a hazy understanding of the peoples called Celts in antiquity, and that there is considerable disagreement over whether the modern Celtic nations—Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, the Isle of Man, and Cornwall—and their cultures bear any direct relation to their purported ancient forebears. Popular authors like to

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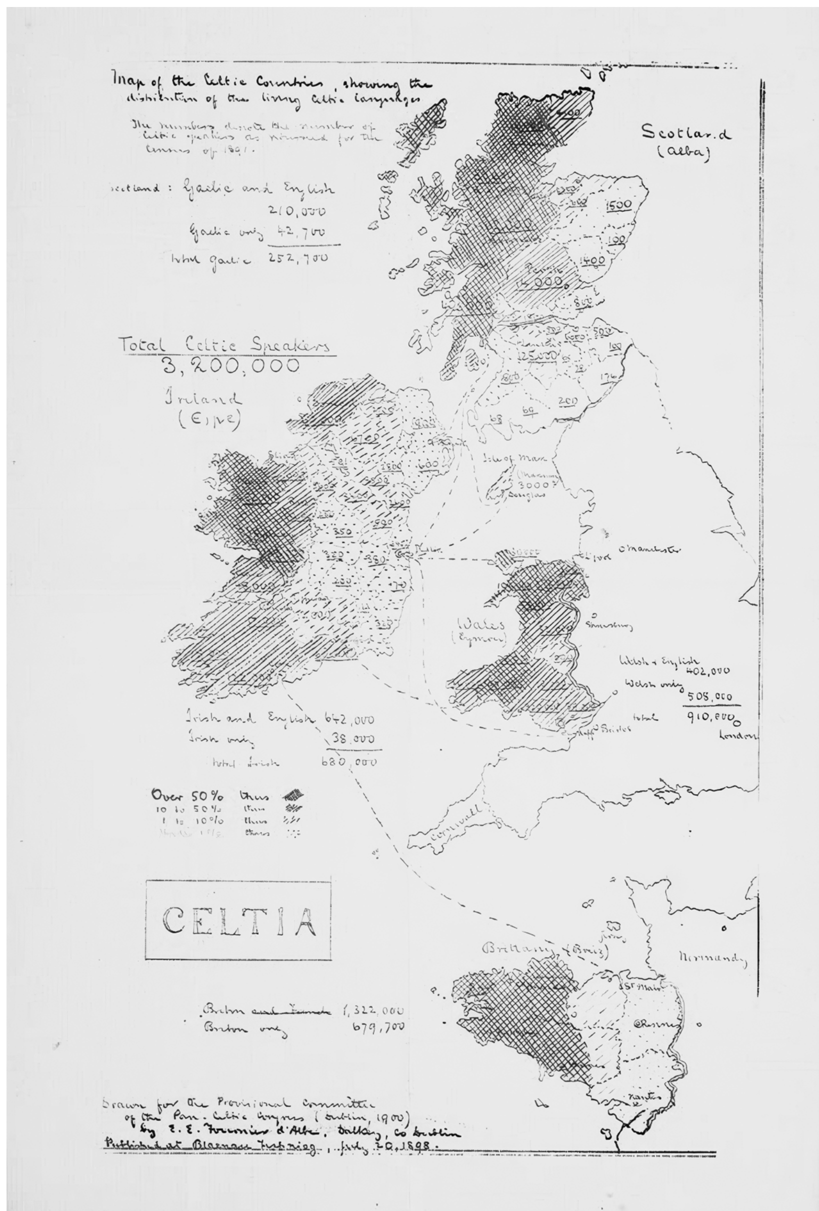

FIG. 1. 'Celtia', National Library of Wales, Sir John Rhys Papers, A4/10, Box 99, folder: Maps. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales.

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suggest that the Celts are a lost people we might 'discover' if we resolutely 'search' for them, but if books published in English are anything to go by then we probably do not need to look very hard.[3] Arguably, we know more about the Celts now than ever before. Nearly every year scholarly books based on the latest scientific research in linguistics, archaeology, and genetics are published;[4] popular studies of Celtic mythology and art appear just as frequently.[5] A bumper year was 2015, when a major exhibition titled *The Celts: Art and Identity* opened at the British Museum (and then in 2016 at the National Museum of Scotland), and during which the BBC aired a television series called *The Celts: Blood, Iron, and Sacrifice*.[6] France, as the territory of ancient Celtic Gaul yet also the medieval kingdom of the Germanic Franks, has had an ambivalent relationship with Celtic subjects, yet there appear seemingly every year new books in French playing upon the idea of the Celts.[7] The classic two-volume work by Henri Hubert (1872–1927), *Les Celtes* (1932), remains in print almost a century after its first publication; however, this might have more than a little to do with the fact that it was edited and introduced by Hubert's more famous collaborator Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), and that they were both disciples of the founding father of French sociology, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). Probably better known than all three of them combined are the comics of *Astérix le Gaulois*.

The Celts also have a broader European popularity, as reflected in a range of exhibitions and publications on art and antiquity, sometimes with more than a hint for European unity embedded in them. The largest of these—*I Celti: La prima Europa*—took place in Venice in 1991, in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty that forged the European Union in 1992.[8] *Keltenmuseums* are dotted around the alpine regions of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, while Germanic scholars have been responsible for some of the most scrupulous studies on the Celts and their languages.[9] In Spain, Celtic interest stretches from the academy—and a strong archaeological focus[10]—to popular culture, especially in Galicia, where *Celta de Vigo* are a solid mid-table football team in *La Liga*. The question of whether Galicia—whose Celtic language died out in the Middle Ages—still qualifies as a Celtic 'nation' has recently been a contentious subject within activist Celtic circles,[11] and a novel academic theory posits Iberia as the place where the Celtic language family might have been born.[12] There are also transatlantic dimensions to the Celtic idea, linked particularly to the Irish and Scottish diasporas and the North American obsession with heritage.[13] American Celticism is often presented with a New Age spiritual twist, but it would be difficult to think of many things further from this

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affected mysticism than the Boston Celtics, a storied and sometimes gritty franchise in the National Basketball Association, named for the city's large Irish population. Therefore, if not quite all things to all people, the idea of the Celts is a highly changeable one with international resonance; but, as the historian Joep Leerssen has pointed out, it is probably the very ambiguity related to things Celtic that has allowed the idea to take so many forms and achieve such popularity.[14]

One thing seems clear: despite widespread interest in the various understandings of the Celts, attention remains concentrated on the ancient Celts. There has been comparatively little interrogation of how and why the Celts became known as such during the modern era. What is the link that binds those who called themselves Celts in ancient Europe to those who now claim Celtic heritage? Most of the many overviews of the ancient Celts will contain a chapter or two dedicated to the ways in which ideas of the Celts inspired modern literary, religious, and cultural developments, and became foundational components of modern national identities in Britain, Ireland, and France.[15] But these are usually highly impressionistic, and a sustained focus on the modern period is rarer.[16] This book, on the other hand, takes the modern manifestations of Celtic ideas as its central focus. It shows how, from about the sixteenth century, the Celts became one of the most popular ancestral groups across Europe. Over the next few centuries scholars from most European nations claimed Celtic ancestry for their peoples at one point or another and fought in the Republic of Letters over the claim to the purest Celtic provenance. The Celts featured in the great intellectual shifts that resulted from movements like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and in political upheavals like the French Revolution. The nineteenth-century onset of nationalism and racialism invested ancestral origins with even more weight and found an important place for the Celts in the developing identities of different European nations. Yet, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Celts had to a large degree been intellectually and physically relegated to the 'fringes' of Western Europe, as apparent victims of political impotence and racial prejudice.[17] If the idea of the Celts and who could claim to be one became clearer, the power of that idea had dramatically weakened and has arguably been in decline ever since, despite twentieth-century events like the Irish Revolution, and the rise of separatist nationalisms in Scotland, Wales, Brittany, and even Cornwall. But the idea of the Celts has proved remarkably resilient and it is perhaps the lack of a certain kind of political import behind it that ironically allowed the Celts to weather the twentieth century: if one can still

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proudly and publicly identify as a Celt, the same cannot be said for the Anglo-Saxons, Teutons, or Aryans. Though E. E. Fournier d'Albe's imagined Pan-Celtic polity never came to pass, his Celtic Association and its emphasis on language learning and shared culture remain the model for groups in the Celtic imagined community to this day.

Questions and Constructions

Who were the Celts? This seemingly innocuous question has actually been ideologically fraught for centuries. Running from the speculative ethnography of classical antiquity, through early modern *Celtomanie*, the nineteenth-century *Keltenfrage*, and today's 'Celtoscepticism', it remains a touchy subject. Helping to account for the tension that has characterised attempts to correctly identify the Celts are a number of related issues wrapped up in that question: Where did the Celts come from, who were they related to, what languages did they speak, what was their culture like, how was their society organised, and, perhaps most importantly, where are they now? These questions were certainly posed in antiquity, especially during the millennium stretching from roughly 500 BCE to 500 CE, but then they seem to have mostly disappeared from the textual record until the Renaissance, when scholars began to ask them again with renewed vigour. For the answers now came loaded with implications for early modern peoples and their institutions. Early modern thinkers were especially concerned with the extent to which nations preserved the virtues and vices of their ancestors, but the arrival of racial theory toward the end of the eighteenth century led to the overarching nineteenth-century question: Who *are* the Celts? Underpinning this shift to the present tense were several new questions: Did modern national characters preserve the unique moral qualities of ancient races, and if they did, then what were the political and cultural consequences for European states with Celtic populations? Who could claim to be a Celt? If the Celts had once formed an ancient European polity or even an empire, could they do so again?

These are the questions this book addresses. They have been asked and answered in many ways at different times and places, but the root question, 'Who were the Celts?', has remained constant.[18] As far as the ancient Celts go, we have textual, linguistic, and material evidence, and their centrality has remained stable over the last five hundred years, though methods have evolved, disciplines have become specialised, and there has been considerable dispute over whether evidence from one discipline should be cross-borrowed

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into another.[19] Textual evidence—in the form of observations recorded in writing by classical authors—formed the first layer of available information, but it was subject to charges of hearsay and so needed to be corroborated with more neutral sources like linguistic evidence—both in the form of written samples and the spoken Celtic languages—and the evidence of physical remains. These approaches prevailed throughout the early modern era, before major progress in the quest for Celtic origins seemed to have been made with the professionalization of history, linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, and other related disciplines in the nineteenth century. Archaeology—grafted onto linguistic models—dominated the field for most of the next century, before its explanations were cast into doubt in the 1980s. After a period of impasse, the revolution in the sequencing of ancient DNA over the last decade or so seems poised to break the deadlock between linguistics and archaeology and reshape things again.[20] However, because of the limited nature of the evidence, a definitive answer to the question 'Who were the Celts?' has never been given and probably never will be. As a result, scholars have had to either reduce the scope of their claims or rely on a potentially hazardous level of conjecture. For these reasons the Celts are, and have always been, constructions.[21] Especially in the modern era, the Celtic picture is held together by much interpretative glue. This is neither to say that the Celts are simply invented or imagined, nor that they are primarily the product of an identitarian centre's need for a peripheral other.[22] Rather, it is to claim that the images of those peoples and cultures that have been called 'Celtic' are the result of more than two-and-a-half millennia's worth of negotiation in different places and cultures, with various kinds of evidence.

Dedicated to examining that process is the field of Celtic studies, a sophisticated multidisciplinary venture with a focus that stretches from prehistory to the present. Emerging in the nineteenth century, 'Celtology' sought to attain a scientific understanding of the Celts and drew in scholars from across Europe, especially Germany and France, as well as Britain, Ireland, and the United States, in order to write the history of the Celtic peoples. That history begins about halfway through the first millennium BCE, when peoples called Celts (κελτοι/Keltoi/Celtae and Γαλάται/Galatae/Galli) inhabited a considerable portion of the European continent, and therefore also occupied a prominent place in the mental maps of classical Greece and Rome.[23] Yet the Celts are elusive. Because they lacked their own literate cultures until the early medieval period, we depend almost completely on classical sources for textual evidence of who the ancient Celts were, where they lived, and what they were

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like. Those accounts are often vague at best and contradictory at worst. For example, the two most significant Roman ethnographies of Northern Europe—the *Commentarii de bello gallico* of Julius Caesar (100 BCE-44 BCE) and the *Germania* by Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56–c. 120 CE)—both allude to the relationships between the Gauls (part of whose territory was called 'Celtica') and the Britons and Germans, but leave their ethnic affiliations undetermined. A millennium and a half later that grey area would lead to acrimonious disputes—particularly between French and German scholars—and, a few centuries after that, those classical accounts would provide many of the negative stereotypes employed at the height of Franco-German nationalist antagonism.[24] This scholarly quarrel, which began in the sixteenth century and ran for over four hundred years (!), revolved primarily around language, and whether ancient Gaulish or ancient German had been spoken by the Celts. Language—preserved in place names, personal names, recorded ancient words, and in the surviving Celtic tongues—formed the main pillar of investigation into the identity of the ancient Celts for most of this period. Yet just as the linguistic debate was finally settling in the 1850s, the rapidly professionalising field of archaeology seemed to offer a new key to unlocking the mystery of Celtic origins once and for all. After some remarkable discoveries, a consensus emerged that the fount of the European Celtic civilization had been in the centre of Europe, specifically in present day Hallstatt (in Austria) and La Tène (in Switzerland), rather than anywhere else in the arc running from Ireland to India that had been proposed over the preceding centuries.[25]

