



Social Changes in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Wales. The Beginning of Celtic Wales?

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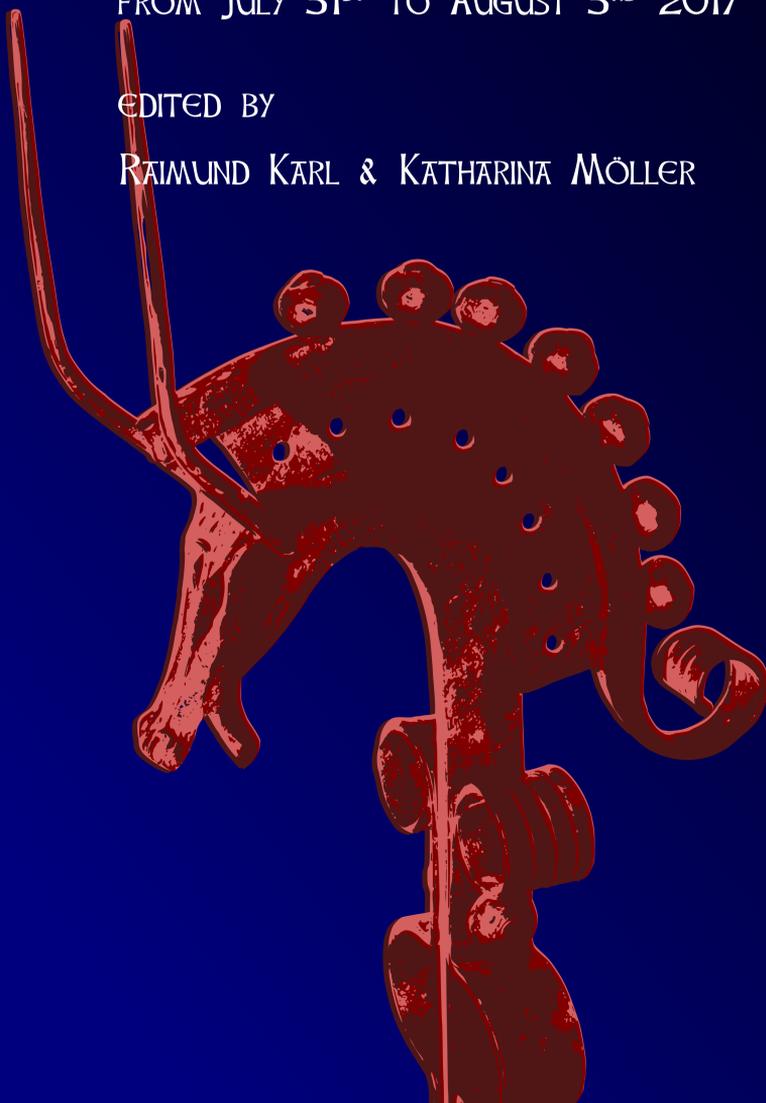
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PROCEEDINGS OF THE
SECOND EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM IN CELTIC STUDIES

HELD AT PRIFYSGOL BANGOR UNIVERSITY
FROM JULY 31ST TO AUGUST 3RD 2017

EDITED BY

RAIMUND KARL & KATHARINA MÖLLER



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second European symposium in Celtic Studies**

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Social changes in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Wales: The beginning of Celtic Wales?

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During the late Bronze and Early Iron Age, significant social changes seem to be affecting the communities inhabiting Wales. While in the millennia before, the archaeological record seems to be showing a mostly egalitarian social organisation, things seem to change dramatically in the first half of the first millennium BC. Before this change, social difference seems to have hardly been expressed and conspicuous consumption of human labour mostly been focussed on communal, inclusive projects. During the first half of the first millennium BC, expression of social difference becomes the norm, especially in the context of the conspicuous consumption of human labour: particularly some, but by no means all, settlements and their boundaries are monumentalised. This creates 'private' spaces which apparently were accessible only to some members of the community to the exclusion of a majority of 'others'; at the same time creating and expressing social difference.

It is argued in this paper that these changes allow to date the beginning of a 'Celtic' Wales in a sociological sense: it is at this point in time that the kinds of societies emerge that characterise Wales for the next two millennia; that is, the kinds of 'Celtic' societies described in later historical sources, both classical and indigenous. It is such archaeologically traceable, local changes, which provide a considerably better starting points for our discipline and its historical narratives than idle speculations about the introduction of particular languages from abroad in prehistory; that is, in periods characterised by definition by the absence of any linguistic sources.

The question of the 'origin' of 'the Celts', and thus also the start of the chronological periods of interest to our discipline, has long been debated within the field, as well as in the various sub-disciplines that make up Celtic Studies. Similarly, the question of how 'the Celtic' spread from its 'place of origin', wherever that was located by those who theorised about this question, has hotly been debated. Indeed, in the last three decades, even the question of whether there (ever) were any 'Celts' at all has become a delicate topic; to the extent that in parts of – at least – archaeology, the use of the 'C-word' is avoided or even actively rejected (for a relatively recent overview, see KARL 2012: 97–102).

