II
Notes

CELTIC GAUL

Despite the vast extent of Celtic civilization in 500 BC, our knowledge of this culture is rather limited to the Celtic peoples of the British Isles and France: the Irish (Ireland), the Welsh (Wales), the Bretons (France), and the Gauls (France). The ancient Celts were prominent in the 4th century BC, their religion presided over by **Druids** (in Irish *druí,* plural *druid,* Welsh *dryw* in Gaulish *druida*), an order of priest-poets. This term 'druid' derives from an Indo-European word meaning 'knowing the tree'. Actually, this religion presents certain beliefs and practices similar to those found in ancient India, indicating a common heritage among all Indo-Europeans. The trees were a central element of the rites, many kinds of wood being **oracular**, through which deities were supposed to communicate divine truth to men. In Celtic Gaul, the sacred names of the months were also founded on the symbolism of certain trees. In fact, the Druids believed that the first man was created from living wood, and this partly explains their veneration for trees. These beliefs can still be found in expressions, such as 'Family Tree" and 'Tree of Life'.

Around 300 BC, a tumultuous war took place in Central Europe between the Celts and various tribes, probably Germanic. At the end of the fighting, Gaul and the British Isles remained almost the only areas still governed by Celtic chiefs. On the other hand, at the beginning of the Christian era, Gaul and Great Britain submitted to the Roman yoke, and their Romanization ensued.

Because of their great respect for the art of memory, like Socrates in Greece who also refused to write for the same reason, the pre-Christian Celts left no writing. Apart from some inscriptions, the main sources of information about them are contemporary Greek and Latin observers, notably Posidonius, Lucan, and Julius Cæsar. Some insights can also be drawn from sagas and myths, especially from Ireland and Wales, recorded by native monks. Celtic culture in Ireland is represented by an extensive collection of texts based on their oral traditions.

CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS. — **Horseshoe** — Who invented the horseshoe? According to the traditional point of view, it's the Celts around 100 BC. They're also the first to introduce iron north of the Alps. If this assumption is true, then the Celtic horseshoe would have been reworked by the Romans around 200 AD into something that closely resembles an ordinary modern horseshoe. — **Chainmail** — The coat of mail was the first form of metal armor and was probably invented before the 5th century by the ancient Celts, the French word 'maille' ('mesh' in English) derived from *macula* in Latin which means 'net mesh'. The armor itself involves the bonding of rings of iron or steel, the ends of which are pressed together, welded or riveted. Sometimes the rings were cut from an iron sheet and then used in alternate rows with riveted joints. — **Agriculture: iron plough; scythe; mower; crop rotation; selective breeding** — The Celts worked on their farms with great diligence, taking an active part in the development of European agriculture. The Celts invented the iron plough, the scythe, and even the first mower (harvester). They made agriculture more efficient by introducing crop rotation. They improved their strains of cereals by selective breeding, and their agricultural products were widely appreciated for their quality. Their beef cattle were also refined by generations of breeding and were a sought-after commodity among the Romans. — **Improvements: wheel; fortifications; differents modes of transport; masonry; expansion of the road network** — Earlier civilizations had built the wheel from several pieces of wood. However, the Celts built the wheel from a piece of wood on which they forged an iron-tire. The tire was reduced to the wooden rim when the tire was still hot using a new technique. The Celts were also skilled in the construction of roads, boats and fortifications.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE. — Gaul was not a nation at the time of the Roman Conquest but a confederation of tribes at different levels of development. Cæsar's description of their social structure presents a generalization of this structure, including the tribal chief and his family, with 'knights' (*equites*: noble families), they, being excluded from the process of food production, as was the case with artisans, priests and seers (Druids), these the clients of the rich. Unfortunately, Cæsar does not mention the 'third estate' or the 'free men' — farmers with their slaves who worked the land. This last class swore fidelity to a particular nobleman who in return assured protection, very

similar to what was to develop later — 'feudalism'. According to Cæsar, certain Celtic nobles, to whom belonged large herds of cattle, rented them to farmer-clients in exchange for services.

