

Celtic and Hispanic

by Douglas Carter

I often joke with Irish visitors to New Mexico that in this state they are considered Anglos. Their reactions range from amusement to insult. To the native New Mexican, though, this is logical since by the time members of their European cultures arrived here they usually spoke English. This tendency to lump other cultures together one-dimensionally is also perpetrated by the Anglo culture. Few Americans realize the breadth and depth of Celtic heritage in Hispanic society. This heritage extends from history through language, music, dance and society and is reflected by first and last names, vocabulary and place names.

This article will help familiarize readers with the proud Celtic heritage of Spain. A brief bibliography and surname dictionary are appended. It should be noted that not all authorities always agree.

I would like to thank Dominic Garland of Belfast, an Irish teacher and scholar, for providing me with sources, articles and especially the inspiration that motivates this article. (Dominic visited us along with Clan Rye and Sessun Cuchallain in 1993.) A knowledge of our common Celtic origins should lead to mutual understanding and sympathy.

It is a misconception to assume that the Celts were one race. This notion has been successfully refuted academically since ancient times. According to the historian Suetonius, the Roman Emperor Caligula was known to dye captives' hair in order to create the illusion of race. One of the most fearsome confraternities of Celtic speaking tribes inhabiting northwestern and Rhineland Gaul, and southern Britain, the Belgae, "were of mixed racial origins... probably more Germanic than Celtic" (McCullough). Even recent genetic studies carried out in Ireland demonstrate a preponderantly Nordic genetic heritage (Garland). Both the classic and modern definition of Celticity is Celtic speech. Since only minorities of the inhabitants of Wales, Brittany, Scotland, Isle of Mann, and Ireland still speak the language, this definition must expand to include Celtic vocabulary, customs, music, and "names - place names, personal names and names of people attached to places" (MacNeill).

The Celts arrived in Spain in 1300 B.C. and by 600 BC had spread of over the entire peninsula. One authority, Jean Descola, asserts in his History of Spain, 1962 that the name Iberia comes from the Celtic word aber meaning harbor or

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river. Modern scholars have given up any attempt to divide these tribes into Celts and Galatians (Gauls) and some even consider them two pronunciations of the same word. Julius Ccesar at the beginning of the Commentaries used this definition: Qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appelantur "Who are called Celts in their own language and Gauls in ours." These names came from the Celts themselves.

By classic times the Greek geographer Strabo had located the Celtici or Galleaci in northwest Iberia. Other tribes mentioned before and during Roman conquest include the Cantabri, Cerretani, Indegetes, Edetani, Sidetani, Constestani, Turduli, Turdetani, and the Treveri.

The conquest of Iberia by the Romans pre-dates their conquest of Gaul. Many Celtic words had entered Latin and had been classified as low or vulgar Latin in ancient times. Even by that time the Romans had adopted the Celtic word for chariot - carrus from which a myriad of words and names derive. (My own included.) Many people think the Spanish word carro is an Anglization when it actually entered Latin by way of Iberia and then into other languages. (Carrus in Celtic.)

The northwest part of Spain is called Galicia and the people and language are called gallegos or Gaelic. The pre-Roman inhabitants of Iberia are called celtiberos or Celtic Iberians. The author, James Michener, in Iberia, describes Galicia as "...a hard, cold, dour land resembling Scotland...The food is heavy like Scottish food, the dress is colorful, like Scottish dress." The music of Galicia is performed on the gaita, an instrument virtually indistinguishable in construction and sound from the highland war pipes. The dances and music of Galicia are recognizably jigs and hornpipes.

Spanish is the only modern language to use a Celtic word for beer, ceveza. Many of us know a "gordo" or fat one. This comes from the Celtic gurdu (gurr in Welsh). The Spanish term for someone of light tan complexion,

güero, comes from the verb engorar meaning to char. The ancient Irish word for fire, gorm, derives from the same root. Here in New Mexico when we see someone with long, dirty hair, we call them greñudo from the Celtic (and modern Spanish) greña or greasy lock of hair. People who have visited Spain have drunk from a bota thinking it means boot when it is really a Celtic word for leather wine bottle.

Many of the Spanish words associated with the land are of Celtic origin. Tapia, which in New Mexico means a dirt or adobe wall, is a form of the Celtic word teppa which mean sod. In modern Gaelic this word is tabhta (tuft in English). Légamo, (slime) and lama (silt), are Celtic words. The Spanish word for flagstone, losa comes from the Celtic leac meaning flat stone (llecl in Welsh).

The Celtic heritage of Hispanics is evident in many words from agriculture and nature. The Spanish word for hook, gancho is Celtic. The words hoz (sickle), cuerno (horn) and corcovada (hump) derive from the Celtic cor or point, as do the Cornish crýman and Irish cróman (curved surgical instrument). A Spanish unit of land

measure arpente is the Celtic arpennis (Irish airchann). A plowed field in Spanish is sema from the Celtic senara (send=apart & ara=plowed field). Carpintero (carpenter) is from a Celtic word for vassal. Legua or league is a Celtic unit of measure.

When a person thinks of Scotland she often thinks of heather and thistle. The Spanish speaker uses Celtic words for these plants, brezo (vroikos in ancient Gaelic) and cardeña (Carduss in Celtic and corran in Irish). Other Spanish words of Celtic origin are abedul (birch), aríño (sloe), alamo (cottonwood) berro (watercress) and alondra (lark).