After holding the field for more than a century, that consensus has been eroded over the last four decades by scholars whose position has been named 'Celtoscepticism', a term borrowed into English by Patrick Sims-Williams.[26] This may be summed up as follows: the Celts were widely mentioned in classical sources, but so vaguely and inconsistently that it becomes difficult to say much more than that they referred to peoples—often the barbarous foil to the civilized Greeks and Romans—in west and central Europe. Driven by the archaeologist John Collis since the 1980s, this position points to larger problems with the cultural mode of archaeology that rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and assumed that material remains could be straightforwardly aligned with particular cultures based on a shared style. In the Celtic case the most glaring incongruity was that, even though no ancient sources survive that refer to the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland as Celts, nineteenth-century scholars uncritically adopted the assertions of some earlier thinkers—particularly the Scottish humanist George Buchanan (1506–1582) and the

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Welsh antiquary Edward Lhwyd (1660–1709)—that, based on historical and linguistic evidence, these peoples were Celtic. The Celtosceptic critique turned on questions of methodology, but in the mid-1990s it caused a heated exchange in the journal *Antiquity*, in which defenders of the traditional interpretation accused Collis and his followers of being motivated by a latent English nationalism.[27] Linguists, perhaps more acutely attuned to the dangers of casually linking languages and material cultures to particular ethnic groups because of an awareness of the wild excesses of their predecessors—one variant of which was labelled 'Celtomania' and held that the Celts spoke the earliest human language from which all others descended—also noted the problems of aligning the linguistic and archaeological records. The meticulous Celticist Patrick Sims-Williams has been the most important voice urging restraint in this respect, but the critique has roots stretching back to the nineteenth century; however, Sims-Williams cautiously links some of the textual evidence to linguistic remains, especially place names, and suggests we can carefully refer to an ancient Celtic linguistic culture in parts of west and central Europe.[28]

At the same time as ideas of ancient Celtic identity were beginning to be picked apart by archaeologists and philologists in the 1980s and 1990s, modern ideas of the Celts came into focus with the critical study of nations and nationalisms. As part of a general examination of the phenomenon of nationalism, individual national identities and their supposed ethnic and cultural bases came under scrutiny. Naturally, the 'Celtic nations' were placed under the microscope, and with them the very idea of the Celts and whether a Celtic identity had ever existed. The main early catalyst was Hugh Trevor-Roper's (1914–2003) stimulating, if mean-spirited, 1983 essay on the invention of Highland traditions, in which he argued that Scotland's identity as a nation whose traditions stemmed from the Celtic Highlands was predicated on a series of recent and, cruelly, English fabrications.[29] Trevor-Roper was warned by the classicist Nan Dunbar (1928–2005) against using 'Celtic' and 'Saxon' to delineate the Highlands and Lowlands, and against using the word 'Scotch', but he did so anyway, clearly enjoying trolling proud Scots.[30] Some Celtosceptic archaeologists and anthropologists followed Trevor-Roper's lead in the 1990s, seemingly exposing the apparent modern manufacture of the entire Celtic tradition. In 1999 the controversy reached its height with Simon James's *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?*, a flawed work relying on a crude reading of the 'invention of tradition' thesis and seeking to introduce the Celtosceptic debate to the public with provocative rhetorical questions

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implying that 'the Ancient Celts of Britain and Ireland are an essentially bogus recent invention', which made waves in newspapers and predictably met with approval in places like the *Daily Telegraph*.[31]

However, the work of most lasting significance in this vein is Malcolm Chapman's wide-ranging *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (1992), which argued that the only point of real continuity running from the ancient to the modern Celts was that they were peripheral cultures effectively othered by a dominant metropolitan core.[32] Of concern to many was that Chapman's model eliminated Celtic agency, but as Patrick Sims-Williams suggested several years before his book appeared, impressions of the Celtic countries have often been made with the help of individuals from those places, who may have had something to gain from their role as intermediaries.[33] This mediated vision extends back to the classical accounts of the Celtic peoples in Britain which, as Francesca and Rhys Kaminski-Jones and their collaborators have shown, tied together the classical and Celtic worlds from that point forward.[34] It was the Celtic presence in Greek and Roman sources that allowed them to reemerge in the European imagination during the Renaissance, when these texts were rediscovered, published, and widely disseminated and studied. From that point forward, anyone moderately well-educated would have likely encountered the Celts many times over in their reading. But, with the eighteenth-century interest in vernacular poetry, many modern readers were for the first time presented with material translated from the Celtic languages, the one indisputable link between the ancient peoples called Celts and those modern cultures that have wished to claim their inheritance.

For all the flaws with his centre-periphery model, Chapman made the first extended attempt to deal with the creation of the Celts in the modern period. It was clear by this time that the Celts were to some extent a construction, but also that this was the case for all ancient peoples given conceptual cohesion by Greek and Roman works, like the classic Celtic foil the *Germani*. Recognition of these wider patterns helped to weaken the purchase of the value judgments that had accompanied historical criticism, and scholars turned to the much more interesting question of the ways in which the Celts had been reimagined in modern European culture.[35] This constructive approach became enshrined in a landmark volume, *Celticism* (1996), in which Joep Leerssen named the enterprise and defined it: Celticism is 'not the study of "the" Celts and their history, but rather the study of their reputation and of the meanings and connotations ascribed to the term "Celtic"'.[36] This book is a study of Celticism from the early modern era to the present. I am interested in what

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people meant by the terms 'Celt' and 'Celtic', why they wanted them to mean what they did, and how those ideas changed over time as the result of negotiation in all manner of texts, traditions, and wider cultural and intellectual movements.

To summarise, Celtic studies has shifted focus over the last several decades as the idea of the Celts as a monolithic ancient people with an obvious territory and clear national descendants has fractured and given way to a more granular examination of the component parts of the Celtic image. Historical criticism in this respect has moved from a rigid deconstructionism to a more sympathetic appreciation of the ways that those ideas and images were constructed over time. Because the ancient Celts lacked extensive documentation, imagination stepped in to fill the void. Studying the vivid ways that humans imagined the past—for whatever purpose—tells us far more about the patterns of historical thought, memory, and identity over the last several centuries than does determining whether particular texts and traditions are true or false. Moreover, doing so does nothing to damage the ancient Celts or modern Celtic traditions. As a result of recent archaeological and philological criticism, the Celts are in now flux. And as this book shows, this has always been the case.

Key Ideas: Nations and Nationalism, Race and Racialism

Although some Celtosceptics point to the obvious modern construction of the Celts as the smoking gun that makes their case, the notion that the Celts have to some extent always been a construction would not have been much of a surprise to the founding fathers and mothers of Celtic studies, who were only too aware of the patchy evidential record. Yet what began as an intradisciplinary methodological dispute spilled into the popular press and was reduced to the crude (and wrong) idea that Celtoscepticism is a denial that the Celts ever existed, a mischaracterisation that now seems to generate more headlines than anything else about the Celts.[37] For the historian of the modern period, however, the greatest problem with the Celtosceptic discussion is that it presents Celticism as the sterile product of academic debates and scholarly paradigm shifts that are mostly methodological in character. Overlooked are the wider ideological movements coursing through the public sphere over the last several centuries, especially nationalism—arguably the most powerful political force unleashed in modern times—and racialism, an idea just as pervasive and maybe more damaging. The ubiquity of these two gargantuan forces meant that many of their assumptions were baked into the hardening dough

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of the professionalising academic disciplines in nineteenth-century Europe, including Celtic studies. As will be seen throughout this book, the barrier between scholarly and public understandings of the Celts has been extremely porous, but there has normally been a casual assumption by Celticists that ideas flow one way: from scholarship into the public sphere. This book, on the other hand, takes popular attitudes and ideas as seriously as it does the academic debates.[38] Figures like Ernest Renan (1823–1892), Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), and in his own way W. B. Yeats (1865–1939)—four thinkers who, among other men and women, disproportionately shaped the modern image of the Celts—all straddled the line between private scholar and public moralist. Their work was suffused with racial theory, which obviously shaped their conceptions of the Celts. Accordingly, it is one of my central arguments in this book that it was neither the professionalisation of archaeology nor even of Celtic studies itself that was the most important development in the history of Celticism, but the onset of national thought and race theory. The extent to which these shaped scholarly and public understandings of the Celts remains largely unrealised.[39]

The evolution and fluctuations of these two ideas—nation and race—are kept firmly in view throughout this book.[40] At the risk of extreme oversimplification, we might think of 'nation' as having two broad meanings here; both are 'imagined communities' but are based on different constituent elements.[41] The first sense used here is the natural understanding of nation: nations are seen as kinship groups held together by language, culture, and the supposition of a common descent. Celtic ideas featured quite heavily in early modern European discussions about nations, but their influence was indirect because no one called themselves 'Celts' and there was no 'Celtic' nation. Instead, the Celts were seen as prestigious ancestors whose legacy was up for grabs if it could be proven that a modern nation descended from them. To assert Celtic lineage was to make a political claim to be descended from one of the earliest known European peoples whose conquests had stretched from Ireland to Anatolia. Establishing these claims required the tools of scholarship: textual philology, linguistic comparison, the study of physical remains (archaeology), and the collection of supposed remnants of Celtic culture (folklore). These are the subjects of Part I, in which we will see how the vague picture of the Celts left by the ancients became sharper through developing scholarly techniques and the argumentative force of political necessity.

The Celts acquired more importance over the course of the eighteenth century as the second, political, sense of the nation strengthened: nations, it

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was argued, are entitled to certain rights and to independently pursue their own destinies. Although national thought had flourished since the Renaissance, and although nation-builders gathered their materials together from a past that stretched from their own age back into antiquity,[42] it was only really during the eighteenth century that the nation changed 'from a fact of nature to a product of political will',[43] in step with the rise of social contract theory, the idea of popular sovereignty, an accompanying rehabilitation of democracy, and other developments in the history of political thought, as well as the rise of the middle classes and the expansion of the 'public sphere' in the form of a burgeoning press and rising literacy rates.[44] The issue of national sovereignty (where did it reside?) was the overriding concern during the first phase of the French Revolution in the summer of 1789; as will be seen in chapter 5, the ultimate resolution to this question as the Third Estate, or '*le peuple*', as *la nation*, had dramatically positive consequences for Celtic ideas in France.[45] In Ireland too, this period saw significant Protestant interest in Ireland's Celtic past for the first time, as that island's political claims grew louder and a neutral, idealised ancestor was needed in order to circumvent religious sectarianism.

The onset of nationalism during this period—which we might understand variously as the pursuit of sovereignty or self-determination for a particular nationality, the advancement of interests of one nation *vis-à-vis* others in the international nation-state system, or a chauvinistic belief that a particular nation (almost always one's own) was intrinsically superior to all others[46]—also saw the Celts firmly established as a foundational element of national identity in three out of the 'four nations' that made up the United Kingdom following the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1800.[47] They also won out as the predominant national ancestor of the French in the early nineteenth century. This story of the rise of modern national identities over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is essential to the history of Celticism.[48] But it is far from straightforward. Although early moderns might have had a sense of their *gens*, or even a linguistic identity, 'national identity' in our terms would probably have made little sense to them.[49] As Colin Kidd has argued, they were much more concerned with religious, dynastic, and social (class) identities than they were with 'national' identities—the 'nation' had not yet become a salient consideration in European politics. Once this occurred, national identities were compounds that varied based on their constituent elements, of which ethnic ancestry was only one, and they reacted differently to other national identities composed of separate elements. For example, while Ireland's Catholicism was its standout feature, tension between

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Scotland and England also came more from the religious sphere than those of ethnicity or culture; not only did Scots play a leading role in the British Empire, but the predominant ethnic identity in the nineteenth-century Lowlands was Germanic, which meant that Lowlanders felt entitled to share in the glory of the Gothic ancient constitution of England.[50] The dynamics of international politics also mattered more for some nations than for others. Whereas the English and, eventually, the British seem to have by and large considered themselves locked in eternal combat with the French—famously analysed in Linda Colley's *Britons* (1992), which argued that Anglo-French conflict helped to forge a modern British identity at the end of the eighteenth century—the French seem to have been more preoccupied with their relationship to Germany and to Rome.[51] The idiosyncratic trajectory of French Celticism stands out, because it is the only case in which the Celts—usually but not necessarily equated with the Gauls—became embraced by a state, until they were elevated by Ireland in the twentieth century.[52] This included a process catalysed by the Franco-Prussian War by which French republican nationalism, up until this point predominantly left-wing, folded in the right-wing, a development largely complete by the 1890s and crystallised in the Dreyfus Affair.

Reflecting and reinforcing the sense of distinct national identities are the disparate historiographies of the nations under consideration here. As is well recognised, history writing has been more intimately related to nation-building than perhaps any other intellectual pursuit, and even though historians have discarded many of the assumptions that prevailed when their discipline professionalised in the nineteenth century, most still investigate the history of a particular 'nation', a focus often called 'methodological nationalism'. The result is a set of strikingly different historiographies with different interests, moving at different rhythms. The 'national question' has been an important subject in the historiography of each of the Celtic nations, but it has a different character in each of them. Studies cutting across the boundaries of the Celtic nations have, in part because of this, been rare, and pulling these strands together has been one of the main challenges of writing this book.[53]

Race is the other idea that transformed perceptions of the Celts in nineteenth-century Europe. For most of the early modern period it meant something like common descent or lineage, and Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) noted that it could be used to describe families of humans, animals, or plants, among other things.[54] However, over the course of the eighteenth century a discursive shift took place wherein 'race' gradually came to preponderate as the term of choice for denoting a distinct, *natural* human population classifiable

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by physical features that (usually) accorded with geographical position. The crucial move in the transition to racialism that occurred in the decades around 1800 was the increasing alignment of external features with inner qualities, of physical appearance with moral character and intelligence; whereas these things were previously thought to be mutable and produced by climate and prevailing institutions, the new racialism often held them to be immutable products of nature. It was assumed that when members of the same race reproduced, both their physical and moral characteristics survived in their offspring.[55] Although 'race' had similarly benign beginnings to 'nation' and was often interchangeable with it, it had much more dramatic consequences for ideas of the Celts, who began to be treated as a distinct population *naturally* different from the Germanic nations next to whom they lived. For the Celts, this meant that a particular set of qualities—like sensitivity to nature and emotional volatility—was thought to correspond with particular face shapes, skull forms, stature, and hair and eye colouring. These biological qualities made up the Celtic race out of which the Celtic nations and their particular characters and institutions had grown. According to the logic of nineteenth-century racialism, because of their natural racial character the Celtic nations had to be governed differently from other populations, and they were frequently portrayed as needing to be civilized by the Anglo-Saxons. So by 'racialism', I mean the idea that humanity is divided into populations distinct by virtue of natural differences, which often entailed separate political treatment. However, it must be noted that nation and race remained interchangeable in many cases throughout the nineteenth century, and it is therefore often necessary to outline the position of a particular thinker. In Parts II and III of this book, we will see how these conceptions played out in scientific and political debates over the course of the nineteenth century.

