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Book Reviews



CELTIC FROM THE WEST 2: RETHINKING THE BRONZE AGE AND THE ARRIVAL OF INDO-EUROPEAN IN ATLANTIC EUROPE. Edited by John T. Koch and Barry Cunliffe. Pp. viii and 237, Illus 95. Oxbow Books, 2013. Price: £40.00. ISBN 978 184217 529 3.

This is the second volume emanating from an on-going project investigating the origins of the Celts and Celtic languages, claiming an Atlantic, and specifically Iberian, origin for both. This volume is much less controversial than the first, as most of us now assume that Indo-European languages were well-established on the Atlantic coast by the end of the second millennium BC, if not much earlier, and what are now called ‘Celtic’ languages, and peoples called ‘Celts’, were widespread across Europe by the mid-first millennium BC. Conflicting views are well-represented in the volumes, in this case a contrast between Mallory supporting the traditional Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age westward spread of Indo-European languages, in contrast to Renfrew’s suggestion of a much earlier spread linked with the adoption of farming. In the first volume (B. Cunliffe and J. T. Koch, (eds): *Celtic from the West: Alternative Perspectives from Archaeology, Genetics, Language and Literature*, 2010) the major dissenting voice was Karl, doubting that there is any way archaeology can resolve the question of the origins of languages or ethnicity using proxy features, such as material culture (e.g. the ‘culture group’), or physical characteristics, such as skull shape or DNA. He suggested that the means of defining ‘Celts’ have changed over time, leading to a spatial displacement of the Celts, e.g. from continental Europe to the British Isles (a view to which this reviewer subscribes).

There are many hangovers from the first volume in the lack of a clear theoretical and methodological basis, for instance the confusion between a paradigm (the framework of thought in which questions are posed and answers suggested) and theories (conflicting interpretations within paradigms). Thus, Mallory writes in terms of ‘culture groups’, such as ‘impressed wares’ or ‘Cardial Culture’ (p. 27), whereas Fitzpatrick talks of ‘networks’ to explain the Beaker phenomenon (p. 45): these are very different approaches from different paradigms. We also find Renfrew in this volume, and Cunliffe and Isaac in the first, reiterating the utterly ahistorical belief that the Ancient Celts were defined by their language; languages in the ancient world were named after the people who spoke them (*lingua Celtica, Gallica, Britannica*), not vice versa. Moreover, there was no classification of languages until the sixteenth century, and most of those, and ones that immediately followed, were wrong. For example, the term Celtic was applied to Breton in the early eighteenth century under the mistaken belief that it was a survival of the language of the Ancient Celts, when in fact it was introduced from western Britain by

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people who were never called Celts. It was not until the nineteenth century that there were reliable classifications of languages.

Turning to the individual papers, Koch deals with the dominant view of the twentieth century of a southern German origin for the Celts in the Iron Age. However, this has been under attack since the 1980s, and this reviewer dealt with the historiography of the theory in 2003 (*The Celts: Origins, Myths and Inventions*); it is still commonly presented in the popular literature and exhibitions, though increasingly being rejected. Koch's alternative Iberian hypothesis also has the same failings. Mallory looks critically at the new theories of a maritime spread of Indo-European along the Mediterranean, in terms of the distribution of Neolithic cardial wares, but he still supports a spread north of the Alps at a later date. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Beaker burials have been linked with the Celts, and in his overview, Fitzpatrick successfully walks the fine line dealing with the 'Beaker Network', and not assuming that 'culture' necessarily equates with language or ethnicity.

The rejection of the 'invasion hypothesis' led some people to think this was an acceptance of a more static population in Europe, when in fact it implies greater contacts that were continuous rather than punctuated. The papers by Gibson, Koch and Brandherm deal with the material culture which helps to show the extent and the direction of such contacts. McKingley, Schuster and Millard look at a specific site in terms of the evidence of isotopes, suggesting quite long-distant movements by individuals, dead or alive. Wodtko, as she did in the first volume, produces a sensible paper on the linguistic evidence, in this case looking at the models for language spread. Renfrew and Cunliffe round off the volume with their views on the origin and spread of Celtic languages. In all, this is a project which needs a much more critical reappraisal than it has so far received.

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