Naturally, for any academic discipline, it seems rather awkward if the subject it studies may not even exist. Yet, as I have already argued in an earlier contribution, it matters little whether 'the Celts', or indeed any 'Celts', ever actually existed (KARL 2010). This is mainly so because we have, in practice, defined the

subject of our discipline based on (what we have decided to be) characteristic features observable in the historical record (KARL 2010: 44–8): linguistic and literary sources can be classified as being ‘Celtic’ by the fact that they were and still are written in languages that are called ‘Celtic’ by modern linguistic naming convention, regardless of whether anyone who considered themselves to be ‘Celts’ ever existed or not; archaeological phenomena equally simply called ‘Celtic’ by academic convention; etc. However, where the question of the chronological starting point of our discipline is concerned, the question when whatever we studied originated is quite crucial: after all, without a starting point in time, we would have to go back into the past indefinitely.

From East to West, or somewhere else?

Due to the historically contingent chronological development of our discipline (or perhaps, more accurately, its various sub-disciplines), the preferred (or at least the dominant) definition (within) the field of ‘the Celtic’ has been a linguistic one. John Koch, for instance, has stated this quite explicitly in the introductory text to his *An Atlas for Celtic Studies*, when he states that for the purpose of compiling this Atlas, a “scrupulously linguistic definition” (KOCH *et al.* 2007: 3) had been adopted. As such, the search for the origins of ‘the Celtic’ has mostly been one for the place and time of origin of the Celtic languages, rather than anything else.

Yet, the places and times suggested as those of the origin of ‘the Celtic’ have varied almost as widely as imaginable: according to more ‘traditional’ models, the origins of ‘the Celtic’ are to be found – very broadly speaking – somewhere in ‘the East’ (mainly, of Europe; see e.g. ISAAC 2010), while some more recent models argue for the very opposite, an origin in ‘the West’ (e.g. CUNLIFFE 2010; KOCH 2010). According to fringe theories like the Palaeolithic Continuity Paradigm (e.g. ALINEI & BENOZZO 2008), ‘the Celtic’ emerges as early in the Upper Palaeolithic; according to e.g. the farming hypothesis (RENFREW 1989: 159–65, 225–49) in the Neolithic; or if one follows the traditional model, as late as the late Bronze or even earliest Iron Age (ZIMMER 2006: 1464). According to some hypotheses, particularly earlier ‘traditional’ ones, but also according to the farming hypothesis, it spread from its point of origin in space and time by (mass) migrations of populations. According to others, e.g. the ‘Celtic from the West’ hypothesis, it spread as a ‘trade language’. Or, according to yet others, it spread by unspecified means of language change; until, when the first actual evidence for Celtic languages becomes available towards the end of the first and then mainly in the second half of the 1st millennium BC, we find them distributed across a large area of Europe and even – via the Galatian migration – in an enclave in Asia Minor (see e.g. SIMS-WILLIAMS 2006).

Regardless of all the differences between these various hypotheses, however, they have one fundamental thing in common: they all propose places of origins which, at the time when ‘the Celtic’ hypothetically emerges there, are still in pre-history, rather than in historical periods. Prehistoric periods however, by definition, are times that are characterised by the complete absence of written sources which tell us anything about the region at that time; and thus, necessarily, also are characterised by the total absence of any linguistic evidence whatsoever. Thus, the hypothetical origins of the Celtic languages lie in times, and their spread by whatever hypothetical means proposed occurs in times, where there is no evidence whatsoever for what languages were spoken where at what times and spread from where they were by what means. Or, in other words: all this happens in times which are particularly unsuited for finding the origins of anything that is defined based on observable features of languages.

As such, as I have already argued elsewhere (KARL 2010: 62–3), it is folly to try to find the origins of what we chose to call ‘the Celtic’ by working based on a linguistic definition, however scrupulous (KOCH *et al.* 2007: 3) that may be. I thus would like to propose an alternative here.

Early ‘Celtic’ Societies

Where early attested ‘Celtic’ societies are concerned, whether they are called ‘Celts’ by classical authors or identified as ‘speaking Celtic’ by modern linguists, they seem to be characterised by specific ‘societal’ features. In very simplified terms, these features are:

- the existence of **individualised, exclusive rights to** (‘private’) **property**; especially to land and other agripastoral resources (KARL 2006: 64–93, 267–71, 281–327). While not necessarily restricted to single individuals, exclusive rights to use such property are usually linked to a particular economic unit of production which is probably best referred to by the term ‘household’ (see KARL 2006: 64–93);
- the **inheritability** of such rights, primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, in the paternal line of descent (KARL 2006: 67–73). This is not to say that a distribution of any particular estate to a wider circle of heirs cannot occur under certain circumstances; but as a rule, inheritance customs favour the preservation of the household unit, even if – in case several eligible heirs exist – this unit can split up into several ‘descendant’ units;
- the ‘arbitrary’ **transferability** of these rights, which can be and are commonly ‘traded’ in return for goods, services, and/or status (KARL 2006: 281–327). Again, such transfers of property rights need not necessarily be

- between individuals as such, but are normally between the economic units the participating individuals belong to and/or represent, that is, transfer property rights from one to another economic unit; and
- the existence of a clearly **established social stratification**, mainly based on these property rights, the inheritance of, and ‘trade’ of these and associated rights (especially through the ‘clientele’ system; KARL 2006: 291–327, 373–96). This results in a social hierarchy both within individual households and between these economic units, with inter-household relationships created by the transfer of property rights creating larger territorial, ‘political’ units.

