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The Celts: A History from Earliest Times to the Present
(review)

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born of a career in surgery and a more recent involvement in the study of nineteenth century epidemics. However, this does not detract from a first-rate achievement: this is a text which will undoubtedly prove to be an important introduction to Scottish medicine and an essential source in this expanding field.

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NEIL MACGILLIVRAY

The Celts: A History from Earliest Times to the Present.

By Bernhard Maier. Pp. ix, 310.

ISBN 0 7486 1605 5.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003. £49.50.

This is an English version of the author's recently published German study *Die Kelten* (München 2000: Beck), a work which surveys the diverse evidence for the presence and activities of Celtic-speaking peoples past and present, drawing on up-to-date scholarship in the several disciplines involved to offer the general reader an integrated picture and specialists in one field access to current thinking in others. The English edition is aimed at the same dual readership and is essentially the same work.

Through the author's strong sense of purpose and the translator's intelligence and art *The Celts* is clear and readable, well ordered and well sign-posted. It is divided into three major sections: the ancient, the mediaeval and the modern world. Each section is sub-divided by place and, where applicable, by period, which makes it easy to find one's way around. It is also very nicely produced, although it may be remarked that this is the only such book encountered by the present writer to contain no illustrations at all. By contrast, the German edition contains thirteen images—admittedly austere black and white ones—of metal-work, illuminated manuscripts and so on. Apart from this puzzling gap, *The Celts* is a highly presentable piece of publishing.

It has to be said that there are considerable numbers of books around with similar or identical content and title. T.G.E. Powell's 1958 volume for Thames and Hudson's 'Ancient Peoples and Places' series may be seen as the first of the modern genre, capitalising on the rapid post-war expansion of archaeology and seizing the opportunity to fuse this with current thinking in the fields of literature (Celtic and classical), language and history. The authors who have followed Powell in writing about the Celts display different emphases, depending on whether their primary expertise is literary, historical, philological, archaeological, or none. But the main ingredients remain essentially the same: a comparative, mostly Indo-European frame of reference (e.g. for language, religion and institutions); archaeologically derived evidence (e.g. for material culture and 'everyday life'); and the continuing literary traditions (mediaeval and modern) of the British Isles and Brittany.

The 'market niche' for the German version of Dr Maier's book was clearly enough defined: by contrast with Britain, there were few scholarly-popular works of synthesis available in German. Specifically 'Celtic' books like Helmut Birkhan's *Kelten* and Karl-Horst Schmidt's *Geschichte und Kultur der Kelten* are heavily weighted towards linguistic matters and the proto-historical period; while the magnificent archaeological publications based on the excavations at Hallstatt, Heuneburg, Hochdorf and elsewhere have tended to be uncompromisingly specialist in their coverage and tone. Yet the last few decades have seen a considerable widening of interest in Germany's Celtic past and in the mediaeval and modern 'Celtic Fringe', and Maier's *Die Kelten* clearly spoke to

that interest. For an Anglophone audience, with many more such publications in the field, the justification for publishing this work has to be somewhat different. It has, in fact, several distinctive qualities, amongst which the most important is a 'Celtic Studies' perspective, in which the different contributing disciplines are all made subservient to the aim of describing the world and evaluating the achievements of the subjects of study.

The book has notable virtues too. Dr Maier is a disciplined scholar who does not burden the reader with speculations masquerading as scholarly ideas, as happens all too often at the scholarly-popular interface. On the contrary, he gives the impression of doing his best to understand and reproduce the arguments of the experts. He has his own specialist areas of expertise, of course, e.g. in ancient Celtic religion; but while his writing in these areas carries an additional punch, he resists the temptation to make too much of them, and strains to integrate them with the other categories of evidence. In the same way he has discreetly laboured to pitch his narrative at a consistent level—'current orthodoxy', as one might term it—and shields the reader from controversial views. Sometimes one hankers to know more about Dr Maier's own view, or to hear the two sides of an argument. But the advantages of the chosen method to the beginning student are obvious, and the self-restraint is doubtless in part attributable to publishers' restrictions. The same emphasis on consistency is evident in the bibliography cited. Where many authors show themselves strong in certain areas and weak or cosmetic in others, Maier's is up-to-date, discriminating and misses few tricks in its mission to provide the reader with a trustworthy *vade mecum* to the next level of scholarly engagement.