If you watch someone walking down the camino, (caminn in Celtic) through the chamiza (dried straw) wearing a camisa or shirt (Celtic for undershirt) and bragas (Celtic for britches) singing with brio (force) you get an idea of the Celtic heritage of Hispanic peoples.

Celtic place names are not limited to Galicia. All over Iberia are found places that incorporate Celtic words. Words such as briga (hill fortress), con and barr (height), nantes (valleys), sen (apart), cor (sharp), nemetes (temples), carvi (farm), don (fort, like the Scottish and Irish dún). The Spanish word for a mine is mina from the Celtic mcin meaning ore or mineral. In Castille something soft or smooth is said to be mellid from the Celtic mcliddi (mifis in ancient Irish). Many cities and towns in the Spanish-speaking world are called Loón and Lugo from the Celtic fire-

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your name down on sheet, I'll give a reminder call after Labor Day.

I guess that's it--Oh, I do want to wish the Edelweiss am Rio Grande German American Club a very Happy 30th Anniversary. They started their ethnic organization in July 1965 and will celebrate the 30 years on July 21-22, 1995.

Have a good summer and see ya!

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god Lugh. Towns in Murcia and Zaragoza are named Chacón from chac, Celtic for noise. Ávila (Abilus, a Celtic given name) and Aragón (from aar, Celtic water) are Celtic place names. As are pico, meaning beak (Celtic beccus) and peña meaning rock (Celtic pen, Irish and Scottish ken).

The Celtic tradition permeates more than just the language and culture of the Hispanic world. Many Spanish names, both given names and surnames, are Castilianized Celtic. In much the same way that a woman may say that her name, Callaghan, is Irish when it is really Anglized, Celtic names are Castilianized in Spain. Callaghan comes from ceallachan, meaning little war, or scuffle. The Spanish name Carabajal comes from the Celtic crabohh baran meaning hedge of oaks.

Celtic given names are still used in the Hispanic world. Some derive from the word Celt itself: Celtigum. Celso. Celtus, Celticus. Blandina(o) is a name originating in Celtic Iberia deriving from blandona meaning candle wick in Celtic. Camilo comes from the Celtic cam meaning battle. Brigido is from briga meaning force. The name Galván is the Hispanic version of Gwalwanus (Gawain) from the Welsh (Gawlehgwyn) or white falcon.

In addition to the Celtic surnames already mentioned (Aragón, Ávila, Carabajal, Gallegos, Peña, Serna, Tapia, Lugo, Mcna, and León) there are many, many others. Some common New Mexico Celtic surnames are: Contreras (from the Celtic ccad suibhal meaning traversing); Atencio (from tanistear meaning regent or heir presumptive); Maldonado, a Castilianization of MacDonald; and Carrasco meaning holm oak (crabohh ach). I have attached a list of some Spanish surnames of Celtic origin. I hope this article helps promote a spirit of community by showing the common heritage that so many of us share. Whether your name is MacCall or Macal (from the Gaelic for son of Caithail, he who directs the war or dominates the battle) you have a lot in common.

Celticity is not a matter of race but of culture and culture is acquired.

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Spanish/Celtic Surname Dictionary

Aragon	aa, aar; water, river
Arévalo	are + vatón, near or next to a wall

Ariño	arueag, sloc tree
Atencio	tamistear, heir presumptive or regent
Ávila	Abilus, pre-Roman Celtic cognomen
Baldonado	same as Maldonado
Barrera	barr=height - stockade
Braga, Braganza	bragas, britches
Brezo	vroikos, heather
Briceño, Briesca	brisca, honeycomb
Brito, Brigido	briga, force or strength
Carabajal	Craobh baran, hedge of oaks
Cardenas	carduus, thistle
Carrasco	craobh holm, oak and Low Scottish holm, dry ground
Carrera/Carrion etc.	carrus, chariot
Celtillo	little Celt
Chacón	chac, noise
Coimbra	Conimbriga, con=height & briga=fortress
Contreras	cead siubhal, traversing
De Bayle	baile, district, great family estate
Delano	nauda, damp ground
Donaldo	Dumnovalos, powerful in the world
Gabatdón	dun, fort Gabalus-Celtic given name
GatLcgos	Galleaci, Gaels - a Celtic tribe
Galván	Gwalwanus (Gawain) Welsh gawlchgwyn - white falcon
Garriga	craobh ach, space covered with oaks
Garrote	garra, leg - crossbow bott
Ledesma	broad or wide
Leon, Lugo	Lugh, Celtic fire god
Losa, Llosa	teac, flagstone (Welsh llecl)
Maldonado	MacDonald, son of Donald (he who governs the world)
Mina	mein, ore or minerat
Narbona	isolated dwelling or residence
Peña	pen or ken, large rock
Pico	beccus, beak
Rangel	rinc, creak
Serna	Senara, a plot of land or feudal service
Tanarro	Gaelic tanachd, thinness
Tapia	teppa, sod (dirt or adobe wall)
Treviño	Treveri, a Celtic tribe

Celtic Corner

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and Ancient Celtic

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