

Briton Brython Etc.

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.archaeology/2006-04/msg00429.html>

- *From:* prd <X_header@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Sun, 23 Apr 2006 17:33:03 GMT
-

I have been reading a large number of posts over the last 2 or 3 days, a considerable waste of bandwidth, not to mention meaningless retorts to a person who is completely clueless.

Way wrapped up in these issues are the pre Anglo-Saxon migration culture of Northwestern Isles of Europe (Great Britain or Britian and Ireland, etc). In this context we are referring to what the names were according to a third party (niether Anglo-Saxon or Native) but Roman.

In this regard it needs to be remembered that while the Romans had historians and military scribes and the like, the relative experience of the greeks and romans really places the romans of the period more or less as an emperialistic militaristic empire which placed a greater value on exhaling their exploits than documenting history in an objective manner. An account is an account, we cannot go back in time and correct errors in that account. However, if an account is backloaded with false assumptions, biases, etc, its value as an account is more or less useless. So the value of the definition needs to be weighed. Briton is a word that describes [handwaving] some people who lived ont these NW Isles at the time of the romans. The word itself is putative from Britto which is a celtic word. The people the romans encountered probably were key.

"

The Roman geographer Ptolemy called the larger island Megale Brettania (Great Britain), and the smaller island of Ireland Micra Britannia (Little Britain). Hence, originally, the term Great Britain referred to the largest island in the British Isles, just as the largest of the Canary Islands is still called Gran Canaria, and the largest of the Comoros is Grande Comore.

"

Therefore we have a contemporary source that defines the entire region of the Isles. The modern use of the term however is contested, but the contest may be irrelevant given the History.

"

Briton Brython Etc.

The usage of the term is sensitive in some areas, particularly among supporters of some political parties, for example the Scottish National Party, and can vary in exact meaning depending on context and the author's personal prejudices.

"

Let us consider if Ptolmey's understanding is not perfect.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picts>

"

The Picts were a confederation of tribes in central and northern Scotland from the 3rd century to the 10th century. They lived to the north of the Forth and Clyde. They were the descendants of the Caledonii and other tribes named by Roman historians or found on the map of Ptolemy.

"

"

The name which the Picts called themselves is unknown. The Latin word Picti is taken to mean painted or tattooed people.[1] The Gaels of Ireland and Dál Riata called the Picts Cruithne, (e.g. Old Irish cru(i)then-túath).[2] There were also Cruithne in Ulster, in particular the kings of Dál nAraidi.[3]

"

1 Pict first appears in a panegyric written by Eumenius in AD 297. Although Picti is usually taken to mean painted or tattooed in Latin, the term may have a Celtic origin, e.g. the Pictones of the Loire.

2 Presumably from Proto-Celtic *kwriteno-touta.

3 The Cruithni are discussed by Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 106-109, Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, pp. 48-50.

So that it seems likely that the celtic name may have been derived from the first peoples the romans encountered to the southeast and the understanding of the peoples to west and north resulted in an error of generalization. This specific problem is dominant with regard to later history (repeated and successful attempts of the southeast to control the north and west).

From a molecular genetic point of view, precedences in the region need to be considered. The genetic relationship between the Irish and Scottish and Welsh is virtually identical, the cornish show patterns of distinction from these groups and suggest that the above three were part of a constantly interbreeding cluster which the cornish separated themselves from very early on. Therefore it is probable that the Romans were ignorant of the distinction of the Cornish from other tribes. Obviously the Central and SE English can be distinguished from Scottish, Welsh, Cornish and Irish. The basal problem is that the current genetic and subregional sampling in this region is inadequate to describe how this process occurred (which

Briton Brython Etc.

invasion is responsible for the distinction). Complicating this is the close genetic relationship between the Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Norwegians, Swedish, Gotlanders, Goths, Northern Slavs and derivatives in the south out Europe. Great cultural differences between groups (language, farming habits, social structure, religion) are observed with relatively little genetic distinction. The distinction between the Irish and Scandinavians is the result of no more than 40% admixture with other groups. The critical issue is when, if the bilateral isolation occurred before the onset of the metal ages, pre-existing culture may have been irrelevant, and genetics is not a marker at all. Distance is also a factor, in the immediate since genes don't change with distance but culture does tend to change rapidly as people travel, small genetic contributions (admixture) may represent disproportionate cultural contributions. I can, with out much trouble, explain the British as a recent (post Roman) admixture between an Welsh/Scottish like people and European mainlanders. This would mean the Romans did not go far enough in defining Brython. While this can be done, there are enough unique haplotypes in the survey of British to suggest a previous interaction with the mainland and admixture in the south east, whereas the genetic signature elsewhere on the Isles reflects relative isolation. This genetic signature has to be distinguished from the overwhelming and ancient signature of the gene flow up the western Atlantic coast. As a result the different geographic vectors of origin demonstrate a plausible Neolithic and early metal age distinction between the SE Isles and NW Isles. It may be this cultural exchange and similarity with mainland Gauls that the Romans exploited as they moved into their 'Briton' and that this is the culture they identified.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commius>