GALLIC CAVALRY = *CHEVALERIE*. — A relationship exists between Gallic cavalry and medieval chivalry. According to Strabo, the Gauls fought better on horseback than on foot, and at that time they formed the flower of the Roman cavalry. The Gallic warrior liked to parade, everything that caused a stir and sense of splendor. His weapons were richly ornamented, and the harness richly made of bronze and enamel, their artistic conception as exquisite as Mycenæan or Cretan art, and the rider's garment was embroidered with gold. For example, when Vercingetorix understood that the cause was lost, he summoned a tribal council and told the assembled chiefs that he was ready to sacrifice himself for his faithful disciples, giving them two options: either they could send his head to Cæsar; or Vercingetorix was going to surrender himself to obtain more favorable conditions for his compatriots. The latter solution was chosen. Then Vercingetorix put on his finest weapons, his horse adorned with the richest harness, and after having surrounded the Roman camp three times on horseback, Vercingetorix went directly before Cæsar and laid at his feet the sword which was the only means to protect Gallic independence.

VERCINGETORIX — GALLIC HERO. — Gallic chief born in *Arverne* (Auvergne) around 72 BC and died in Rome in 46 BC. His name means 'great king of the brave'. Cæsar had almost completed the conquest of Gaul when Vercingetorix led a general insurrection in 52 BC. From a noble family of Gaul, Vercingetorix followed a teaching of the Druids. Lucid and courageous, Vercingetorix knew how to reassure his men, being an orator of the first order and animated with an impressive composure. Consequently, Vercingetorix was appointed king of the Arverni and General of the Confederates, creating a powerful army. After a first defeat at *Noviodunum Biturigum* (Neung-sur-Bevron, former capital of the *Biturges*), Vercingetorix used guerrilla warfare to harass Cæsar's supply lines and skillfully proposed to engage Cæsar's forces on a terrain unfavorable to the Romans. After many battles, Vercingetorix caused Cæsar to undergo a serious setback before Gergovie in *Arverne* in 52 BC. In August of the same year, Cæsar crushed the Gallic cavalry near Dijon (*Divo* — divine). Vercingetorix retreated to Alesia (in the center of France), but reduced to famine, his 80,000 men and he had to capitulate after 2 months of siege. The Romans were in Gaul for seven years, during which ten thousand men were killed. Vercingetorix surrendered his arms to Cæsar and was taken to Rome in order to appear enchained at the Triumph of the Victors. Six years later in 46 BC, still a prisoner in Rome, Vercingérix died strangled.

ASTERIX — FICTIVE HERO. — or 'Asterix the Gaul' is a series of French comics, written by René Goscinny and illustrated by Albert Uderzo. The series appeared in the Franco-Belgian magazine *Pilote* in 1959. Asterix also appears in movie versions of his adventures. In these stories, Asterix and his Gallic friends defeat the Romans and perform magic exploits with their Druid priests. For many Frenchmen, Asterix represents the courage of patriots who allowed France to endure many invasions during its history. There is also a popular theme park in France, the 'Parc Astérix', where Gallophiles can visit ancient Gaul and enjoy fun rides (**http://www.parcasterix.com/**).

THAMORY — FICTIVE ANTI-HERO in *LANZ & GWENHEVRE*. — **Riothamus** is a Latinization of the Brythonic meaning 'powerful king' or 'supreme king'. This form in the romance, 'THAMO-ry', is the reversal of 'rio-THAMUS' based on this Romano-Britannic hero [from **rigo** (king) **tamos** (powerful), a real military leader around 470 AD. He fought against the Goths in alliance with the Roman Empire. Called 'the king of the Bretons' by Jordanes, a historian in the sixth century, the extent of his kingdom is not certain.