Empire is not an immediate context for this book, but as the term 'Celticism' suggests, post-colonial criticism accompanying the 'cultural turn' in the humanities and social sciences—probably associated above all with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978)—strongly influenced the study of the Celts and the Celtic nations in the 1980s and 1990s.[56] The Marxist sociologist Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism* (1975) inspired a number of post-colonial treatments of the 'Celtic' nations, which, though they show the ways literature in particular encoded reactions to the creeping British state, have tended to flatten people, ideas, and texts into two-dimensional pieces in the politics of identity formation.[57] Here again the centre-periphery model is visible in studies that depict a fairly rigid dichotomy between England and the Celtic nations, whose

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identities supposedly developed primarily as a response to English hegemony.[58] Historians and literary scholars have pointed out the many problems with this model and have shown how Celticism was often harnessed in support of British state- and nation-building.[59] Moreover, historians have been alert to a tendency of applying post-colonial models 'to project onto the early modern period racial notions of selfhood and otherness that were not crystallised until much later', in Ian McBride's words, a particularly noticeable anachronism in the case of Celticism.[60] As Parts I and II show, there was no shared sense of Celticity among the different nations of Britain and Ireland until the nineteenth century, and when this developed it was integrally linked to the development of racial theory. As Part III shows, the upshot is that race was an idea also harnessed by activists who felt kinship with their 'Celtic' neighbours, not simply an othering device used by the *Sassenach*. A version of liberal racialism was at the heart of E. E. Fournier d'Albe's Pan-Celtic project, for example. Yet it is essential not to fall into the trap of thinking that Celts shared an innate fellow-feeling, despite Oscar Wilde's (1854–1900) suggestion in 1884 that 'all Celts gravitate towards each other'.[61] Celticism was 'one of the strangest things on *this* earth', according to a Welsh critic of Fournier's project, a sentiment shared by many Irish nationalists of the time, who preferred the vision of an independent Gaelic Ireland to synthetic Pan-Celticism.[62] This book therefore rejects the tendency to equate Ireland with the other Celtic nations on that racial basis, collapsing the varying experiences of people in these different nations.[63] The post-colonial approach has been fruitfully applied to Ireland and has shown how anti-Celtic racial discourse operated in the British-Irish relationship, which became increasingly fraught over the course of the nineteenth century. However, as chapter 8 shows, the other Celtic nations were not subjected to denigration on the same basis, and even Welsh people and Scots who proudly identified as Celtic often viewed the (Catholic) Irish as something other entirely. Trying to place Ireland, its history, and the experience of its peoples in the 'correct' interpretative framework has been an ongoing point of contention, but I think any attempt beyond simple historicism might be futile. The history of Ireland is like a platypus: it has many recognisable features but is something wholly its own. Unlike the platypus, however, Irish history's classification is still undecided.[64] Aspects of this book will help to show that Ireland is nearly always a special case; understanding it requires careful empirical work and not ingenious theorising.

With the ideas and contexts discussed so far in mind, my argument is that appreciating the history of Celticism in all its complexity requires serious

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attention not only to ideas of and attitudes toward the ancient Celts, but to the history of knowledge and scholarship across early modern and modern Europe, as well as the histories of the scientific and political concepts of nation and race, and the ideologies they spawned. The development of knowledge about the Celts did not proceed insulated from the political imperatives of drawing genealogies in the early modern period, and the nineteenth-century formation of Celtic studies was pursued in a European context saturated with nationalism and racialism. These contexts obviously shaped enquiries into the Celts and their legacies, which varied in their emphases depending on which national or racial context in which an author was writing. At the same time, those who wanted to draw on the conceptual resources of Celticism in the pursuit of political and ideological goals were circumscribed by the available source base and limits of what scholarship would allow. Traditions can be invented and memories manufactured, but it is the factual base produced by scholarship—itself obviously the changing product of multiple variables over time—that determines the coherence of these crucial components of national myth-making.

The Shape of This Book: A New Narrative

Like ancient Gaul, this book is divided into three parts. These reflect the three major intellectual forces that (I believe) shaped modern Celticism: national thought, racial theory, and pan-nationalism. These ideas were part of the wider intellectual currents flowing through European culture over the last several centuries. As they did so they swept the idea of the Celts along with them. Those ideas changed over time as they were adapted to new contexts, and those contexts reshaped the collection of Celtic ideas in kind. Yet the book is essentially ordered chronologically. It provides a history of Celticism from the Renaissance to the present, but the bulk of the text focuses on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the idea of the Celts crystallised in the context of democratic revolutions, the rise of nation-states, and the global expansion of empires.

Defining the relevant geographical territory is trickier. Rather than any particular nation, my focus is ultimately on ideas: their genesis, circulation, and manifestation in different contexts, as well as their effects on those contexts. Most of this intellectual energy pertained to the ancient and modern inhabitants of the six core Celtic nations: Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, the Isle of Man, and Cornwall. However, depending on the criteria one chooses, certainly the French and even the English can make Celtic claims, and many have

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done so. Much of this thinking was done in places like Edinburgh, Dublin, London, Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, and Berlin, often by those who considered themselves Celts, but equally as often by those who wanted nothing to do with them, or others who were neutral. Germany—not itself considered a Celtic country, although this question generated debate for centuries—has made a huge contribution to our understanding of the Celts, and German thinkers will appear frequently throughout these chapters. Early modern Dutch scholars were also very important in the recovery of the Celts from the classical record, and archaeological discoveries in Austria and Switzerland in the middle of the nineteenth century initiated a major shift in the study and understanding of ancient Celtic geography and material culture. Ideas from even further afield are accounted for as they appeared and became woven into modern Celticism, including from India and North America. My approach emphasises movement and the permeability of historical borders, whether linguistic, geographical, political, intellectual, or cultural.

With these geographical and chronological parameters established, the book tells a new story about the Celts, showing how they transformed from a two-dimensional yet prestigious people from Europe's ancient past into a living and breathing, yet marginalised, people living on the continent's western periphery in the European present. This protracted shift, the primary focus of Parts I and II, was the result of intellectual, cultural, and political flux, but the changing idea of the Celts helped to reshape the very contexts in which it was altered. Part III, which focuses on pan-Celticism, shows how individuals and groups then used these ideas to fashion new 'Celtic' cultural and political identities. It would be impossible to give a comprehensive account of an idea so large, protean, and diffuse; my aim therefore has been to present one that is coherent. The result is the new narrative drawn here.

The Celts: A Modern History

As outlined in chapter 1, the Celts were widely recorded in classical sources from about 500 BCE to 500 CE. Depicted as a fearless warrior people, the Celts marauded across Europe and penetrated well into Asia Minor. One Celtic tribe even sacked Rome. Broadly, though, the Celts were associated with the west of Europe, and especially Gaul. Although they did not offer definitive proof, Caesar and Tacitus surmised strong links among the Gauls, the ancient Britons, and the Hibernians. The Celts gradually vanished from the textual record during the early Middle Ages, but a thousand years later

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they were rediscovered by Renaissance humanists mining the classical sources for ammunition to fire in the inter- and intranational scholarly conflicts that raged across early modern Europe, where new historical origin myths were devised to suit the political and religious needs of the time and place. Generally speaking, the Celts enjoyed great prestige during the early modern period. To claim Celtic lineage was to claim descent from the oldest known inhabitants of Europe, who were fierce warriors ruling large territories, and perhaps even a Europe-wide empire. Scholars from France, the Holy Roman Empire, the Low Countries, England, Wales, and Scotland held views like these over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, arguing over which nation was the closest descendant of the ancient Celts, which they would have encountered countless times in the course of reading the classics by Caesar, Tacitus, and many others discussed in the following chapter.

The Celts as we now understand them became more clearly delineated in the period from about 1690 to 1710 through developments in linguistic scholarship, which are examined in chapter 2. Important steps had been made to recover the remnants of the Gaulish language by seventeenth-century scholars, above all by the Dutchman Marc Zuer van Boxhorn (1612–1653), who linked it to modern Welsh, and these attempts were built upon in different ways by the Breton monk Paul-Yves Pezron (1639–1706), the Welsh scholar Edward Lhwyd, and the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). While Pezron associated the Celts more firmly with Brittany and Wales and the related languages spoken there than anyone previously did, Lhwyd demonstrated that these Brittonic languages were related to the Goidelic languages of Scotland, Ireland, and the Isle of Man. These two language branches—the Brittonic and the Goidelic—together made up the Celtic language family, which strongly suggested that the peoples who spoke these languages in Britain and Ireland were related. As shown for the first time in this book, Leibniz had already speculatively drawn this conclusion, though for separate reasons and by different means, but his suspicion turned to resolution after reading Lhwyd's work. Though Leibniz was particularly influential in the French and German discussions of the Celts, and his contribution to debate in Britain and Ireland should not be underestimated, Pezron and Lhwyd more than any others shaped the parameters within which ideas of the Celts became understood in the eighteenth century and, in Lhwyd's case, beyond.

The Celtic areas of Britain and Ireland thus became firmly established as those nations and regions where English was not spoken. Yet, it was recognised that Celts had once occupied the entirety of Britain and most of Western

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Europe. As shown in Chapter 3, there were features of the landscape across England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, which antiquarians thought could also be identified with the ancient Celts and especially their priestly class, the Druids. Even though Caesar had noted that Druidical ceremonies took place in oak groves, megalithic monuments like Stonehenge, Avebury, and the many similar structures that could be found around Britain, Ireland, and the French coast became associated with the Druids and their ceremonial practices. Although the English antiquary John Aubrey (1626–1697) was an important seventeenth-century precursor, the key decades in which the early 'archaeological' approach to antiquities flowered and yielded an association of megalithic structures with prehistory and the Celtic Druids were the 1710s and 1720s, and the antiquaries who did the most to achieve this were John Toland (1670–1722) and William Stukeley (1687–1765). Concurrent developments in France, where reconstruction work on Notre-Dame de Paris yielded the famous *Pilier des Nautes* (Pillar of the Boatmen) in 1711, helped scholars to get a better sense of the gods unmentioned in classical sources who were worshipped by the ancient Celts and their Druids across Europe.

The poems of Ossian and the controversy they stirred up are the subjects of chapter 4, for they completely reshaped the debate over the ancient Celts in Britain and Ireland. Their 'translator' and composer James Macpherson (1736–1796) was manipulative, disingenuous, and fraudulent, but he was also fiercely clever, and his poems of Ossian were not only a European literary sensation but an ingenious attempt to rewrite the ancient history of Britain and Europe. For by collecting oral poetry and whatever manuscript sources were available, Macpherson sought to recover historical information available only in Gaelic, which he then combined with frameworks more familiar to his non-Gaelic audience. He intuited Enlightenment ideas of civilization, savagery, and society better than almost anyone and wielded them as weapons to attack rival historical interpretations. His version of Celtic history ignited an antiquarian civil war over national histories in Scotland, England, Wales, and Ireland, and which nation could claim most plausibly to be the true descendants of the ancient Celts and first inhabitants of Britain and Ireland. Ironically, while Ossian sowed historiographical discord in Britain and Ireland, the poems raised the reputation of the ancient Celts to new heights across the European continent.

By the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, the background for the events and ideas examined in chapter 5, scholars had access to vital linguistic, archaeological, and literary evidence of Celtic culture that they had not

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possessed a century earlier. All of this could be drawn upon in the long-running battle over French national origins waged between two scholarly camps, one tracing French national descent from the Germanic Franks, the other arguing for more ancient origins in Celtic Gaul. With the Revolution came the triumph of the Gaulish interpretation, symbolised above all by the Abbé Emmanuel Sieyès's encouragement to the French nobility to return across the Rhine to their 'Franconian Forests'. The importance of the Celtic past attained such heights in the Napoleonic period that a Parisian antiquarian society patronised by the empress named itself the *Académie celtique* and dedicated its efforts to illuminating the Celtic origins not only of the ascendant French nation but of the entirety of Europe. This period also witnessed important breakthroughs for the Celtic past in Ireland, where for the first time Anglo-Irish institutions such as the Royal Irish Academy embraced the ancient Celts for historical, political, and religious reasons. In Wales too, the events of the revolutionary period stimulated attempts by patriotic antiquaries—above all the mad genius Iolo Morganwg (1747–1826)—to claim Wales as the birthplace of ancient Celtic civilization and the original home of Druidism. Iolo forged medieval Welsh poetry and integrated it into a philosophical system supposedly inherited from the Druids, inventing traditions in the process that remain integral to popular Celticism to this day.