It is noteworthy here that these features certainly are not exclusive to and thus not uniquely characteristic for (early) ‘Celtic’ societies, but rather are commonly found in other human societies, too (e.g. classical Greek and Roman, (early) Germanic societies, but also medieval Japanese societies, etc.), at least once they develop a certain level of social complexity. However, since the development of these features (and their specific interrelationships) is historically contingent, their particular expression – also in terms of physical remains – tends to be regionally specific. Thus, they tend to (also) leave archaeological traces which, at some level, can be considered to be quite similar (e.g. private property will, especially if it is land, be divided up by some form of boundaries), but can and do often differ considerably in their specific qualities or characteristics (e.g. what kinds of boundary markers are deemed appropriate is locally specific).

Pre-monetary economies and human labour

Most prehistoric European societies operated pre-monetary economies: where money appears, it appears either only after, or virtually at the same time that the first historical (and thus normally also the first linguistic) sources become available. Pre-monetary economies, however, especially such which recognise individualised, exclusive rights to private property, all share the same, distinctive problem in mobilising the most important economic resource, that is, human labour: since there is no money available, one cannot easily ‘pay’ for it (though see KARL 2015; *forthc.*). Thus, other means of motivating the workforce are required.

Mobilising the human labour required for ‘small’ projects is normally no problem: the members of the same subsistence economy unit, e.g. a family or household, normally all share in the benefits of joint labour. Thus, even though they may not all share equally in the fruits of their joint labour, every member of the unit has a particular good motivation to contribute to the activities of their unit: self-interest, and be it only that to ensure their own survival.

However: the human labour (or ‘manpower’) available in such a unit is usually a very limited resource, since normally, such subsistence economic units only have quite few members, more often than not on average only between 2–10 fully productive people, and rarely more than a few dozen. Also, in such small subsistence economic units, the time when this manpower is available is very limited: after all, normally, most, if not all of the available manpower is occupied at most times with producing the subsistence goods the economic unit as a whole needs for its collective survival. Thus, very little manpower normally remains to be invested into anything else.

That makes the mobilisation of the required human labour a problem for any bigger than ordinary and especially all ‘monumental’ projects: if the workforce required to complete the project exceeds that which *c.* 10 people, or even a few dozen, can provide; and this workforce is even required for extended periods of time; the workforce required to complete it must be motivated in one way or other to contribute to it. But how to motivate such workers, if there is no money to pay them?

Monumentality

Monumentality is something that is very well traceable archaeologically: artificially created structures of larger than normal dimensions not only tend to survive longer than more ephemeral structures in the archaeological record, if only because there is ‘more’ of their substance to be destroyed or eroded before they are completely gone, but also, for the same reason, tend to remain more easily visible. Also, monumental structures usually require a great deal of labour-investment to be built, at least considerably more than normal structures built by the same community, and thus normally fall into the category of bigger than ordinary projects which require more human labour than ordinarily readily available.

It is also often quite easily distinguishable as to whether any monumental structure is communal or private.

Communal monumentality, as we find it e.g. in henge monuments like Stonehenge, is typically characterised by being ‘inclusive’, that is, serving a wide community. That, of course, does not necessarily mean that all members of the community that such a monumental structure is (supposed to be) serving may actually be admitted into the monumental structure itself. Rather, especially the ‘truly important’ parts of such a structure may be accessible only to a select few and be shielded from sight of everyone else. Still, the monumental structure is (perceived to be) serving the wider community, who is normally not only congregating, at least occasionally, at the structure, but will normally also have access to at least