The aim of providing comprehensive coverage within a limited space results in abridgement and selection. While this is mostly achieved in a skilful manner, the narrative is occasionally so summary that there is an actual hiatus if one does not already know the material, which defeats the purpose of the exercise. I sensed such gaps *inter alia* in regard to the Anglian settlement of north-east England and south-east Scotland (pp. 163ff), in the transition from ancient to mediaeval Brittany (pp. 185ff), in the leap from the Book of the Dean of Lismore to Iain Lom in Scottish Gaelic literature (pp. 213ff), in the juxtaposition of nineteenth-century nationalistic sentiment in Wales and the Welsh language movement of the 1960s (pp. 233ff), and in the association of Scottish devolution with the Gaelic language (p. 248). In each case an extra sentence or paragraph could have clarified things significantly.

Again, the central chapters are constructed to a fairly rigid formula: each has a brief (usually chronologically based) introduction, and then focuses on two or three key thematic aspects of the chapter's subject-matter. One can respect the reasoning behind this approach, given the limited space available. And it is surely important for us to heed Dr Maier's estimation of what is most significant, where our thinking may have become hide-bound. Yet at certain points one feels sure that something crucial to the larger picture has escaped his net. Examples with Scottish relevance include the wider political aims of King James VI and I in regard to his 'Celtic fringe' (pp. 210ff); and the importance of religious revival and evangelicalism in the emergence of the modern Highlands (pp. 217ff). Perhaps the publishers should have given Dr Maier about half as much space again!

One of the pleasing things about *The Celts* is the fact that it is pretty much free from the hang-ups about Celts and Celtic identity that afflict too many British writers, including some professional archaeologists and anthropologists. On the other hand, it would appear that Dr Maier's desire to reflect current orthodoxy all round has induced him to include some statements about the non-existence or non-entity or meaninglessness of Celts in the ancient world (see pp. 4-6 and

39) which are at odds with his sane and expert handling of the classical literary sources and the Celtic linguistic evidence in the body of his text. Here the underlying assumption is that in classical times there were thought to be—and were—a people or peoples called—and in certain circumstances calling themselves—Celts (or a related name-form). This position (for which see the concluding remarks on pp. 249-50) seems a fair enough position for the twenty-first century.

In conclusion one may reiterate that this is a very useful addition to the literature for precisely the purposes its author intended it. He has built a level and pretty robust bridge over some quite troubled waters.

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The Stone of Destiny: Artefact and Icon.

Edited by Richard Welander, David J Breeze and Thomas Owen Clancy.

Pp. xx, 283.

ISBN 0 903903 22 9.

Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. 2003. £25.00.

This book originates in a conference held in Edinburgh in 1997 to mark the return of the Stone of Destiny to Scotland the previous year. But this is more than just the conference proceedings; its scope has been expanded to cover inauguration stones and seats in Scotland, Ireland and on the Continent. This presumably explains the delay in publication, although an explanation, if not an apology, from the editors would have been appropriate for such a long-promised volume on a high-profile subject. The volume appears in the monograph series of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and has been produced to a standard that is mostly consistent with this. The exceptions are the unsightly cover design, while some references cited in the text are missing from the bibliography.

The book begins with an introduction by David Breeze but nowhere do the editors define its objectives, making it impossible to assess whether the volume achieves their aims. The seventeen chapters are grouped into six parts covering 'The Stone as an Object', 'Inaugurations and Symbols of Dominion', 'Scone', 'The Taking of the Stone', 'The Return' and 'Envoi'. Some of the contents, notably on the geology of the Stone and its returns to Scotland in 1950-51 and 1996, are already familiar. This leaves the volume's largest section, on comparative studies, as its most distinctive and original contribution. Its chapters discuss royal inauguration practices and places among the Scots of Dal Riata (Ewan Campbell), in mediaeval Gaelic literature (Thomas Owen Clancy), in mediaeval Ireland (Elizabeth FitzPatrick), on the Continent (Stuart Airlie) and the sites of Finlaggan on Islay (David Caldwell) and Govan (Stephen Driscoll). This section is the real strength of this book, placing the study of the Stone in a wider international context. The range of parallels discussed here adds substantially to our understanding of the symbolism and use of inauguration stones and chairs. The inauguration of Scottish kings on a block of sandstone emerges as a specific form of a once-widespread range of related royal rites. These contributions reveal that such inauguration ceremonies were not immutable but changed over time according to political and religious circumstances.

The book's greatest weakness is its structure, which is disjointed and eccentric in places. For example, physical aspects of the Stone are discussed by Peter Hill in the second chapter. But the results of technical examinations, including X-ray