Part I thus focuses on the ways in which a convincing picture of the Celts was drawn in the early modern period—primarily through a recovery from the classical record, but also as the result of innovative linguistic, archaeological, mythographical, folkloristic, and historiographical techniques—which could then be drawn on in the vital period of national identity formation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Part II the narrative moves into the nineteenth century and is underpinned by the inception of the idea of race in European thought. By fundamentally altering the conceptual foundations of nations and their characters—which, depending on the thinker, could be seen as determined partially or entirely as a result of racial composition—this new understanding of people and populations transformed the picture of the Celts.

As examined in detail in chapter 6, one of the main subjects of contention that arose with racial theory was whether the Celtic race belonged to the wider European family or not. Significant developments in the field of comparative philology—the most important discipline for racial classification well into the nineteenth century—showed that most of the European languages, and therefore peoples, were related and descended from a common ancestor. Yet some

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hostile scholars alleged that the Celts were a separate—and likely inferior—race entirely. However, the English scientist James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848) realised by at least 1813 that the Celtic languages could be classed within the Indo-European language family, though he did not publish definitive proof until 1831. Several years later he was followed by the Genevan Adolphe Pictet (1799–1875) and the German Franz Bopp (1791–1867), who each illuminated new aspects of the historical development of the Celtic languages in support of their Indo-European credentials. However, the most important work of the century, which appeared in 1853, was by a German teacher named Johann Kaspar Zeuß (1806–1856). Basing his scholarship on the oldest known Irish manuscripts—stashed away in the monasteries of central Europe—Zeuß was able to trace the history of the Celtic languages in greater detail than ever before. His scientific study laid the foundation for the academic field of Celtic studies.

At the same time as these impressive linguistic works were being composed, writers were refashioning national identities in large historical and literary works that drew on the latest scientific research. Chapter 7 teases out their political implications. Sometimes these were fairly subtle, as in the case of Scotland, where Walter Scott (1771–1832) promoted reconciliation between Highland Celts and Lowland Saxons as important members of the British nation; or, in the case of Wales, where a few scholars sought to hold their compatriots and national mythologies to increasingly rigorous scientific standards and had no political line to pursue beyond cultural patriotism. However, embracing the Celtic past had dramatic political implications in other places. In politically volatile France, for example, where liberals and republicans looked to the example of their warlike Celtic ancestors the Gauls; and in Ireland, where the nationally minded Young Ireland group embraced the Celts and their laudable qualities in the face of Anglo-Saxon racism during the years of the Great Famine, before their dismal failed rebellion in 1848. In Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, archaeological breakthroughs and the theory of 'Celtic Art' played into the consolidation of national and regional identities, supporting centralisation in some places and federalism in others. Coming at the subject from racial and literary angles, Ernest Renan penned his famous essay 'La poésie des races celtiques' in 1854, which catalysed the study of Celtic literature and contributed to the rise of the pan-Celtic movement.

The question of race is at the heart of chapter 8, which shows how ideas of the Celts were fashioned and deployed in relation to the 'Irish Question' that dominated British politics throughout the nineteenth century. With the

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racialisation of nations and peoples, new ideas of the Celts were promulgated, both by those who identified as Celts and those who despised and demonised them. If taken to its logical extreme, the idea of race could cut through the Gordian knot of religion, class, and politics—in other words, of history. The question, therefore, is to what extent the idea of the Celtic race was a *causal* explanation of, or an answer to, the Irish Question. The answer is not to any great extent, and to a lesser degree than some have argued. Instead, I show how a range of different thinkers deployed the idea of the Celts as it suited their other arguments, and that although monolithic anti-Celtic racism did exist, it was a minority position. This was almost inevitable after the key decade of the 1860s, when scientists started to argue that all nations were racial hybrids, an idea applied to the literary culture of the Celtic nations by Matthew Arnold in his *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867).

With the recovery of the Celts as prestigious national ancestors through a variety of developments in scholarship—the subject of Part I—and the shift in ideas about the Celts that occurred through the rise of racial theory—examined in Part II—the final third of the book is the first thorough and scholarly examination of pan-Celticism.[65] I employ two loose definitions of pan-Celticism.[66] The first (lower-case p) 'pan-Celticism' denotes an informal series of networks, journals, and correspondence, ranging across scholarship, cultural groups, and occasionally politics, that accepts a shared Celtic descent and therefore racial, cultural, and linguistic links among the Celtic nations. Often this kind of pan-Celticism is mobilised in pursuit of common political goals. The second (Upper-Case P) 'Pan-Celticism' denotes the enshrinement of pan-Celticism in a formally organized movement with its own institutions, mobilized in pursuit of stated pan-Celtic cultural and political goals. In other words, pan-Celticism is merely an awareness by 'Celtic' peoples of shared links among them; Pan-Celticism is a self-conscious pan-national movement mobilized to promote and strengthen those links. The goal of Pan-Celticism *is* Pan-Celticism, often envisioned politically in a federation of the Celtic nations, or culturally, as by E. E. Fournier d'Albe in *Celtia*.

The origins of pan-Celticism are traced in chapter 9 to the 1830s and the Celtic *Eisteddfod* of 1838, where the influential Welsh cultural group *Cymdeithas Cymreigyddion y Fenni* hosted a deputation of five Bretons to Abergavenny. Welsh-Breton links remained intact throughout the century and were strengthened by French nationalists, who viewed Brittany as the Celtic spiritual repository of the French nation. Together they hosted a *Congrès celtique international* at St. Brieuc in 1867. The 1838 Abergavenny *Eisteddfod* only in-

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volved the Bretons, while the *Congrès celtique* aimed at true pan-Celtic participation but only drew a handful of participants from Wales and Cornwall. Yet both these events transcended their ephemerality and became lodged in the pre-history of the later Pan-Celtic movement.[67] The links among Wales, Brittany, and France were also vital in the emergence of the first Celtic studies journal and the professionalisation of Celtic studies as an academic field, a subject first discussed in chapter 9 and revisited throughout Part III.

National identities in Britain and Ireland also progressively consolidated around Celticism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when pan-Celtic ideas became mobilised in order to demand reform from a British parliament dominated by English interests. Chapter 10 examines pan-Celticism within the political framework of land reform across the 'Four Nations', which was intimately linked to nascent nationalist movements. Congresses remained popular forums in which to explore pan-Celticism, but whereas the Cambro-Breton exchanges had been culturally focused, political organising was the main goal of the land-based pan-Celtic movement, culminating in the Pan-Celtic League founded in 1886. The literature on the land question is huge—particularly in the case of Ireland—but while studies have noted the existence and occasional manipulation of Celtic links between nations,[68] these have not as yet been considered within the context of a developing pan-Celticism, which is the purpose of this chapter.

Chapter 11 returns us to E. E. Fournier d'Albe and his Celtic Association, which I consider the first real Pan-Celtic society. The Celtic Association was the first to promote the closer association of all of the Celtic nations as an end in itself, rather than as a booster movement for a particular nationalist group or goal. It sought to create a distinctive Celtic future to be realised in a new Celtic polity: *Celtia*. The Celtic Association organised three congresses—in Dublin, Caernarfon, and Edinburgh—and attracted the (usually brief) involvement of many of the leading cultural figures interested in Celticism. Though it was short-lived, the Celtic Association drew the blueprint for the forms that the twentieth-century Pan-Celtic movement would take, and in which it still exists.

As even this cursory sketch will show, ideas of the Celts have shapeshifted through time, and continue to do so to this day. For this reason, I have decided not to give this book a traditional conclusion and instead follow several threads down to the present in chapter 12. The main narrative concerns the rise of Ireland in the world of Celtic studies and the decline of Germany, where the mobilisation of Celtology by the Third Reich nearly destroyed it there as a real

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science. It was in the twentieth century that the history of Celticism itself began, when Eoin MacNeill noted that the 'modern Celtic consciousness' had a 'somewhat academic origin'.[69] This fact is ironic in the context of the story of Celticism in the second half of the twentieth century. For at the same time that Celtic studies became firmly established as a scholarly field producing major advancements in knowledge, the growing Celtic popular movements became increasingly untethered from the scholarly record. Whereas in previous centuries scholars of the Celts and Celtic revivalists had often been one and the same, that connection weakened as scholarly rigour increased and the Celts became circumscribed by their existence in the sources, while Celtic revivalists needed material that was inspiring and malleable. Instead, leading Celtic scholars are turning the tools of modern science to answering the almost timeless question: Who were the Celts? The story of Celticism is evolving all the time, and that is the reason why the chapter with which this book ends is not a conclusion.

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INDEX

/ | \ (mystic mark), 170, 234

Abaris, 102
Abbey Theatre, 339, 361
Abergavenny, 22, 194, 215, 234, 293, 298–99; eisteddfod of 1838, 293, 299–302, 306, 349
Abergavenny Welsh Society. *See* Cymdeithas Cymreigyddion y Fenni
Abraham, 64
Académie celtique, 20, 150–52, 156–58, 175–80, 188, 206, 207, 296, 309, 438n7
Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres, 65, 85–90, 113, 115, 204, 299
Académie française, 156, 443n115
Act of Union (1800), 12, 261
Adelung, Johann Christoph, 190, 195–96
Aeneas, 36–37, 41
Ahnenerbe, 383–85
air power, 359–60
Alésia, 255
Alexander the Great, 30
Allen, Grant, 338, 398n17
Alsace, 311
American Revolution, 154
American School of Celtic Studies, idea for, 378
Ampère, Jean-Jacques, 206
Anatolia, 11, 29, 31, 167
ancient DNA, 6, 396
Ancient Order of Hibernians, 375
An Claidheamh Soluis, 373, 473n109
An Comunn Gaidhealach, 349
Anglesey, 79, 96–97, 167
Anglo-Irish literary nationalist movement, 333–40
Anglo-Norman Invasion of Ireland, 37, 355
Anglo-Saxons, 5, 14, 129, 263, 271, 284
Angoulême, 296
An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland (James Macpherson), 122, 127–29, 146
Anne, Princess of Wales, 110
Annius of Viterbo, 43–46, 51–53, 142
Anthropological Institute, 282
Anthropological Society of London, 280–83
Anticipations (H.G. Wells), 360
anti-imperialism, 358–61, 390
Antiquity (journal), 8
Aquileia, 111
Aram, Eugene, 59–60
Archaeologia Britannica (Edward Lhwyd), 57, 65–73, 88
archaeology, 3, 6–7, 11, 66, 92–117, 177, 217–18, 238, 239, 244, 250–57, 279, 370, 377, 394
Arcueil, 150
Aristotle, 30, 35
Arnold, Matthew, 11, 22, 41, 206, 223, 232, 250, 263, 283–87, 394–96
Arnold, Thomas, 198, 263–65
Arnould, Joseph, 193
Aryans, 5, 208, 246, 276, 287, 305, 324, 364, 374, 378

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Ashkenaz, 36, 42, 49
Ashmolean Museum, 66
Asia Minor, 17, 30–31, 42, 53, 62
Assyrians, 92
Astrée (Honoré d'Urfé), 99
Aubrey, John, 19, 66, 71, 99–101, 103
Austria, xiii, 3, 7, 17, 21, 217, 251, 253, 257, 377, 380–81
Avebury, 19, 93–94, 100–101, 105–06, 109–10, 118, 167
Aventinus, Johannes, 46

Babylonians, 92
Bacon-Tacon, Pierre, 179
Badenoch, 122–23
Bale, John, 51–52, 97
Baner ac Amserau Cymru, 329
Barddas notebooks (Iolo Morganwg), 170, 228, 236
Bardism (of Iolo Morganwg), 165–72, 225–29, 235–37, 309
Bards, 101, 118, 121, 124, 135–36, 163, 167–73, 196, 224, 232–35
Barrès, Maurice, 345
Barzaz Breiz (Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué), 247, 299, 301, 307
Basque language, 71, 73, 103, 158, 161, 179, 190, 207, 214, 276, 412n39, 439n23
Bast, Martin-Jean de, 190
battle axes, 252
Battle of the Braes, 324
Baudelot de Dairval, Charles César, 112–13
Baudis, Josef, 381
Bavaria, 192, 210–13, 253
Baxter, William, 73, 85
Bayle, Pierre, 412n24
BBC, 3
Beatus Rhenanus, 46–47
Beaumont, Gustave de, 260
Beauzée, Nicholas, 88
Becanus, Johannes Goropius, 48, 82, 161
Beddoe, John, 282–83
Bede, 37
Bel-Air, 253, 255
Belenus, 104, 111, 113, 115
Belgae, 106, 129, 196
Belges, Jean Lemaire de, 45
Belleforest, François de, 46
Bellovesus, 31, 176
Benedictines of Saint-Maur, 86–87, 94, 113–14
Benfey, Theodor, 200
Bere, Clifford, 389
Bergin, Osborn, 371
Berkeley, Bishop George, 56
Berlin, 17, 206, 209, 363, 371, 384; Academy of Sciences, 77, 89–90, 209, 242; University of, 357, 367, 371, 381, 386
Bernard, Edward, 67, 70–71, 74
Bertrand, Alexandre, 255, 279
Best, Richard, 371, 380–81, 386, 478n53
Best, Werner, 384
Betham, Sir William, 188, 201, 213, 239–41, 319, 451n146
Bezen Perrot, 385, 389
Bible, 28, 36, 42, 193; Breton translation of, 294–96
Binchy, D.A., 379
Birch, Samuel, 251
Birmingham University, 361
Blackie, John Stuart, 324–25
Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1, 328
Blair, Hugh, 123–28, 138, 143, 426n90
Bloomsbury, 340
Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, 274, 459n117
Bochart, Samuel, 62, 64, 109, 156, 411n24
Bodin, Jean, 42, 45, 47–49
Boece, Hector, 52, 97
Boer War, 346, 353
Boisrouvray, Louis Jacquelot de, 300
Bombay, 190
Bonamy, Pierre-Nicolas, 88
Bonaparte, Napoléon, 119, 151, 158–60, 176, 179, 216
Bonar Bridge, 329–30
Bonneville, Nicolas de, 156, 169, 432n27
Book of Kells, 256

