Preface to the First English Edition

The history presented in this book seeks to do justice to the term ‘Celt’ in all its aspects, and therefore spans the entire field, from a time before written records to the present, from the westernmost manifestation of Celtic culture in Ireland to the easternmost in Asia Minor. It aims to help the general reader to make historical sense of the various facets of Celtic culture, while offering the specialist reader an overview of the present state of knowledge by means of detailed references to all sources. Following the historical sequence of events, the presentation is divided into three parts.

Part I deals with the continental Celts of antiquity, on whom there is little native documentary evidence and who are known chiefly from the evidence of archaeology and the observations of classical commentators. The first chapters present the culture and history of the Celts of central Europe from the late West Hallstatt culture to the civilisation of the oppida in the immediately pre-Roman period. This is followed by a brief survey of the history of the Celts in northern Italy and the most westerly and easterly branches of Celtic
culture in the Iberian peninsula and Asia Minor. Part I concludes with a chapter on the Romanisation of Gaul, which marked the end of the political independence of the Celtic peoples on the European mainland.

Part II covers the medieval history of the Celtic peoples of Ireland, Britain and Brittany, which was colonised from Britain. These chapters focus on the effects of the Celts’ conversion to Christianity, the foundations of their political, legal and social order, and the evolution of their languages and literatures. They also analyse the contribution of the insular Celts to the culture of medieval Europe, which can be seen particularly clearly in the Irish mission and in the reception of Celtic materials and motifs in courtly literature. Part II ends by describing the transformation of traditional social, cultural and legal structures that resulted from the loss of political independence.

Part III is devoted to the modern age. It deals first with the later history of the Celtic languages and literatures, and secondly with the rediscovery of the ancient Celts and how this has affected the self-image of contemporary speakers of Celtic tongues. Here the focus is on developments in economic, demographic and cultural policy, the influence of the Christian denominations on language and literature, and lastly how romantic and nationalist tendencies have led to the creation of a timeless and imaginary Celtic world. The book concludes with some reflections on the question of our modern use of the term ‘Celtic’ and the role of the Celts in Western culture.

It is my pleasant duty to record my gratitude to three bodies which, through their material support, have made possible my long-lasting engagement with Celtic culture and thus also this book: the German Research Foundation for a three-year post-doctoral scholarship for research into Celtic religious history; the Gerda Henkel Foundation for a two-year research grant to investigate the phenomenon of Interpretatio Romana; and Professor Geraint Jenkins of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth.
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In the present English edition, the Bibliography and corresponding references have been brought up to date and adapted to the needs of English-speaking readers. I have taken the opportunity to add two short paragraphs on Manx and Cornish and to correct a number of minor inconsistencies and errors. For pertinent suggestions I am grateful to Dr Anja Gunderloch (Glasgow) and, above all, to Dr Kevin Windle (Canberra) who suggested a number of improvements and succeeded in translating an often difficult German text into readable English. Thanks are also due to Sarah Burnett for her extremely skilled and tactful editing.

Preface to the Second English Edition

Sixteen years after the publication of the German original, and thirteen years after the publication of the first English-language edition, C. H. Beck publishers (Munich) gave me the opportunity to thoroughly revise, update and expand the original German version, taking account of recent archaeological discoveries and the considerable progress in Celtic Studies. For the present English-language version of the new German edition, the original translator, Kevin Windle, has again provided a faithful and accurate rendering of several new passages and implemented numerous minor changes and additions which had become necessary in the notes and bibliography.