
A prominent academic has recently suggested that certain authors deliberately use the word ‘Celtic’ in the titles of their books in order to boost sales.¹ This is not the case of this neatly produced volume which is an update of a Ph.D. dissertation submitted in Trinity College Dublin in 2000. It goes without saying that the School of Classics at TCD is an important centre of Hellenic studies: Professor Brian McGing, who supervised the original dissertation, as well as Professors George L. Huxley and John M. Dillon acknowledged in the book (p. xv), are undeniably leading experts in the field. On the Celtic side lies the very fact that the dissertation was written (at least partially) in a “Celtic land”, which has a most impressive library to facilitate this kind of research. Moreover, the term “Celtic” – judging by the Index to the book (p. 239-240) – occurs more than on fifty pages of the publication, which itself consists of several parts. A short introduction (p. xvii-xx) is followed by three sections: *The Hyperboreans and the Golden Age* (which contains one chapter, “Inventing Mythical Greek Time”, p. 3-23), *The Hyperboreans and Hyperborean Identity* (three chapters, p. 27-98), and, finally, *The Hyperboreans and the Celts: a case of mistaken identity*? (five chapters, p. 101-155), followed by the *Conclusion* (p. 157-161). Notes to the text are found at the end of the book (p. 175-217); the bibliographical section is aptly entitled “Select bibliography” (p. 219-235) as we do not find there all the references occurring in the notes;² and of course the very subject of this publication imposes selectivity due to incredible amount of relevant publications both on Celtic and Hellenic matters.³

In the first paragraph of his introduction (p. xvii) the author states that “in what has come down to us of Greek literature, six rather curious fragments of texts identify the Hyperboreans, a totally mythical people, with the Celts, a real people and one of the Greeks’ northern neighbours, or the Hyperborean lands with Celtic ones. These fragments were written by Antimachus of Colophon, Protarchus, Heraclides Ponticus, Hecataeus of Abdera, Apollonius of Rhodes and Posidonius of Apamea”. The phrase “real people” immediately starts ringing a “Celtosceptic”⁴ bell; and its chiming becomes even louder when the *Appendix* to the volume (p. 163-173), where the author collected the relevant fragments (with English translations), is consulted. The Celts are mentioned *verbatim* there only few times and are once translated into English as “Gauls”. And here immediately arises a question about the term “Celtic” which looms on the cover of this book but is nevertheless not

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¹ Cunliffe 1997, 19.
² See., e.g., a reference to a famous although outdated article by H. D’Arbois de Jubainville given as a note 1 to the second chapter on p. 182. It is evident that Bridgman used more secondarly sources than it is acknowledged in the bibliography – otherwise it is difficult to explain his treatment of Asclepiades’s fragment on p. 68 – at least 10 lines of it I find in the analysis of the same passage by Freeman 1996, 26.
³ It may be noted that in a recent study of the Celto-Hyperborean problem by S. Verger (2006, 45-61) the author refers to a number of recent works by scholars of classics not mentioned by Bridgman. Needless to say, the number of publications on Celtic prehistory is immense.
⁴ On “Celtoscepticism” see Sims-Williams 1998, 1-36. Most important articles on the dispute, both *pro* and *contra*, are conveniently collected in the first volume of Karl & Stifter 2007.
defined anywhere in the publication. The author speaks, for example, about “Celts of the Bronze Age, or those people who were direct ancestors of the Celts in central Europe, sometimes called Proto-Celts” (p. xviii), mentions the collapse of “Hallstatt palace economies” which made “Celtic civilization” far less centralised (p. 127); or allows a phrase “the Golasecca People, Celts themselves” (p. 105), and refers to “La Tène aristocratic sites”. What we have here is an unfortunate blend of archaeological and ethnic notions, which has been criticised from various standpoints for decades. And Celtic ethnicity has become recently a battle-zone – to quote another Celtosceptic, “linking of the peoples whom the earliest Greek commentators named Celts with later populations designated with the same name created a fixed idea that hindered ancient observers and their modern counterparts from understanding process of change among the peoples of Iron Age Europe.”

What is notable is that the existing verbatim identifications of the Celts with the Hyperboreans are really insignificant; not a single passage which offers a direct association has survived. Of course, Heraclides Ponticus relates about an army of Hyperboreans capturing a Greek city called Rome. Plutarch, whom we own the preservation of this account (Camil., 22, 2-3), states that the sackers of Rome were not the Hyperboreans but the Celts, referring to Aristotle. According to Bridgman (p. 119), “Heraclides Ponticus changed the essence of the Hyperborean myth by transforming the Hyperboreans from a peaceful, joyous, idealized people (…) into a violent aggressive people similar to the stereotypical Greek view of the Celts”. The problem is that we do not know much about IV century BC Greek views of the Celts, to say nothing about the stereotypes – Greek sources on the Celts are very scanty, and what may be labelled as “Celtic ethnography” will appear only centuries later.

Identifications of Hyperborean lands with “Celtic”, the other aspect of the research, are even more difficult, particularly due to the fact that the very notion of “Celtic lands” is itself provocatively controversial. Few Greek authors locate the Hyperboreans to the north of the Alps (which are also identified as Rhipean mountains; and Bridgman discusses this application throughout the book); sometimes Hyperborean tribes are even named, as in case of the

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5 For these archaeological cultures, traditionally associated with the “Celts” and constantly referred to by the author, see the entries (with further bibliography) in the third volume of Koch 2006 by R. Karl (Golaseca, p. 831-2), J. Leskovar (Hallstatt, p. 887-9) and J. V. S. & M. R. Megaw (La Tène, p. 1071-6). Note the striking title of J. Collis’s contribution, “Adieu Hallstatt! Adieu La Tène!” (published in Aquitania, Suppl. 1, 1986, 327-330); for more on “Celtoscepticism” see references in fn. 4 above. Linguistically, there is no doubt that the “Golaseca Celts” spoke a Celtic language labelled Lepontic (Uhlich 1999, 277-304). It is very tempting to associate the La Tène “civilization” in Gaul with another known Celtic language, Gaulish (for which see Lambert 2003), although there are different views on the problem. What was the language (to say nothing about their ethnic self-estimation) of the people(s) of Hallstatt areas remains enigmatic. It is important, however, that the word “Celt” which Greek authors were using very probably has a Celtic (in a strictly linguistic sense) etymology; see Sims-Williams 1998, 21-22.

6 Wells 2004, 76. This reasonable observation has been repeated by historians and archaeologists alike for decades.

7 For the fragments of earliest Greek authors mentioning the Celts see Freeman 1996, 9-48; for Greek “Celtic ethnography” see Tierney 1960, 189-275 (reprinted in a separate volume, Dublin, 1985); and Nash 1976, 111-126. Incidentally, neither of these important publications is referred to in the chapter dedicated to Posidonius. See below.