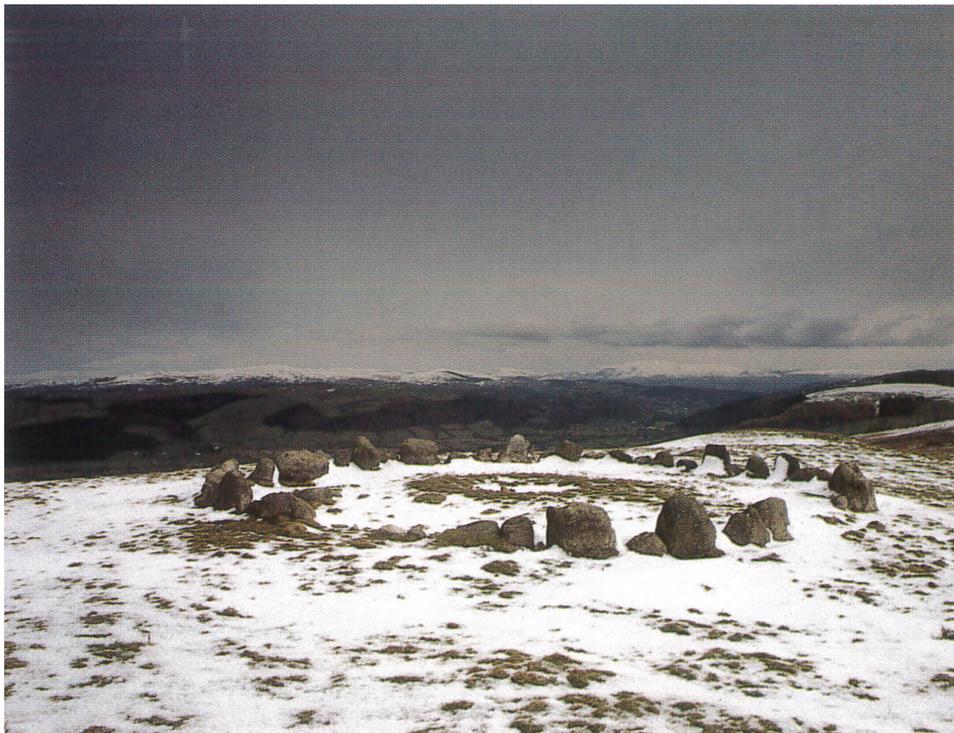


Fig. 1: Kerb circle at Moel Ty Uchaf, Merioneth (LYNCH 2000: Plate 14).

some parts of the monumental structure at least during some special occasions. Communal monumentality thus serves to bring a wider, often even widely dispersed community together.

Private monumentality, on the other hand, as we find it mostly in settlement contexts, are typically characterised by being ‘exclusive’, that is, reserving a particular place or space to a sub-set of a wider community. Such monumental structures – mediaeval castles are particular good examples for this – serve only and exclusively a small group of people, while almost everyone else, unless personally invited, is normally and intentionally kept out. Private monumentality thus serves to separate those who live (work, have rights to access, etc.) within from those who have to stay out.

In other words: private monumentality is an excellent archaeological indicator of the existence of individualised, private property rights. Particularly if it is in the context of sites used in the same way over extended periods of time, it is also an excellent archaeological indicator of the inheritability of such rights: after all, the intergenerational longevity of a private monument indicates the

preservation of, at least, the economic unit that is reserving the monumentalised space for itself. Even better, if only some, but by no means all settlements of households in a particular time and region, are monumentalised in such a manner, it also is an excellent archaeological indicator of social stratification: after all, the 'monumentalised' household is not only clearly distinguished from such that are not, but given that it is monumentalised, it was obviously able to draw on considerably more manpower than it itself could provide. That, in turn, means that at least some of the people who lived in non-monumentalised households in its vicinity must have helped. And that, in turn, means that chances are that property rights were 'arbitrarily' transferable: even if not paid in money, those from other households who helped to monumentalise the one that was must, after all, have been motivated to do so in some way; and that, most likely, means by transfer of some economic resources in return for their labour.

And that makes the features of early 'Celtic' societies described above archaeologically traceable back to their respective, regionally specific origins.

Monumentality and the Welsh archaeological record

We know that in Wales, as soon as it emerges into the light of historical sources, 'Celtic' languages were spoken. We also know from the early historical sources that, while classical authors did not call the Welsh 'Celts', the societies existing in Wales at that time seem to have had all the features described above characteristic for early 'Celtic' societies. As such, we can try to use monumentality as an archaeological indicator for when these features first become observable in this particular region.

Luckily, the Welsh archaeological record offers considerable amounts of monumentality to – quite literally as well as figuratively – dig into. However, the kind of monumentality that we can observe does not remain the same throughout Welsh prehistory. Rather, the nature of monumentality – whether communal or private – changes over time, and at that not slowly, but, at least apparently, rather rapidly at a particular point in time.

Communal monumentality

Communal monumentality (Fig 1) is widespread in the prehistory of Wales, and can even be seen as characteristic for the Welsh archaeological record; but only up until c. the end of the earlier (which encompasses the early and middle) and perhaps even the earlier phases of the late Bronze Age. Up until then, we do find quite a lot of monumental structures, e.g. stone and timber circles, and communal burial cairns (LYNCH 2000: 121–37).



Fig. 2: Caerau, Aberpwl, Pembrokeshire (LYNCH 2000: plate 21).

‘Private’ space, on the other hand, is not monumentalised at all: the settlement record is meagre and sometimes even appears to be positively ‘egalitarian’ (see LYNCH 2000: 85–95, especially p. 88 fig. 3.3). It is dominated by small, mostly quite ephemeral round buildings (or ‘roundhouses’, even though the term ‘house’ as applied to them appears rather generous for what seem to be little more than ‘huts’; LYNCH 2000: 88 fig. 3.3), which appear as individual isolated buildings or in small clusters. Sometimes, they are integrated into wider field systems, which indicate that at least separate usage rights of particular plots of (cleared) land may very well have developed already in the earlier Bronze Age, though their walls are often very poorly built (LYNCH 2000: 91); which may very well indicate that they were only used seasonally and were almost certainly not long-lived. It may even be quite debateable as to whether the field systems of the earlier Bronze Age even indicate the development of separate usage rights: they may have been purely functional (whether to keep animals or to keep them out of crops planted inside the fields) and been used collectively or access to them been determined on an annual or seasonal basis by mechanisms completely unknown.