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Bopp, Franz, 21, 186, 191–92, 197–201, 207–10, 214, 230
Borlase, William, 85
Boscawen-Un, 100
Boston, 271, 341–42, 378; *Boston Globe*, 378; the Celtics (NBA team), 4
Boswell, James, 122, 143
Boudica, 33–34
Bougainville, Louis-Antoine de, 157
Boulainvilliers, Henri de, 87
Brandes, H.B.C., 214
Breiz Atao, 384
Brennus, 30, 37, 64, 113
Brerewood, Edward, 67
Breton language, xix, 47–48, 50, 60–65, 74–75, 79, 85–86, 88–89, 103, 150, 154–58, 177–80, 188, 191, 205–06, 300–301, 358, 411n21
Breuriez-Breiz, 302–3, 306
Bright, John, 281
Brissot, Jacques Pierre, 169
Bristol, 192–94
British and Foreign Bible Society, 294–95
British Association for the Advancement of Science, 199
British Museum, 3, 198, 251, 256, 353, 394
Britons, ancient, 7, 17, 32–34, 37–40, 47, 50–55, 68–70, 76, 79–80, 98, 100, 105, 109, 115, 132, 136–37, 145, 149, 194, 201, 221, 240, 295, 327, 374
Brittonic languages, xix, 18, 59–61, 74, 88–90, 187, 210–11, 214, 294, 368, 444n134
Brizeux, Auguste, 299
Broca, Paul, 206, 276–79, 458n89
Bromwich, Rachel, 283, 365
Brooke, Charlotte, 142, 163–64, 365
Brucker, Jacob, 92
Bruges, 202
Brutus, 37, 39, 51–54, 79–80, 105
Buchanan, George, 7, 52–53, 57, 374
Buchner, Andreas, 211
Buckle, Henry Thomas, 269–70
Bullet, Jean-Baptiste, 88–89, 128, 140, 145, 157, 190, 211
Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies, 369
Burke, Edmund, 138, 141, 162, 271
Burnouf, Eugène, 204
Butt, Isaac, 317

Caernarfon, 23, 346, 353, 361
Caesar, Gaius Julius, 7, 17–19, 29, 32–35, 41, 44–45, 64, 93–95, 98, 105, 113, 127, 133, 136, 157, 168, 170, 255, 268, 277–78, 404n25, 411n24
Caithness, 321
Caius, John, 97
Caledonians, ancient, 33, 119, 122, 125, 128–32, 426n59
Callimachus, 34
Calonne, Charles-Alexandre de, 154
Calvinism, 139
Cambrian Archaeological Association, 229, 236
Cambridge, 17; University of, 41, 97, 105, 192, 198, 262, 365, 377, 393
Cambry, Jacques, 150, 175–78
Camden, William, 53–57, 61, 66, 69, 74, 93, 97–98, 100, 111
Campbell, J.F., 369, 424n16
Cane, Robert, 316
Cardiff, 168, 342, 344–45
Carlyle, Alexander, 123
Carlyle, Thomas, 263, 267, 297
Carmichael, Alexander, 344, 347, 369
Carmichael, Elizabeth (Ella), 347, 369
Carn, 391
Carnot, Lazare, 157
Carroll, William, 319, 322
Carte, Thomas, 95, 134
Carthage, 120
Casement, Roger, 372
Caspian Sea, 63
Cassius Dio, 34
Catherine the Great, 154
Catholic Committee, 140
Catholic emancipation, 261, 264–65, 267
Catholicism, 12, 241, 262
Catholic University of America, 375

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Catullus, 59
Cecil, Robert (Lord Salisbury), 398n17
Celtae, 6, 27, 35, 44, 46, 52, 55, 59, 83, 93, 120, 127–28, 135, 141, 152, 163, 166, 174, 188, 196, 238, 240, 399n23
Celtia (journal), 1, 22, 346–49, 354–61
'Celtia' (map), 1–2, 346–48
Celtica, 7, 27, 45, 49, 52–53, 78, 84, 128, 177, 278
Celtic alphabet, 170, 404n25
Celtic art theory, 21, 250–57, 394
Celtic Association, 1, 5, 23, 319, 333–62, 363, 371, 386, 392
Celtic Christianity, 295, 366
Celtic Congress (f. 1917), 379, 386–88. *See also* International Union of Celtic Societies
Celtic domination of ancient Germans, theory of, 257, 380–81
Celtic femininity, idea of, 247, 249–50, 285, 339
Celtic 'Fringe', 27, 338, 347, 398n17
Celtic from the Centre theory, 396
Celtic from the West theory, 3, 395–96
Celtic gods, 93–94, 99, 110–16
Celticism, definition of, 9–10
Celtic League, 364, 389–92
Celtic Literary Society, 337
Celtic Magazine, 323, 325
Celtic Renascence, 333, 338–40
Celtic Review, 369
Celtic Revival, 338, 343, 363–64
Celtic Society (*c.*1802–3), 152, 173–75
Celtic studies, 5–10, 20–24, 59–60, 78, 152, 185–215, 237–47, 279, 286, 299, 307–12, 363–96. *See also* Celtology
Celtic Twilight, xi, 333–36, 355, 361, 390
Celtic Union, 271, 316
Celtic Voice, 390
Celtis, Conrad, 46, 97
Celto-Germanic question, 46–50, 64, 111, 113, 189–90, 366, 384
Celto-Gothic confusion, 89–90, 143–48, 210–14
Celtology, 6, 23, 185–87, 299, 363–64, 366, 372, 381–86
Celtomania, 8, 61, 179, 186, 199, 210–15, 236, 252, 365, 393, 438n7, 443n115
Celtophobic racism, 145–48, 150, 166, 220, 267, 270, 321, 374
Celtoscepticism, 5–10, 395–96
Celto-Scythians, 30, 60, 77, 190
Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique, 393
Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 393
cephalic index, 274–78
Cernunnos, 112–15
Chadwick, H.M., 393
Chadwick, Nora, 365, 394
Chalmers, George, 174, 221
Chapman, Malcolm, 9
Charencey, Hyacinthe de, 309
Charles II, 100
Chartism, 267
Chester Castle, 318
Cicero, 32
Cimbri, 55, 129, 131, 137
Clan na Gael, 318–19, 372
Clark, Gavin Brown, 328
Cleland, John, 84–85
Clodd, Edward, 338
Clüver, Philipp, 27, 49, 67, 72, 84, 89, 139, 144–46, 189, 210, 214
Cobden, Richard, 258–59, 273
Coelbren y Beirdd, 170–72, 234–36
Coke, Edward, 55, 420n24
Colebrooke, Henry Thomas, 191
Collège de France, 247, 370, 379
Collis, John, 7–8, 34, 257, 394–95
Combe, George, 258, 262, 272–74
Commission de la topographie des Gaules, 254–55
Comte de Caylus, 114
Condorcet, Marquis de, 154–55
Congrès celtique international, 22–23, 291, 302, 306–308, 349
Connemara, 342, 344, 356

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Constant, Benjamin, 117
Constantine, Mary-Ann, 116, 133, 165, 217, 301, 365
Contemporary Club, 335
Cork, 341, 347
Cork Examiner, 315
Cornhill Magazine, 283, 286
Cornwall, 1, 4, 16, 23, 61, 68, 76, 100, 158, 307, 326–27, 347, 351, 364, 377, 389, 392
Council of Europe, 389
County Antrim, 373
County Clare, 162, 245
County Mayo, 318
Court de Gébelin, Antoine, 155–56, 188, 190, 206
Coxe, William, 174
Craniometry, 274–79
crannogs, 254
Creed of the Celtic Revolution (Peter Berresford Ellis), 390
Criccieth, 328
Crimea, 27
Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian (Hugh Blair), 125–27
Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act (1886), 324
Crofters War, 320–26, 330
cubit, 106
Cú Chulainn, 400n31
Culloden, 122, 125, 280
Cunliffe, Barry, 395–96
Curtis Jr., L.P., 261–63
Cuvier, Georges, 197
Cymdeithas Cymreigyddion y Fenni, 297–302
Cymdeithas y Ddaear i'r Bobl, 327
Cymdeithas y Gwyneddigion, 162, 166–68
Cymmrodorion Society, 166, 345

Dacia, 29, 111
Dafydd ap Gwilym, 167, 172
Dail Éireann, 363, 379
Daily Telegraph, 9
Dalkey, 341
Danes, 39, 100, 129, 240
Danube, 128–29
d'Arbois de Jubainville, 257, 308, 323, 364, 370–71, 380, 381
d'Arcy Mcgee, Thomas, 244
Daunt, William O'Neill, 240
Davies, Evan, 236–37
Davies, John, 50, 54, 66, 190, 198, 419n16
Davies, Rev. Edward, 54, 152, 172
Davis, Thomas, 242–44, 316
Davitt, Michael, 314–19, 322, 325, 328–29, 335, 346
Déchelette, Joseph, 257, 372
Declaration of Arbroath, 39
Delâtre, Louis, 213
Delphi, 31
Denina, Carlo, 176, 178
Denmark, 72, 250, 359
Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 393
Derouet, Jakez, 390
Derry, 103
Des caractères physiologiques des races humaines considérés dans leurs rapports avec l'histoire (William Frédéric Edwards), 201–6, 276
Desor, Édouard, 255–56
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Keltische Studien, 382–84
de Valera, Éamon, 373, 378–80, 382, 388, 393, 480n94
Devoy, John, 319, 326
Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme (Johann Kaspar Zeuß), 211
Diefenbach, Lorenz, 199
Dieu, Louis de, 56
Dijon, 106
Dillon, John, 322
Dillon, John Blake, 242
Dillon, Myles, 375, 394
Dîners celtiques, 311
Diodorus Siculus, 30–31
Diogenes Laertius, 92, 114
Directory (1795–1799), 157, 176
Dis, 44

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Dissertation on the Origins and Progress of the Scythians or Goths (John Pinkerton), 146–48
Diviciacus, 32
Dottin, Georges, 388
Draak, Martje, 365
Dreyfus Affair, 13
Druids, 19–20, 32–33, 44–46, 92–117, 118, 128, 132–34, 148, 162, 165, 167–73, 225–29, 305, 374
Du Bellay, Guillaume, 45
Dublin, 17, 23, 68, 138, 208, 241–44, 256, 306, 322, 332–60, 371, 377–78, 388
Dublin University Review, 335
Dubos, Jean-Baptiste, 87
Duclos, Charles Pinot, 87, 99, 110, 115
Duke of Argyll (8th), 325
Dulaure, Jacques-Antoine, 156, 176, 178
du Marc'hallac'h, Auguste François, 302
Dunbar, Nan, 8
Dunkeld, 81–82, 124
d'Urfé, Honoré, 99
Durkacz, Victor, 391
Durkehim, Émile, 3
Duval, Amaury, 157
'Dying Gaul', 42, 160

Early Irish Laws and Institutions (Eoin MacNeill), 374–75
Eastern Crisis, 326
The Eastern Origin of the Celtic Nations (James Cowles Prichard), 186, 193, 196–97, 199–201, 205, 206–7, 210, 242
Easter Rising, 334, 372
East India Company, 190, 195
École pratique des hautes études, 309, 369
Economist, the, 259, 392
Edinburgh, 17, 23, 103, 123–24, 193, 206, 219, 221–22, 272, 280, 333, 338, 346, 353, 387; University of, 122, 185, 192, 324, 369, 393; University Library, 207
Edinburgh Review, 148, 195
Edwards, Charles, 54
Edwards, William Frédéric, 187, 201–6, 215, 224–26, 259, 265, 274, 276–77
Egyptians, 55, 57
Eisteddfod, 165, 168, 173, 228–29, 232–37, 282, 291, 294–95, 298, 335, 341, 344–45, 353–54, 386, 389; of 1838, 22, 194, 200, 293, 297, 299–303, 306, 308, 349
Elichmann, Johannes, 49, 56
Ellis, George, 174
Ellis, Peter Berresford, 390–92
Ellis, Thomas Edward, 328–29
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 262
Emili, Paolo, 406n75
Enfield, William, 92
Engels, Friedrich, 267–69, 451n134
Englynion, 136
Ephorus of Cyme, 29
Ériu, 371–72
Erny, Alfred, 303
Erro, Juan Bautisto, 178–79
Erskine, Rhuaraidh, 387–90
Esperanto, 357, 359
Estienne, Henri, 45
Estourbeillon, Régis Marie Joseph, Marquis de l', 344, 346, 354
Esus, 94, 112–15, 225
Ethnological Society of London, 279–82
Etruscans, 170, 326
etymology, 35, 48, 64, 69, 77, 84, 93, 98, 137, 166, 178–80, 213, 241, 246, 368, 381, 399n23, 420n25, 421n54
Euphrates River, 62
European Renaissance, xi, 4–5, 9, 12, 16, 18, 27, 36, 39–57, 97–98
European Union, 3
Evans, Evan, 121, 134–36, 144, 413n73
Evans, Theophilus, 80

Fáinne an Lae, 347–48, 373
The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland (Michael Davitt), 319
Fauriel, Claude, 224–25