Although it's still a subject of debate, some scholars consider this hero as one of the possible sources of the legend of **King Arthur**. Two of these researchers are Léon Fleuriot, an academic, and the historian Geoffrey Ashe. These authors also note that the last position of Riothamus was near the Burgundian town of **Avallon**. Moreover, the activities of King Riothamus in Gaul can also be one of the sources for Geoffrey de Monmouth and his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Geoffrey Ashe suggested a direct link between the betrayal of Riothamus by Arvandus and the betrayal of Arthur by Mordred in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

BARD. — A Celtic poet who sings praises about heroes. *By extension:* Heroic and lyrical poet. *History:* Bards and ovates or diviners were, like the Druids, but at an inferior rank, part of the sacerdotal class among the Gauls. Their function was mainly to celebrate the exploits of the leader who harbored them. Bards are found in all Celtic countries.

GERMANIC FRANCE

Despite its Germanic name, France represents primarily a Latin culture, although Frankish domination lasted as long as Roman domination, each 500 years. The Franks took charge of the administration of the country after the fall of Rome, but the culture remained essentially Roman in the upper classes. In fact, some of the Germanic tribes, especially the Burgundians and the Visigoths, were themselves Romanized before the fall of Rome. The Franks and Alamanni, on the other hand, had little contact with Roman culture before settling in Gaul after the fall of Rome. Moreover, the Franks and Alamanni who invaded Gaul remained for generations pagan and faithful to their heritage, maintaining lasting bonds with their country of origin and its customs. Finally, the first king of France who spoke mainly the Romance tongue (French) and not Frankish was Hugues Capet, five hundred years after the fall of Rome in 987! Obviously, long-standing Germanic traditions mixed with those of the Romanized Gauls.

LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE. — After Latin, the Frankish language is the second influence in French vocabulary. Many everyday words are of Frankish origin, concerning terms relative to 1) war; 2) rural life; 3) hunting; (4) political and judicial institutions, including colors, for example: *blanc* (white), *bleu* (blue), *brun* (brown), *gris* (grey); adjectives – *gros* (big), *haut* (high), *franc* (frank); ordinary verbs — *fournir* (to provide), *guérir* (to heal), *garder* (to keep), etc. While the Franks finally adopted the language of Romanized Gaul, nevertheless, Gaul would retain a Germanic name — *France*. Even after the adoption of the Romance language, Francophones continued to name their children by Frankish first names. For example, many popular first names are of Frankish origin: **Albert**, in Frankish *Allbrecht,* meaning 'all shining', **Henri**, in Frankish *Hamrich,* meaning 'ruler of family or nation', **Frederic**, in Frankish *Frederich,* 'peaceful ruler', **Gautier**, in Frankish *Walter,* meaning 'the forester', **Geoffroi**, in Frankish *Gotfred,* meaning 'God's peace'. There is even a common root in this Germanic surname (**Werner**); in English (**Warner**); in French (**Garnier**). Moreover, many Frankish names, in their French form, spread into England after the Norman Conquest, where the ruling class spoke French. For example, the modern pronunciation of **William** closely imitates the medieval Anglo-Norman pronunciation of **Guillaume** (written at the time **Willam** and pronounced [*wiljam*]). Later on, the French and Spanish opted to replace the Germanic letter 'w' with 'gu' in order to preserve the sound [*w*] of the Low German 'w' instead of pronouncing 'w' [*v*] as in High German. Ironically, the French and Spanish ended up pronouncing this use of 'gu' [*g*]. Finally, the spelling *Willam* represents the old pronunciation in medieval French of *the l mouillé*, pronounced at that time like 'lli' in *million*.

SALIC LAW. — The legal code of the Salian Franks who conquered Gaul in the fifth century, the code published at the end of the reign of Clovis, founder of the Merovingian dynasty. The code was reissued twice during the Germanic dynasties of France — Merovingian and Carolingian, modified several times. The Salic Law codified judicial proceedings and sentences, with a long list of fines for various offenses and crimes. The code also covered civil law, with a chapter that excludes girls from inheriting land. This chapter was to play an important part in French and English history in the Middle Ages, invoked to prevent English kings, whose mothers were French princesses, from succeeding the French crown. Although this code was written in Latin, it was little influenced by Roman law. Some of the Frankish legal terms were Latinized, but several Frankish words remained in the Latin version.