At any rate, ‘monumentalising’ use of manpower is only observable in communal ‘ritual’ and religious contexts throughout at least all of the earlier Bronze Age, possibly even continuing into the early parts of the late Bronze Age; while

private monumentality does not appear to occur at all. Most of the monuments we find, like e.g. timber and stone circles, are relatively open (stones in stone circles, for instance, are normally widely spaced and rarely high enough to even only obstruct the view into the inner part of the circle, let alone access to it). While in most cases, the investment required to build these comparatively ‘monumental’ structures was sufficiently small that even a single, relatively small household could actually have provided the necessary manpower to construct them, they are large enough to have provided a communal space for a wider community than that. That, together with the assumption that these sites were, at least also, used for communal religious purposes, shows that they seem to have intended to draw in wider communities, and certainly not to exclude the majority of the wider community apart from a small sub-group, for which these spaces were reserved.

It goes without saying that, if their function was, as is assumed, at least also a religious one, the provision of labour to construct them is unlikely to have been much of a significant problem, even if they required more manpower than could be required by a single subsistence economic unit. Religion, after all, is a great motivator for people to voluntarily invest labour into ‘monumental’ projects.

‘Privatising’ monumentality

It is only roughly at the start of the 1st millennium BC that the focus of labour investment into monumentality shifts in Wales; but when it does, it shifts radically. From that point onwards in time, monumentality can virtually exclusively be found in the context of individual settlements (Fig 2), both the better known, more sizeable hillforts, but also, and arguably much more frequently, in the so called enclosed homesteads of the 1st millennium BC, which are mostly found on the hillslopes or in lowlands (see e.g. WADDINGTON 2013).

Significantly however, this monumentality, particularly in the context of the latter, does by no means appear in the context of all settlements, not even in the majority of settlements, but only in some (WADDINGTON 2013: plates 3.4–3.6). This privatised monumentality, which frequently is also considerably more labour-intensive than most, if not all, of the earlier communal monumental structures to construct, demonstrates clearly that now, a wider community invests labour for the benefit of a restricted (and restrictive) subgroup.

The monumentalised settlements of the 1st millennium BC are often surrounded by significant, sometimes even multiple earthen or stone banks that clearly serve as a demarcation of exclusive, private property (of at least one) of their inhabitants. Their occupation is certainly not only seasonal, but permanent all year, often lasts – uninterruptedly – for long durations, certainly stretching not only several, but many generations of inhabitants; and their enclosing features

internal space to their occupants. It also clearly shows status distinctions and thus, social stratification: some, if not much, of the monumentalisation of their enclosing architecture almost certainly serves no defensive purpose (as has sometimes been assumed), but primarily aims to impress visitors and demonstrate the importance of their occupants. In some cases, we even find hints at an 'internal' social stratification of the community of the occupants (see the short case study on Meillionydd below).

Thus, it is this point in time – a period lasting only a few hundred years at the most, and perhaps even only a few decades or years at the local level – that the characteristic 'societal' features of early 'Celtic' societies become observable in the archaeological record in Wales. Of course, that tells us nothing about what language the Welsh populations of that time spoke, nor whether that was a 'Proto-Celtic' or already fully 'Celtic' language; but it does clearly identify the point in time when the kind of societies that dominate Wales for much of the next – at least – 2000 years emerges.

Meillionydd: a case study

Meillionydd (Fig 3) is such an enclosed homestead, that an international team directed by Kate Waddington, Katharina Möller and I have been excavating since 2010: and is a particular good example for the points made above. It started out, most likely sometime in the 8th century BC, as an unenclosed roundhouse cluster settlement on the top of a ridge jutting out from the lower slopes of Mynydd Rhiw, almost at the western end of the Llŷn peninsula. There also are two other, similar settlements (out of sight from Meillionydd) and several smaller (always unenclosed) clusters and a few isolated roundhouses on the slopes of Mynydd Rhiw; across the plain of the Penllŷn in its centre, about 3 miles from Meillionydd as the crow flies and clearly visible from it, is another such settlement, *Castell Odo* (ALCOCK 1960); and more roundhouses can be found on Mynydd Anelog at the western end of the Penllŷn (WADDINGTON 2013: Plate 5.6).

According to the radiocarbon dates and the (almost complete lack of) finds recovered during our excavations at the site, we currently believe that Meillionydd was continuously occupied from c. the 8th to c. the 3rd century BC. Based on the analysis of the stratigraphic relationships between different features, we are currently able to distinguish between 14 occupation phases. Assuming for simplicity's sake that each of those existed for about the same time and that the site was occupied in total for c. 500 years, this would mean that the structures (mainly, roundhouses) of each occupation phase stood for c. 35–40 years before being replaced with those of the subsequent one, which is a very reasonable assumption for the average use-life of buildings like those we find on the site.



Fig. 4: A reconstruction of the Late Bronze Age unenclosed settlement at Meillionydd. Note the dark spots in the background, which are the contemporary houses on Castell Odo (image: M. Wallner).