http://www.romans-in-britain.org.uk/club_tribe_atrebates.htm

So let us argue for the moment that this is correct, that adequate gene flow had occurred before Roman times so create an admixed culture in the SE of England that followed a tradition of similar past cultures. Secondary arguments about tribalisms and the need for trade, who was king and who the Romans recognized as king. The Atrebates settled in the south but not directly across Dover, and the Romans were able to make agreements with people north of the Thames estuary. Even if the Atrebates brought group specific HLA types to England, the level of those types even now would not suffice to be recognized over the general sample of England. Therefore it means the influence if of a pre-Roman recency would have to have stretched farther inland, therefore the sphere of what was core to the Roman recognition of 'Briton' would have contained 4 or 5 British counties in the southeastern part of England. Beyond this there would have been cultural intermediate zones of trade and cultural blends until one got to the regions of Briton that the Romans were less familiar with and failed to document or preserve history of.

The issue is not resolved, but the fact the Romans built a wall to

Briton Brython Etc.

the north and the cornish can identify themselves separately suggests at least some error (over generalization) on the romans behalf.

The ptolemic definition of Great Britian is probably adequate given the post-ptolemic events, and not neccesarly inadequate to define briton of the period. For example the pictic tribes may have been more culturally brythonic before the arrival and dominance of the Scottie in Alba (which is the Irish/Caledonian name of the whole island of Great Briton) after the 9th century, some are now saying this change was of little importance, culturally since caledonians had settled in Ireland and vice versa during the previous period.

The Romans recognized Ireland as Hibernia, but apparently failed to see the strong cultural connection between Ireland and northern Britian and western Britian. This understanding may be due to the fact that the Romans did not have a significant presence in Hibernia.

So I would argue that while one can come up with a historically derived definition of 'Briton' 'Bython' 'Britain' the secondary issue of meaning can be asserted. For the romans the meaning of romans was the name of an Island they found handily with name by natives. Since they define Great Britian as the larger Island and Lessor Britain as Ireland then we have a pretty good indicator that this was explicitly their reasoning and the cultural complexities was not a reason for the definition.

We have poorer examples. We have North America named after a dude named amerigo and South America and it is dubious whether this individual stepped on either continent. West Virginia and Virginia are named after a Queen of England. IN terms of Naming things, really bad nomenclater is pretty par for conquerors.

The secondary issue is what is culturally briton, versus cultural alban or cornish as this might be sort of important as split modern definition. Culturally Briton (people who recognized themselves to the romans as part of a larger collective Britto) may have only included a small number of tribes, which we know almost nothing about, either genetically in representation of the uniqueness of modern English or historically, in the means by which the romans documented the culture of these peoples as they were encountered. It may have not been inaccurate to describe intermediate tribes between cornish or hibernian as being Brythonic.

Relevance to the discussion. Post-emperial invasions of these Illes by this or that group does not make more culturally sophisticated in recognizing intertribal or intercultural boundaries. Its taken 500 years of post colonial invasions to arrive at a greater understanding of the native cultures of the new world. It is not a common goal of the conquerors to exhalt the culture of the conquered. Percentages of westward or northward migrants, etc would be something the migrators would want to conceal from their enemies. Therefore accounts get blurred in the fog of wars. Levels of admixture are often not revealed (i.e. if you can blend into the basturds, best not to reveal your differences) in the perceptions or history. From this logic

Briton Brython Etc.

follows there is no genuine means of resolving the issue of invader versus invaded at the cultural level. And one can translate this to mean there is no particular way for the Invaders to know when they crossed the cultural line (if such a line exists) between Briton, Romanized Britons and some other different tribe which leaned more toward the core culture of some other geographically defined group. It would be very nice for me to come back with grand details of sub-nodes within SE Briton and a categorization of which groups dominated in which region. That objective information does not exist, and so the cultural or historical heresy claims by Romans are the only thing of value, even if culturally I disagree that this is a fair cultural representation.

I think it is acceptable in this instance if there is some confusion over what Briton and Britian are in the Iron-age, but we have to agree that from a political and geographic point of view Briton is already defined even if the definition confuses an earlier definition. The confusion lies in how in depth the Romans would recognize culturally distinguishable peoples, and how far their cultural definition went, we cannot know on the ground the answer to either question.