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Federation of Celtic Societies, 322
Feis Ceoil, 341–43
Félibien, Dom Michel, 114
Fenianism, 262, 281–83, 286, 316, 318–19, 323, 327, 337
Fenius Fársaid, 38
Fergus I, 39, 52
Feutren, Louis, 385
Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem (James Macpherson), 123–27, 132, 138, 143
Finistère, 150, 154
Finn Mac Cumaill, 404n35
Finns, 255, 276
Flood, Henry, 163–64
Folklore, 11, 120, 177–78, 239, 309, 323, 337, 369, 382–83
Fordun, John of, 39
Förster, Max, 386
Foster, Roy, 334, 337, 340
Foster, Thomas Campbell, 270
Fountaine, Andrew, 75–76
'Four Nations' history, 401n53
Fournier d'Albe, Edmund Edward, 1, 5, 15, 22–23, 332–62
Fragments of Ancient Poetry (James Macpherson), 123–25, 129, 132, 143
Franco, Francisco, 364
Franconia, 210
Franco-Prussian War, 13, 303
Frankish invasion, 36, 86–87, 89, 150, 156, 180, 202, 223, 305
Franklin, Benjamin, 154
Franks, 3, 20, 36–37, 44–45, 47–48, 86–87, 99, 117, 203
Franks, Augustus Wollaston, 256
Franz Joseph I, 254
Fraser, John, 369
Fraser Mackintosh, Charles, 323, 325
Fredegar, 36–37
Frederick the Great, 176
Freeman, E.A., 287–88
Freiburg, 252, 365, 367, 371, 375, 386
French Republic. First, 157–59; Third, 228
French Revolution (of 1789), 4, 12, 19, 150–51, 153–60, 169, 172, 401n46
Fréret, Nicolas, 88, 115
Frongoch, 373
Fructidor Coup, 157
Fry, Edmund, 172
Furetière, Antoine, 86

Gaelic Journal, 373
Gaelic League, 317, 336, 341–44, 346, 348, 356, 373, 387
Gaelic nationalist movement (Ireland), 334–35, 371
Gaelic Society of Dublin, 164
Gaelic Society of Inverness, 322
Gaels, 196, 211, 307; of Ireland, 38, 164, 166, 238, 327, 331, 336, 396; of Scotland, 122, 129, 196, 317, 319
Gaidoz, Henri, 237, 247, 303, 308–11, 346, 364, 370, 373, 415n118, 465n110, 478n63
Gaisberger, Joseph, 253
Galatae, 6, 35, 399n23
Galatia, 29
Galicia, 3, 392
Galilee, 380
Gall, Franz Joseph, 272
Galli, 6, 35, 38, 44, 46, 52, 380, 399n23
Gallic Wars (Caesar), 32, 35, 41
Galls and Kymris theory in France, 203–4, 224–25, 277
Garnett, Richard, 198, 298–99
Gaulish language, 7, 18, 43–48, 50, 53–54, 64, 66–67, 69–70, 72–81, 86, 88, 93, 98, 101, 103, 113, 155, 190, 200, 205, 211
de Gaulle, Charles (general), 303
de Gaulle, Charles (poet), 302–9, 311–12
Gavan Duffy, Charles, 242–44, 271
Gazette de France, 302
Geddes, Patrick, 333, 338, 346, 351, 353–54
Gee, Thomas, 329
Genesis, Book of, 36, 62, 139, 231
Geoffrey of Monmouth, 37, 39, 51, 99, 231
George, Henry, 318, 328

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George, William, 353
George IV, 164, 222
Gerald of Wales, 56, 61
Germania (Tacitus), 7, 32, 43, 46, 214
Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, 295
Gessner, Conrad, 47
Gibbon, Edward, 36, 132, 137, 145–46, 164, 271, 426n48
Gilbert, John T., 247
Gildas, 37
Gill, T.P., 346
Gillies, John, 148
Girodet, François, 159
Gladstone, William, 261, 297, 324–25
Glamorgan, 165–69, 235, 435n102
Glasgow, 103, 322, 323, 325, 369, 477n30
Glorious Revolution (1688), 266
Gobineau, Arthur, Comte de, 277
Godwin, William, 169
Goidelic languages, xix, 18, 60, 187, 214, 294
Gomer, 34, 36–37, 42, 53, 59, 62, 65, 80, 95, 114, 155, 229–30
Gonne, Maud, 337, 340, 343, 345, 361
Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain, 151–52, 165–73, 180, 228, 237, 300, 332, 341, 344–46, 349–50, 353
Gosselin, Antoine, 411n24
Gothicism, 55, 118, 143–48
Gothic migrations, 29
Goths, 126–28, 135, 144–47, 150, 186, 188, 230, 271
Göttingen, 196, 274
Gouges, Olympe de, 155
Grafton, Anthony, 40
Graham, Thomas, 122
Grammatica Celtica (Johann Kaspar Zeuß), 187, 208, 210, 212–14, 238, 241, 308, 366
Grandidier, Philippe-André, 155
Grant, Ulysses S., 326
Graves, Alfred Percival, 335, 346, 361
Graves, Robert, 292, 346
Gray, Thomas, 135, 143
Great Famine, 21, 238, 270–71, 315
Great Reform Act (1832), 267
Great Repeal Year (1843), 270
Great War, 372
Greece, 6, 28, 31, 41–42, 46, 53, 59, 62, 120, 135, 141, 177, 207, 271, 359–60
Greek language, 33, 40, 45–46, 50, 56, 59, 62–77, 80–86, 148, 155, 170, 186, 191, 195–97, 207
Green, Alice Stopford, 371
Grégoire, Abbé Henri, 156–57
Gregory, Lady Augusta, 339–40, 342–44, 353, 471n24
Gregory of Tours, 36
Grieve, Christopher, 388–89
Griffith, Arthur, 337
Grimm, Jacob, 176, 191, 196–97, 199, 207, 212, 235, 242, 259, 309, 370
Guenebault, Jean, 106
Guest, Lady Charlotte, 228, 231–34, 247, 249, 301
Guizot, François, 202
Gwynn, E.J., 380

Hall, Augustua, Lady Llanover, 297, 303, 307
Hallam, Henry, 298
Hallstatt, 7, 253–54, 256, 379, 381, 396
Ham, 36
Hamilton, Alexander, 188, 195
Hanes Cymru a Chenedl y Cymry (Thomas Price), 231, 233
Hannibal, 31
Harcourt, William Vernon, 325
Harrison, William, 51–52
Harvard Irish Survey, 377–79
Harvard University, 372–79, 393
Hearne, Thomas, 85
Hebrew language, 40, 50, 54, 66, 80, 82, 85, 113, 139, 173, 198, 236, 419n16
Hebrews, 96
Hecataeus of Miletus, 29
Hechter, Michael, 14
Heiermeier, Annie, 365, 386

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Helvetii, 44
Hemon, Roparz, 384
Henry VIII, 51, 54
Hercules, 45, 85, 104
Herder, J. G., 90
Herodian, 111
Herodotus, 29
Heusaff, Alan, 389–92
Heyne, Christian Gottlob, 176
Hibernia, 29, 43.
Hibernian Antiquarian Society, 56
Hickes, George, 67, 72, 144–45, 426n46
Hielscher, Friedrich, 383, 385
Higgin, James, 281
Highlander (John Murdoch), 319, 322, 325
Highland Land Law Reform Association, 329
Highlands, of Scotland, 8, 67–68, 82, 117, 120–33, 143, 149, 221–23, 248, 305, 314–15, 318, 320–26, 335, 342, 357
Highland Society of London, 222
Hildebrand, Hans, 256
Himmler, Heinrich, 383
Hirlas Horn, 350
Histoire de France (Henri Martin), 226
Histoire de France (Jules Michelet), 225–26
Histoire des Gaulois (Amédée Thierry), 203, 224
Hitler, Adolf, 380
Holinshed, Raphael, 51
Holtzmann, Adolf, 211, 214
Holy Roman Empire, 18, 44, 46
Home, Henry, Lord Kames, 123–24, 132, 193
Home, John, 122
Homer, 59, 85, 122, 124
Home Rule (Irish), 261, 283, 288, 317–18, 324–25; 'all round', 313, 330, 364, 386–87; Scottish, 323, 329
Hooton, Earnest A., 377–78
Horn, Georg, 50
Hotman, François, 48, 407n91, 409n133
House of Commons, 328, 342
House of Keys, 347
House of Lords, 341
Hubert, Henri, 3
Hudson, William Elliot, 242, 244
Hughes, Rev. John, 295
human sacrifice, 33, 94, 113, 115
Hume, David, 122–23, 126, 132, 138, 140, 165
Hunt, James, 281
Huxley, Thomas Henry, 282–83, 287
Hwfa Môn, 346
Hyde, Douglas, 11, 335–36, 342–45, 371, 388
Hyde, Thomas, 104

Iberno-Celtic Society, 164
Iceni, 33
Idéologues, 157
idolatry, 96, 98
Ieuan Ddu, 327
Ihre, Johan, 61, 146
Illyria, 110
index of 'negrescence', 283
India, 7, 17, 155, 195–96, 211
Indo-European language family, xix, 21, 64, 181, 185–215, 230, 232–34, 240, 285, 299, 368, 381, 386
Inishowen, 103
Innes, Thomas, 125, 129–31, 137
Institut national, 175
International Congress of Celtic Studies, 393
International Union of Celtic Societies, 386–87
invasion-scare fiction, 326
'invention of tradition', 8, 394–95, 400n31
Inverness Courier, 321
Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams), 20, 151, 165–75, 180, 194, 196, 207, 220, 223–28, 228–37, 249, 297–98, 303, 309, 369
Irish Archaeological Society, 245
Irish Folklore Commission, 283
Irish Free State, 336, 363, 37–73, 377–78
Irish Ireland movement, 332, 336
Irish Land War (1879–1882), 315–20

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Irish language, 35, 38, 66–67, 82–83, 101–3, 142, 161–62, 241–42, 244, 317, 341, 344, 356, 374, 379, 384
Irish National Land League, 318
Irish Ordnance Survey, 239, 241–42, 245
Irish Parliamentary Party, 314
Irish Question, 21–22, 188, 258–88
Irish Republican Army (IRA), 387
Irish Republican Brotherhood, 316, 318
Irish Studies Committee (of RIA), 379–80
Irish Tenant League, 316
Iron Age, 251, 255–56, 379, 394
Isidore of Seville, 34, 44–45, 65
Islay, 322
Isle of Man, xii, 1, 16, 18, 60, 67, 79, 90, 97, 104, 239, 347, 357, 364
Italy, 30–31, 38, 42, 44, 53, 62, 100, 110, 160, 212, 359

Jackson, Kenneth, 367, 369, 375, 393
Jacobite Uprising of 1745–6, 81, 122, 125, 320
Jaffrennou, François, 344
James, Simon, 8, 394–95
James I and VI, 52
James II, 100
Japhet, 36, 38, 42, 43, 44, 46, 49, 53, 55, 62–63
Jauffret, Louis-François, 189
Jefferson, Thomas, 90, 132
Jenner, Henry, 347, 353
Jesus College, Oxford, 66, 232, 393
Jesus Professor of Celtic, Oxford, 286–87, 346, 369
Johanneau, Éloi, 175, 177–80, 188
John, Edward Thomas, 386–88
John, S.R., 348
Johnes, A.J., 298, 307–08
Johnson, Joseph, 169
Johnson, Samuel, 13, 119, 126, 133, 135, 143–44
Jones, Apollonia, 297
Jones, Evan Pan, 327–28, 330
Jones, Michael D., 305, 327–28
Jones, Owen. *See* Myfyr, Owen
Jones, Rowland, 85
Jones, Sir William, 153, 155, 186, 190–91, 195
Jordanes, 146
Joséphine, Empress, 176
Josephus, 34, 37, 53, 65, 139, 231
Journal asiatique, 206–8
Journal des Sçavans, 113, 139–40
Jullian, Camille, 370
Junius, Franciscus, 48
Jupiter, 45, 62, 64, 111–12
Jutland, 62

Kabbalah, 98
Keating, Geoffrey, 56–57, 71, 128, 130
Keferstein, Christian, 213
Keller, Ferdinand, 252–56
Keltenfrage, 5, 252, 254–55
Keltoi, 6, 29, 35, 395, 399n23
Kemble, John Mitchell, 256
Kennedy, Vans, 190, 197, 230
Kerrig y Druidd, 100
Keyßler, Johann Georg, 422n87
Khan, Muhammad Ali, Nawab of Arcot, 123
Kidd, Colin, 12, 55, 120, 127, 218
King's College, Aberdeen, 122
Kingsley, Charles, 262
Knott, Eleanor, 386
Knox, Robert, 277, 280–81, 287
Koch, John T., 395
Koch, Matthias, 253
Kossinna, Gustaf, 380

Lainé, Celestin, 385, 390
Laing, Malcolm, 220
Lalor, James Fintan, 244, 316, 466n13
Lamartine, Alphonse de, 247, 300
Lancashire, 318
landlordism, 328, 335
Land Question, 23, 313–31, 351
Lang, Andrew, 333, 339
Lanjuinais, Jean-Denis, 176, 179, 188
'La Poésie des races celtiques' (Ernest Renan), 21, 247–50