While it had started out as an unenclosed settlement (Fig 4), after an estimated about 100 years (so presumably sometime in the 7th century BC), it was enclosed with two concentric, round ditches and a strong timber fence with a substantial gatehouse (which was repaired / replaced at least once, if not twice during the lifetime of the timber-fenced double-ditched enclosure). The occupation phases associated with the unenclosed and timber-fenced double-ditched enclosure consisted of timber-built roundhouses, some with diameters of up to 15 meters; that is, quite substantial and sizeable (up to 175 m² floor space) buildings.

Another c. 100 to 150 years later (so, presumably sometime in the late 6th century BC), the site was completely remodelled (Fig 5) and its construction style radically changed. Most significantly, it was surrounded by a monumental double embanked enclosure, with the banks closely following the course of the earlier ditches and up to 4 meters wide at the base, and probably c. 2 meters high, with steep drystone facings on both their inner- and outer side. The entrance was kept in roughly the same place as in the previous phases, but the one through the inner bank was particularly spectacularly elaborated: the banks turn inwards to form a c. 10 meter long, c. 4 meter wide corridor or entrance passage, which has a massive gate-house or even gate-tower (replaced at least once) set in it. We also know from a clear repair phase we found on the inner side of the inner bank, where almost another meter of earthen bank body and a new drystone facing was added, that at least the inner bank was well maintained for at least considerable time. Also, the roundhouses were now also constructed with earth core, drystone-faced walls (c. 1 meter thick), some of which reach inner diameters of c. 9–10 metres (c. 70 m² floor space).



Fig. 5: A reconstruction of the double ringwork enclosure (based on the state of knowledge following the excavations up until 2016), superimposed on a modern photo of the landscape, with modern buildings in view removed (Image: M. Wallner).

Estimating based on ethnographic parallels, experimental data, and published estimates for the construction of Late Hallstatt barrows constructed at roughly the same time in Central Europe, presumably with very similar tools (see EGGERT 2007: 167–74) that an average worker can cut *c.* 0.4 m³ of sods per hour, we can arrive at the following labour investment required to build just the banks surrounding Meillionydd:

The inner bank, enclosing an area of *c.* 80 m in diameter, has an approximate length of 251 m. Its width at its base is *c.* 4 m on average, its width at the top will have been approximately 2.5 m, and we assume it was *c.* 2 m high, giving a volume of *c.* 6.5 m³ per meter of its length; or a total of 1,630 m³ for the volume of the inner bank. The outer bank, enclosing an area of *c.* 100 m in diameter, has an approximate length of *c.* 314 m. With roughly the same size and shape as the inner bank, its estimated total volume is *c.* 2,040 m³. The total volume of earth (and stones) which had to be moved for constructing the banks thus amounts to at least ***c.* 3,670 m³**.

Calculating with the above estimate of *c.* 0.4 m³ of sods cut per man-hour, this gives a required labour-investment of (at least) *c.* 9,175 man-hours to erect the monumental enclosure. Assuming *c.* 8 hours of work per man-day, this gives *c.* 1.150 man days of work. Given that the double enclosure seems to have been constructed in one single, uninterrupted event, this would equate to e.g. ***c.* 38 men working uninterruptedly for a whole a month** (assuming 30 days of uninterrupted work) just to create the banks (investment into the massive gate-house and the construction of internal houses not considered at all).

Yet, Meillionydd is unlikely to have been occupied by more than 25 inhabitants of working age capable to cut the 0.4 m³ of earth per hour. Even more importantly, it is extremely unlikely that these inhabitants – however many they actually were

– simply would have had a month (or indeed more than that if it was less than 38) in spare time that they could invest into building this enclosure if they were operating in a pure subsistence economy. Rather, they seem to have been able to draw on the workforce of a wider community – a community who was, at least partially, excluded from the use of the enclosure they had helped to construct – to be able to distinguish and separate themselves from that wider community.

The fact that (at least some of) the inhabitants of Meillionydd stood out socially from their neighbours is also indicated by the fact that the exterior postholes of what is likely to have been the first gatehouse or -tower constructed in the inner entrance passage contained intentional depositions of what only can be interpreted as prestige goods. One of these contained a decorated blue glass bead (Fig 6), which has clearly not accidentally been lost; while another contained a fragment of a jet bracelet, presumably made of Whitby jet, which thus clearly was an imported high-status good (Fig 7).

The structure of the site during these and subsequent phases also seems to indicate ‘internal’ zoning of houses of different size and quality, possibly hinting at an internal hierarchy of the occupants of the site. While the large roundhouse near the centre of the inner enclosure, whose entrance was facing the gate through the inner enclosure, was almost 10 m in internal diameter; the roundhouses set along in inner side of the inner bank on average had between 6–8 m of internal diameter; and those sitting alongside the inner side of the outer bank – with the exception of the roundhouse directly south of the outer entrance, which one could probably consider to have been a ‘porter’s lodge’, only c. 4 m. Also, while the drystone walls of the buildings in the inner enclosure were generally

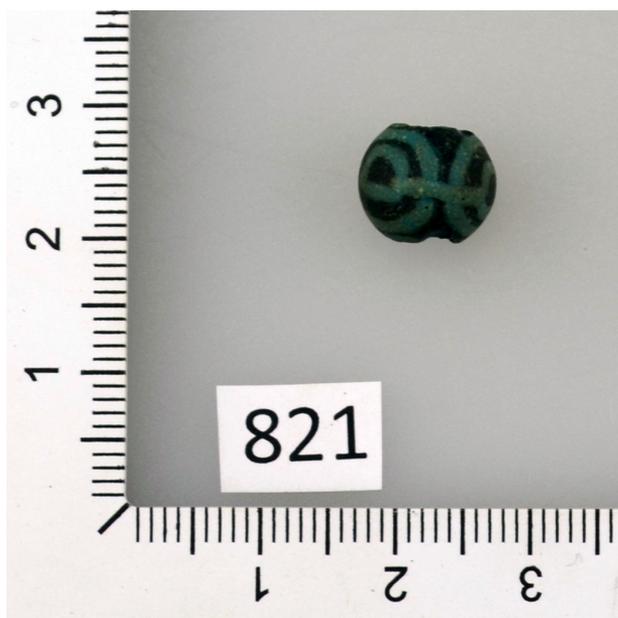


Fig. 6: The decorated blue glass bead found in one of the external postholes of the massive gate of the strongly monumentalised phase of Meillionydd (image: A. Kampa).

well-built from nicely laid, sizeable stones – in one case being preserved to more than half a meter in height (Fig 8), those houses situated only in the outer enclosure – once again with the exception of the ‘porter’s lodge’ – were rather shabbily constructed from smaller and much less well-laid stones, making it questionable whether they served as any more than the foundations for relatively ephemeral timber ‘huts’ constructed upon them (Fig 9).



Fig. 7: The jet bracelet fragment found in the other external posthole of the massive gate of the monumentalised phase of Meillionydd (image: A. Kampa).

the dwelling of the family who owned the site; with possibly ‘minor’ relatives and higher-ranking members of the household occupying the well-built houses alongside the inner side of the inner bank; and lowlier members of the household – particularly servants, tenants, or even slaves – occupying the much less well-built and sizeable huts between the inner and the outer enclosure.

Meillionydd, in these phases of its construction, thus seems to capture – in its timber-fenced, double ditched phases – the emergence and – in its elaborately monumentalised phases immediately following these – the firm establishment of the principles of individualised, exclusive usage rights to private property, their inheritability and transferability, and the social embedding of both internal social stratifications within and between different households.

While the smaller huts situated between the outer and the inner enclosure could of course also have been used for different functions like as craft workshops or storage building, several of them did contain ash-pits in their floors, indicating that they had at least at points during their use-life been heated. Thus, it is very well possible to interpret this distribution of different kinds of buildings as reflecting a social hierarchy of the inhabitants of the site: the most sizeable, central building could very well have been the



Fig. 8: Remains of the inner drystone facing of one of the roundhouses of one of the later construction phases at Meillionydd, constructed alongside the inner side of the inner bank. The high quality and nice appearance of the drystone work is still apparent (image: R. Karl).

Yet, Meillionydd's history doesn't end there: the site continues to be occupied for at least another 5 phases. Yet, the gate passage through the inner enclosure is already blocked up by a house (of small size, but reasonably well constructed) in the second phase following the construction of the double embankment, making the inner bank redundant only about a generation or two after it has been erected. Yet, the internal structure, with differently sized buildings continues, and the outer enclosure seems to have been maintained for several phases longer, indicating that the site did not necessarily lose its functions. Rather, the elaborate display of exclusiveness and separation and the labour invested into the monumentalisation of the site seems to have become unnecessary; and it may well be that indicating the inheritability of the status – by living in a *henllys*, not just a newly constructed *llys* – became more important than actively maintaining the monumentality of the site.

What is also particularly interesting and important is that Castell Odo, as already mentioned in plain sight from Meillionydd just 3 miles across the Penllŷn as the crow flies, seems to have gone through exactly the same construction sequence, at virtually the same time as Meillionydd. It also seems to have started as

‘Celtic’ societies sometime between c. the mid-7th and the end of the 6th century BC; and in that sense, only by this transformation became distinguishably ‘Celtic’. Yet, that process does not happen everywhere at the same time, not even in Britain, or only Wales. In North-eastern Wales, the same or a very similar process seems to be occurring, only some two centuries (or so) earlier. And in parts of England, the process may have even have started to occur another c. 1–2 centuries earlier still (see e.g. PARKER-PEARSON 2005: 25).