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La Tène, 7, 254–57, 379, 394, 396
La Tour d'Auvergne, Théophile Malo-Corret de, 157–60, 176, 188, 226
Lavallée, Joseph, 176
Lavisse, Ernest, 228
Lebor Gebála Érenn, 38–39, 57
le Brigant, Jacques, 153–60, 166, 179, 181, 188
Le Coz, Bishop Claude, 158
Leerssen, Joep, 4, 9, 160, 164, 217, 238–39
le Fustec, Jean, 344
le Goffic, Charles, 345
Le Gonidec, Jean François Marie Maurice Agathe, 179, 294–96, 299, 312
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 18, 27, 60, 62, 73–79, 81–83, 86, 89–90, 98, 113, 161, 189, 210
Leiden philological 'school', 49, 56, 60, 63
Leland, Thomas, 141
Lenoire, Alexandre, 175
Le Pelletier, Louis, 86, 418n179
Lepsius, Karl Richard, 200–201
'Les Celtes au XIXe siècle: Appel aux Représentants actuels de la race celtique' (Charles de Gaulle), 305
Lewis, Saunders, 388
Leyden, John, 41, 174, 188, 191
Lhwyd, Edward, 8, 18, 54, 57, 59–61, 65–86, 88, 90–91, 93, 101, 103, 105, 109, 136, 139, 144–46, 161–62, 166, 173, 188, 201, 231, 234, 241, 374, 396, 410n4, 413n60, 415n110
Lia Cineil, 332, 350–51
Limerick, 141, 245
Lincoln's Inn, 241
Lindenschmit brothers, 252
Linguistic antiquarianism, 59–61, 82, 91
Lipsius, Justus, 49, 146
Livy, 30–32, 44, 64
Llandudno, 341
Llangollen, 389
Llanover Hall, 227, 298
Lloyd, J.E., 369
Lloyd George, David, 328, 353, 373
Llywarch Hen, 167–68
Loch Katrine, 185–86, 193
Logierait, 122
London, 17, 85, 105, 123, 138, 141, 143, 151–52, 166–69, 174, 192, 206, 212, 272, 326, 333, 335, 337, 340–42, 346, 354, 361
Lord Acton, 262
Lord Castletown (Bernard Edward Barnaby Fitzpatrick), 341–46, 350, 353–54, 361, 371
Lord Inchiquin, 361
Lord Rosebery, 353
Lord's Prayer, 75, 145
Loth, Joseph, 370
Lottner, Carl, 368
Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, 154
Louis Philippe, King of France, 258, 299
Louis XVI, 153–54
Louvre Museum, 160, 175
Low Countries, 18, 48–49
Lowlands, of Scotland, 8, 13, 53, 123, 218, 222, 248, 320–21
Lubbock, John, 283
Lucan, 94, 104, 113
Luzel, François-Marie, 307
Lye, Edward, 144

Mabinogion (Charlotte Guest), 231–32, 247, 249
MacAdam, Robert, 244
Macalister, R.A.S., 378, 388
Mac Alpin, Kenneth, 39
Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 263–67
MacBain, Alexander, 468n60
MacDiarmid, Hugh. *See* Grieve, Christopher
MacDonald, Alexander, 81
MacFarlan, Robert, 147
Mackenzie, Alexander, 323, 325–26
Mackinnon, Donald, 369
Maclean, Lachlan, 201
Macleod, Fiona, 333, 338–40, 350. *See also* Sharp, William
MacNeill, Eoin, xi, 24, 291, 317–18, 371–75, 378, 380, 388

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Macpherson, Ewan 'Cluny', 122
Macpherson, James, 19, 82, 118–49, 166, 194, 196, 220
Macpherson, Rev. John, 123–24, 127, 130, 132, 426n48
Macpherson, Sir John (baronet), 123, 128
Madras, 368
Magog, 38, 42
Mahr, Adolf, 377–78, 382, 385
Maistre, Joseph de, 117
Major, John, 409n128
Malcolme, David, 81, 139
Mallet, Paul-Henri, 116, 144, 176, 188
Malte-Brun, Conrad, 186, 188, 197
Mangan, James Clarence, 239, 242
Mangourit, Michel-Ange de, 157, 175–76
Marischal College, Aberdeen, 122
Marseille, 29
Martin, Dom Jacques, 114
Martin, Henri, 225–28, 279, 293, 301–2, 307–8
Martyn, Edward, 346, 363
Marx, Karl, 268–69
Mathers, MacGregor, 337
Maunoir, Julien, 63, 85, 113
Maurras, Charles, 345
Mauss, Marcel, 3
Max Müller, Friedrich, 287
McElheran, John, 271
McLagan, Peter, 468n74
McLagan, Rev. Donald, 426n54
Meiners, Christoph, 189, 193–94
Mémoires de l'Académie celtique, 175, 178–79
Mentelle, Edme, 178
Meredith, George, 337–38
Mérimée, Prosper, 202, 206
Merlin, 99
Merthyr Tydfil, 232
Meyer, Carl Friedrich, 199, 298
Meyer, Kuno, 350, 353, 357, 366–72, 476n14
Michelet, Jules, 202, 206, 223, 225–26, 249
Milan, 31, 212
Milesian Theory of Irish Origins, 38, 137, 139, 141, 161, 409n132
Míl Espaigne, 38
Mill, John Stuart, 269–70, 317
Millar, John, 132
Miller, Hugh, 321
Milton, John, 95, 388
Mitchel, John, 244, 316
Mòd, 346
Mommsen, Theodor, 370
Mongez, Antoine, 160
monogenesis, theory of., 186, 193, 282, 298, 438n5
Montagu, Elizabeth, 132
Montesquieu, 146, 271
Montfaucon, Bernard de, 94, 113–14
Monumenta Britannica (John Aubrey), 100–101, 105
Moore, A.W., 347
Moore, George, 346, 363
Moran, D.P., 332, 336, 340, 344, 352
Moreau de Mautour, Philibert-Bernard, 112–13
Morlaix, 307, 342, 344
Morris brothers, 80, 133–35, 166; Lewis, 55, 80, 134, 137; Richard, 60, 80, 88; William, 80
Morris-Jones, John, 369
Movius, Hallam, 377
Much, Rudolf, 381
Mühlhausen, Ludwig, 382–86
Müller, Johannes, 47
Munday, Anthony, 52
Münster, Sebastian, 47
Murdoch, John, 319, 322–23, 325–26, 335
Murray, Alexander, 188, 191, 439n10
Murray, John, 133
Musée des Monuments français, 175
Myfyr, Owen, 166–67
Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales (Iolo Morganwg, William Owen Pughe, Owain Myfyr), 173, 207, 225–28, 249

Napier, Theodore, 346
Napoleon III, 254–55
Napoleonic Empire, 151–52

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nation, ideas of, 5–16
The Nation (Young Ireland paper), 242–44, 306, 316, 319, 322
National Convention (1792–1795), 156
nationalism, ideas of, 10–16
National Library of Scotland, 325
National Literary Society (Ireland), 336–37, 341–42
National Museum of Ireland, 377
Nazis, 364, 367, 377, 380–86
'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland'(Douglas Hyde), 336
Necker, Jacques, 154
Nehalennia, 50, 111, 113
Nennius, 37, 231
Netherlands, the, 44, 68. *See also* Low Countries
New Age Celtic movement, 3, 366
New Departure, 318
New Poor Law (1834), 267
New Testament, 42, 56, 295–96
Newton, Isaac, 105
New York Times, 372
New York University, 375
Nicaise, Claude, 62, 75
Nicholson, Edward, 356, 365, 368–70
Nicolson, William, 69, 73
Niebuhr, Bartold, 297
Noah, 34, 36–38, 59, 62, 86, 95–96, 158
Noah's Ark, 106
Nordic racial ideology, 380, 384–85
Noricum, 253
North America, 261, 281, 308, 365, 375
Northwestern University, 375
'nos ancêtres les Gaulois', 86, 228
Notre Dame de Paris, 19, 94, 111
Nouvelles de la république des lettres, 62, 75, 78
Nova Scotia, 390, 398n13
Nuremberg Race Laws, 381
Nutt, Alfred, 337, 361, 370

oak trees, 19, 93, 96, 98, 103, 110, 420n39
Oban, 342
Oberlin, Jéremie-Jacques, 155
O'Brien, Henry, 240
O'Brien, John, 84, 139–40, 190
O'Brien, William, 320
O'Connell Daniel, 238, 240, 242, 261, 267, 270, 457n48
O'Connor, Roger, 238
O'Connor, T.P., 325
O'Conor, Charles, 84, 131, 139–43, 161–63
O'Curry, Eugene, 238, 241, 244–47, 368, 451n146
O'Donovan, John, 208, 213, 238, 241–47, 368
O'Donovan Rossa, Jeremiah, 246
ó Duilearga, Seamus, 383
O'Farrelly, Agnes, 386, 388, 482n151
O'Flaherty, Roderick, 83, 130, 416n135
O'Flanagan, Theophilus, 162–64
Ogmios (Gallic Hercules), 94, 113
O'Grady, Standish Hayes, 368–69
O'Halloran, Clare, 56, 84, 120, 138, 143, 217
O'Halloran, Sylvester, 138, 141–43, 163
Oireachtas, 341, 356, 370
O'Kearney, Nicholas, 245
Oldham, Edith (Best), 341
Old Irish gosses, 41, 192, 208, 212
O'Leary, John, 319, 335, 346
Olympic Games, 62, 141
O'Neill Russell, T., 317, 336, 356
On the Study of Celtic Literature (Matthew Arnold), 22, 263, 283–87
O'Rahilly, T.F., 371
O'Reilly, Edward, 164, 451n146
O'Reilly, J.P., 341
Origen, 95
Orkney Islands, 321
Ortelius, Abraham, 27–28, 53, 57, 181
Ossian, 19, 61, 82, 116, 118–49, 156, 159, 163, 173, 206–7, 219–20, 223, 230, 285, 299, 423n1
Ossianic Society, 245
Owenson, Sidney, 164
Oxford, 17, 41, 66–67, 100, 102–3, 135, 192, 212, 232, 236, 264, 283, 286–87, 328, 341, 346, 365, 369, 393

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Paine, Thomas, 169, 202
Pan-Celtic Committee, 342–44
Pan-Celtic Congress: of 1901 (Dublin), 332, 334, 342–46, 349–53, 360; of 1904 (Caernarfon), 353; of 1907 (Edinburgh), 353–54
pan-Celticism (lower case 'p'), 22, 291–92
Pan-Celticism (upper case 'P'), 22, 291–92, 332–33
Pan-Celtic League, 23, 313, 329–31
Pan-Celtic Society, 335
Pan-Germanism, 311, 359–60
Pan-Latinism, 359–60
pan-nationalism, 16, 402n65
Pan-Slavism, 303, 359–60
Parczewski, Alfons, 359
Paris, 17, 68, 85, 88, 97, 111–14, 138–41, 150, 153, 155, 157–58, 160, 175–76, 189, 202, 206, 225, 247, 249, 252, 276–77, 280, 296, 297, 302–3, 305, 311–12, 319, 337, 359
Parnell, Charles Stewart, 318, 322, 324, 334
Parsons, Lawrence, 164
Pasquier, Etienne, 46, 99
Paul (apostle), 42
Peabody Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology, 377
Pearse, Patrick, 344–45
Pedersen, Holger, 308
Pelagianism, 295
Pelloutier, Simon, 89–90, 147, 157, 189, 206, 443n115
penal laws, 141
Pentateuch, 62
Percy, Thomas, 133–36, 143–45, 188
Périon, Joachim, 45
Persian language, 40, 56, 84, 133, 186, 191, 195, 197
petite chouannerie, 297, 303
Petrie, George, 238–42, 246
Petty, William, 82
Pezron, Paul-Yves, 18, 59–65, 70–72, 75–76, 78–81, 83–86, 88, 90–91, 102, 106, 113–14, 135, 166, 187, 206, 236, 411n12, 411n19, 411n21, 411n22
Phases of Irish History (Eoin MacNeill), 373–74
Phoenician language, 64, 109, 143, 161, 188, 215
Phoenicians, 55, 109, 115, 143, 161, 240
Phrenology, 258, 272–74, 321
Picard, Jean, 45
Pictet, Adolphe, 21, 186, 199, 200, 206–10, 213–14, 227–28, 230, 247, 303, 307, 309, 368
Picts, 37, 39, 53, 109, 129, 131, 219, 221, 295; 'Pictish Problem', 119, 130–31, 146, 221–22
Pighius, Stephanus Vinandus, 111
Pile-dwellings (Alpine), 254, 265
Pilier des Nautes, 19, 94, 111–13
Pillars of Hercules, 29, 128
Pinkerton, John, 143–48, 150, 166, 170, 173–74, 186, 188, 190, 193, 196–97, 219–20, 223, 230, 321, 399n26
Plato, 30, 86, 96, 102
Plautus, 161, 164
Plunkett, George, 346
Plunkett, Horace, 346
Plunkett, Joseph Mary, 346–47, 357
Pokorny, Julius, 363–64, 381–82, 386, 480n107
Polybius, 30–32
polygenesis (racial theory), 186, 192, 438n5
Pontrieux, 154
Posidonius of Apameia, 32
Postel, Guillaume, 45, 47–48
Pott, August, 199, 235, 443n114
Pownall, Thomas, 27
P-Q Distinction, 69, 77
Prague, 381
Prendergrast, Sean, 373
Price, Rev. Thomas, 226, 228–36, 240, 293–301
Price, William, 237
Prichard, James Cowles, 21, 185–87, 190, 192–201, 205–20, 214–15, 230, 232–33, 240, 242, 265, 274–75, 279–80, 282, 297–301
Primrose Hill, 151, 165, 169

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Prince Albert, 200, 298
Prince Madoc, 236
prisca theologia, 46, 96
Pughe, William Owen, 152, 166–68, 172–74, 213, 219, 224, 229, 435n92, 435n93
Punch, 271
Pythagoras, 94, 98, 102