Thus, the ‘societal’ features characterising (early) ‘Celtic’ societies seem to have largely emerged locally. This is also what the evidence from the Llŷn seems to indicate: there is no discernible ‘external’ influence during the period when Meillionydd and Castell Odo are founded, then enclosed, and then monumentally enclosed. Also, all the ‘monumentalised’ features develop out of entirely indigenous, indeed local, architectural traditions. Indeed, in North-west Wales, if there is any ‘external’ influence that could be argued for, it is not one from the East, not one from mainland Britain; but rather, if anywhere, from Ireland, that is, the North-west. At least throughout the very end of the late Bronze and pretty much all the Iron Age, the Llŷn as much as larger parts of North-west Wales are part of the ‘Irish Sea zone’, which is most obviously characterised by being virtually completely aceramic; that is, by not using any pottery at all (but rather, most probably, wooden vessels turned on a lathe instead). And indeed, enclosures like Meillionydd are at least as, if not even more similar in their construction and shape to early medieval Irish ‘ringforts’ (see e.g. EDWARDS 1990: 6–33) as they are to the late Bronze, Iron Age and Romano-British ‘enclosed homesteads’.

Moreover, that process of local emergence is a gradual one, starting already much earlier in the Bronze Age, with the emergence of house-associated field boundaries, presumably leading to the emergence of a concept of exclusive, private usage rights first. These rights, first customary and perhaps not directly inheritable in the (male) line of descent, but rather only within wider kin- or otherwise connected groups, will then presumably slowly have become directly inheritable property rights and – as land was becoming increasingly sparse during the later middle and late Bronze Age – transferable for rents and services. At roughly this time, when customary, but previously non-inheritable usage rights turned into inheritable and transferable property rights, communal monumentality will have increasingly disappeared and been replaced by ‘privatised’ monumentality. Contemporarily with this, a particular kind of social hierarchy based on the interaction of these features, and especially property-based social status distinctions, then emerged during the late Bronze or early Iron Age, as the system locally matured and ever fewer of the emerging ‘elite’ households were able to acquire ever more of the local means of production, especially land (see on this already KARL 2007: 161–73). It is particularly with the latter transformation, which seems to have happened in chronologically short transformative bursts

whenever conditions were right in a particular locality – which may have been as small and remote as the end of the Llŷn – that the features characteristic of our object of study thus become archaeologically traceable.

Conclusions

It is with these archaeologically traceable transformations of society that ‘the Celtic’ becomes first observable in prehistory, much like it becomes historically and linguistically observable later, once those areas come into the light of historical sources, and once linguistic evidence becomes available to be able to classify the languages spoken there as ‘Celtic’.

Thus, I would argue that a sociological definition and model of the ‘origins’ of ‘Celticity’ are vastly preferable to linguistic ones, however scrupulous (KOCH *et al.* 2007: 3) such a linguistic definition may be. Because in prehistory, linguistic definitions are pretty useless to answer any questions, while social change is archaeologically detectable and traceable. Thus, using a sociological definition enables an evidence-based debate of prehistoric changes; while at the same time removing the need to ‘causally link’ archaeological phenomena with language change, which has always been and will always be the biggest problem, and thus the downfall, of language-based models. One can discuss any question for which there is no evidence either way forever, *ad nauseam*, without ever arriving at a meaningful result.

At the same time, a sociological definition of our subject also has the advantage that it, as opposed to ‘scrupulously’ archaeological definitions, is not one that is subject to the mere fashions of material culture or art styles – as traditional archaeological ‘cultures’ like Hallstatt, La Tène etc. are – but is actually inherently meaningful: a transformative change in society is not something that is a mere fashion, nor can it be imported, exported or imitated easily, as material culture can be. Rather, it is a fundamental change in how human life, and particularly human interaction operates, and in many ways follows rules that are as stringent and difficult to understand (and thus to learn) as a new language (and thus is as attractive, if not even more so, as a defining characteristic as language is).

Moreover, such a definition is also not dependent on an ‘external’ origin and (more or less) complicated means of transmission from that place of origin to most other places. Rather, it is based on principles of self-organisation and locally emergent (societal) features, which can even emerge entirely independently of each other, given that the circumstances or environments in which they emerge are reasonably similar and subjected to similar – whether natural (like climate change), man-made (like inventions of new technologies), or even systemic (like

population dynamics and resulting over-population) – needs or pressures. The particular social system proposed here even has an in-built mechanism for its own, gradual spread: if neighbours – and be it only relatively remote ones – ‘privatise’ some property, particularly the main means of subsistence goods production, so must those of their neighbours who have not yet; since if they do not, they will, at least eventually, lose access to the means of production they need for their own subsistence.

That the Llŷn, which after all is pretty much the end of the world, at least when seen from a European perspective, as a result of its remoteness was only affected by that ‘need’ for change comparatively late in the process – several hundred years after more central parts of Britain, and indeed even more after some more central parts of Europe had undergone the same transformation – thus is not much of a surprise. Still, as a case study, it allows to examine in some detail, and pinpoint chronologically, when and how these changes happened, and demonstrate that they happened rather rapidly once conditions were right.

All in all, a definition and model like the one proposed here would allow us to create a rational, evidence-based narrative for the ‘origins’ of ‘the Celtic’. Thus, we would not only gain an answer to the question of the emergence of our object of study. We would also gain a rational, evidence-based definition of the limits of our discipline at its early end. That, then, would hopefully allow us to move on to more relevant questions, as I have already highlighted elsewhere (KARL 2010: 62–3).

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