Queen Victoria, 298, 325
Qu'est-ce que le tiers état? (Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès), 20, 150, 153, 155, 401n45
Quiggin, Edmund Crosby, 365

Raabe, Wilhelm, 254
Race, the idea of, 10–16, 185–92
race-mixing, theories of and about, 226, 277, 321, 402n55
The Races of Men (Robert Knox), 280–81
Radiguet, Lionel, 344
Ramée, Pierre de la, 45–46, 48
Ramsauer, Johann Georg, 253
Rask, Rasmus, 188, 191
Ravalière, Pierre-Alexandre Lévesque de la, 88
Ray, John, 72
Raymond, Anthony, 83–84
Reformation, the, 39–43, 85, 266
Reliques of Irish Poetry (Charlotte Brooke), 163
Renaissance, the, xi, 4, 5, 9, 12, 16, 18, 27, 36, 39–43, 45, 94, 97–98
Renan, Ernest, 11, 21, 218, 232, 247–50, 283, 285, 293, 305, 309, 311, 312, 319, 335, 387, 453n194
Rennes, 61, 384, 392
Republic of Letters, 4, 50, 62, 111, 113, 124, 139
Researches into the Physical History of Mankind (James Cowles Prichard), 193–96
Retz de Servières, Claude-Urbain de, 154
Retzius, Anders, 274–78
Révellière-Lépeaux, Louis Marie de la, 176
revolutions of 1848, 258
Revue celtique, 237, 279, 305, 308–11, 319, 323, 366
Revue des deux mondes, 247, 345
Reynaud, Jean, 227, 248
Rhymers' Club, 337
Rhys, Elspeth, 305
Rhys, Ernest, 337
Rhys, John, 287, 305, 309, 311, 342, 346, 368, 370
Richelet, César-Pierre, 86
Rio, Alexis-François, 294, 297, 299
Ritson, Joseph, 221–22
Robert Molesworth, 102
Roberts, Peter, 188
Robertson, William, 123–24, 146, 165
Robinson, Frederick Norris, 375, 378
Rolleston, T.W., 335, 337, 361
Rollright Stones, 105
Romanist-Germanist debate, 87, 99, 210
Romanticism, 119, 206, 216–17
Romantic nationalism, 216–19
Rome, 6, 13, 17, 28, 30–37, 41, 54, 59, 79, 81, 95, 120, 128, 135, 156–58, 177, 199, 227, 265, 271, 297
Ross, Alexander, 98
Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 338
Rostrenen, Grégoire de, 85–86
Round Towers of Ireland, 239–40
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 155, 168
Rowlands, Henry, 79–80, 84–85, 93
Royal Celtic Society, 219
Royal College of Science, 340
Royal Irish Academy, 20, 151–52, 161–62, 164, 237, 239, 256, 372, 378–79, 393
Royal Society, 66, 100, 104–5
Rue, Abbé Gervais de la, 224
Rugby School, 264
Russell, George (Æ), 337
Russell, Lord John, 270
Ruthven, 122–23

Said, Edward, 14
Saint-Martin, Antoine-Jean, 180, 204, 295
Saint Patrick, 104

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Salmasius, Claudius, 63, 146, 411n21, 411n22
Samothes, 44–45, 51–52
Samwell, David, 152–59
Sanskrit language, 153–54, 172, 186, 191, 195–97, 201, 207–8, 213, 236
Sarmatians, 128, 146
Sassenach, 15, 317, 337
Saturn, 62, 65
Savigny, Friedrich Carl von, 176
Saxons, 37, 100, 110, 129, 131, 145, 154, 243, 262, 280–82, 285–87, 295, 331, 338
Scaliger, Joseph, 27, 48–49, 54, 66–67, 111, 146
Scandinavia, 37, 100, 128–29, 146, 219, 253, 390
Schlegel, August Wilhelm, 186, 188, 199, 206–8, 210–11
Schlegel, Friedrich, 191, 197
School of Celtic Studies (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), 379–80
School of Irish Learning, 366, 370–72, 379, 381
Schöpflin, Johann Daniel, 190
Schreiber, Heinrich, 252–53
science fiction, 360
science of man, 120, 122, 124
science of race, 274
Scots Magazine, 82, 122, 124
Scotsman, 321
Scott, Walter, 21, 148, 175, 185, 218–24
Scottish Enlightenment, 118–33
Scottish Labour Party, 322
Scrope, George, 269
Scythian linguistic hypothesis, 49–50, 63
Scythians, 29, 55–57, 74, 83, 146–47, 411n19
Second World War, 364–65, 380
Segovesus, 31
Selden, John, 93, 95, 98–100, 419n24
Sellar, Patrick, 321
Senones, 30–31
Septuagint, 62
Seren Gomer, 230
Seward, Anna, 220
Sharp, William, 333, 338–40. *See also* Macleod, Fiona
Shaw, George Bernard, 329
Shaw, William, 148
Shem, 36
Sheringham, Robert, 55
Shetland, 321
siege of Paris, 311
Siegfried, Rudolf Thomas, 208, 213, 246, 368
Sievers, Wolfram, 383, 385
Sieyès, Emmanuel-Joseph, 20, 150, 153, 155, 401n45
Sigerson, George, 317
Sims-Williams, Patrick, 7–9, 35, 395–96
Sinclair, John, 222
Sinn Féin, 337, 373
skalds, 163
Skene, William Forbes, 324–25
Skinner, Stephen, 67
Skye, 123, 323–24
Slavic language, 72, 74, 191
Smith, Adam, 123, 125–26
Smith, Dr Donald, 425n41
Smith, Thomas, 75, 98
Smith O'Brien, William, 242, 244–45
Smollett, Tobias, 59, 126
Smythe, Percy, 213, 285
Snyder, Edward, 119
Social Question, the, 267, 318
Société d'anthropologie de Paris, 276–79
Société nationale des antiquaires de France, 150. *See also Académie celtique*
Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 317, 341, 356
Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards (Evan Evans), 134–36
Spain, 3, 38–39, 42, 52–53, 73, 100, 110, 127, 139, 161, 222, 364, 394
Specimen of the Critical History of the Celtic Religion and Learning (John Toland), 102–4
Speed, John, 55
Spenser, Edmund, 56
Spurzheim, Johann, 272
stadial theory, 126, 131, 146
St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, 48

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St. Brieuc, 22, 291, 302, 307–8
Stendhal, 202, 206
Stephens, James, 316
Stephens, Thomas, 213, 228, 232–37, 303, 306, 449n100, 450n102
Stern, Ludwig Christian, 121, 368
Stewart, David, 222
Stewart, Dugald, 193
St. Malo, 347
Stokes, Whitley, 208, 213, 309, 324, 368, 370
Stone, Jerome, 81–82, 124
Stonehenge, 19, 93–94, 99–100, 101, 105–11, 118, 252, 301
Strabo, 30, 34, 83, 200
Strachan, John, 371
Stuart, Charles Eduard, 122
Stuart-Glennie, John Stuart, 313, 329–30, 350
Stukeley, William, 19, 93, 95, 101, 104–10, 118
Sullivan, William K., 214, 246
Süssmilch, Johann Peter, 90, 418n179
Sutherland, 313, 321, 329
Sweden, 250, 359
Switzerland, xiii, 3, 7, 17, 21, 203, 212, 217, 251–56, 380, 382

Tacitus, Cornelius, 7, 17–18, 29, 32–34, 43, 46, 49–50, 52–53, 64, 96–97, 116, 127
Tahitian language, 154–55, 157
Taillepied, Noël, 45, 97, 99
Tartessian, 396
Tarvos Trigaranus, 112
Temora (James Macpherson), 123, 125, 127, 130–31, 134, 138
Temple, William, 67
Teutomania, 263
Teutons, 5, 127, 244, 246, 264
Theodore Roosevelt, 375
thèse nobiliaire, 180, 202, 223
Thierry, Amédée, 202–3, 224–26
Thierry, Augustin, 224, 234, 260
Third Estate, 12, 86, 117, 150
Third Reich, 23, 380–86
Thiry, Paul-Henri, Baron d'Holbach, 116
Thomas, Ceinwen, 390
Thomson, Derick, 121, 369, 390
Thracia, 29, 190
Three Age Theory (archaeology), 250
Thurneysen, Rudolf, 246, 309, 367, 371, 373, 375, 384, 388, 394
The Times, 168, 270–71, 286, 321
Titans, 62–63, 65, 75, 90
Tocqueville, Alexis de, 260
Toland, John, 19, 67–68, 83, 93, 95, 101–4, 109–10, 115
Tormy, Father J.F., 316
torques, 251
Toulouse, 114, 139
Tower of Babel, 36, 38, 63, 79, 96
Treason of the Blue Books, 284
Tréguier, 247
Trevelyan, Charles, 321
Trevor-Roper, Hugh, 8
Trinity College Dublin, 162, 393
Trioedd Ynys Prydain, 167–68, 196, 207, 266, 227, 231, 234, 249
Trippault, Léon, 45
Tristram, Hildegarde, 365
Trithemius, 49, 97
Troy, 36–37, 45
Troyon, Frédéric, 252–53, 255
Túatha Dé Danaan, 38, 337
Tullidelph, Thomas, 82
Turgot, Anne Robert Jacques, 88
Turner, Sharon, 173–75
Tylor, Edward Burnett, 198
Tyrol, 253

Ulster, 68, 270–71, 317, 319, 400n31
Union régionaliste bretonne, 344
United Irishmen Uprising (1798), 151, 160, 164
United States, xiii, 6, 271, 320, 325–26, 353, 366, 375, 378
University College Cork, 371
University College Dublin, 371, 373, 393

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University of Amsterdam, 365
University of Bonn, 367, 386
University of Cambridge, 41, 97, 105, 192, 198, 262, 365, 377, 393
University of Chicago, 375
University of Edinburgh, 122, 185; Celtic Chair, 324–25, 369
University of Freiburg, 365, 367, 371, 375, 386
University of Hamburg, 367, 371, 382
University of Leipzig, 382
University of Liverpool, 367
University of Manchester, 371
University of Munich, 210, 386
University of Oxford, 41, 66, 100, 135, 192, 212, 232, 236, 264, 283–87, 328, 341, 346, 365, 369, 393
University of Strasbourg, 383
University of Utrecht, 103, 365, 393
University of Wales, 393
University of Wisconsin, 375
University of Würzburg, 386
Ussher, James, 56, 101

Vallancey, Charles, 142–43, 161–64, 181, 188, 213, 236, 240–41, 319, 439n10, 440n31
Van Boxhorn, Marc Zuer, 18, 50, 54, 61, 63–64, 66–67, 69–74, 84, 93, 101, 111, 113, 411n21
Vandals, 128
van Hamel, Anton, 381
Vendryès, Joseph, 309, 364
Venice, 3, 111
Vercingetorix, 32, 34, 255
Vergil, Polydore, 51
Verjus, Antoine, 74
Verne, Jules, 360
Versailles, 153
Verstegan, Richard, 55
Vienna, 272, 381
Vikings, 110
Villemarqué, Theodore Hersart de la, 234, 247, 299–303, 306–8, 312, 350
Virey, Julien-Joseph, 189, 193, 274, 439n20
Virgil, 36, 59
Volney, Comte de (Constantin de Chasseboeuf), 157, 176, 179, 188
Voltaire, 157, 176, 179, 188
von Arndt, Christian Gottlieb, 190
von Bunsen, Carl Josias, 199, 297–98
von Glück, Christian, 213–14
von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, 119
von Humboldt, Alexander, 176, 199
von Humboldt, Wilhelm, 200–201, 209
von Müller, Johannes, 195
von Pallhausen, Vincenz, 211
von Ranke, Leopold, 253
von Tevenar, Gerhard, 382, 384–85
Vossius, Gerardus, 98–99, 146
Vulso, Gnaeus Manlius, 31

Wachter, Johann, 89
Waddington, Frances, 297–98
Wallis, John, 54, 67, 75
Walpole, Horace, 143
Walters, John, 166, 172
Ware, James, 319
Warner, Ferdinando, 138–39
Weisgerber, Leo, 383–84, 386
Wells, H.G., 360–61
Welsh Manuscripts Society, 229, 297
Westminster, 199, 329–30, 386; Houses of Parliament, 68, 261, 288, 330; School, 53
Whately, Richard, 265
Whewell, William, 198, 294
'Whig' historiography, 266–67
Whitaker, John, 121, 128, 136–37, 143, 174
Wilde, Oscar, 15
Wilde, William, 254
Wilhelmi, Karl, 252
Williams, Edward. *See* Iolo Morganwg
Williams, Jane, 293
Williams, John, 236–37, 247
Williams, Taliesin, 194, 198, 228–29, 231, 233, 298, 450n119
Williams, William, 236
Wiltshire, 100, 108
Windisch, Ernst, 367, 370
Wise, Francis, 84

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Wiseman, Bishop Nicholas, 199, 241
Woleseley, Garnet, 288
Wotton, William, 76
Wyld, Edmund, 66, 412n35

Xenophon, 30

Y Celt, 327, 330
'Y gwir yn erbyn y byd', 169, 234–35
Yeats, William Butler, 11, 119, 314, 333–37, 339–40, 342–43, 345–46, 352–53, 361, 363
Young Ireland, 21, 237–47, 246, 315–16, 319, 335
Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848, 238, 244
Yvon, Abbé Claude, 116
Y Werin, 329
Y Wladfa, 305

Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie, 368
Zeuß, Johann Kaspar, 21, 187, 192, 208, 210–15, 230, 238, 241–42, 245, 287, 308, 366, 368, 370, 380
Zimmer, Heinrich, 345, 350, 357, 367, 370–71
Zurich, 252, 254

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