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Ph.D. Theses  
Summary

**The Ancient Druids in the Light of Ancient Sources.  
Revisiting Old Questions**

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## I.

The Druids of ancient Gaul have always generated significant scholarly interest, yet many uncertainties still surround them. Given that many researchers have already dealt with the topic, it is legitimate to ask what new contributions can be made to this thoroughly researched subject. Therefore, I justify my choice of topic and briefly present the issues that highlight why it is still worthwhile to engage with this often considered "overworked" topic.

In my view, the most serious problem is that some experts working on the subject often rely on translations or isolated excerpts when analysing written sources. The data contained in these are often connected to the Druids in a way that is questionable or not possible based on the context of the text. As a result, researchers sometimes attribute data to the Druids that do not actually pertain to them. This problem is particularly characteristic of interpretations of the description of the Druids found in Book XXX of the *Naturalis Historia*, but similar erroneous interpretations can be found in relation to other texts as well, which can be excluded through more precise examination of the texts.

Since the Druids are mainly known from written sources, their precise interpretation and thorough philological analysis are essential for research on the subject. Thus, my choice of dissertation title (*The Ancient Druids in the Light of Written Sources*) is partly justified by the problems related to the written sources.

However, the subtitle of the dissertation (*Revisiting Old Questions*) was inspired by other problems. The most significant of these is that an outdated approach still appears in some scholarly works, which suggests that most of our data on the Druids comes from fragmentary accounts of ancient authors, primarily from Posidonius. In my dissertation, I devote an entire chapter to this question, in which I demonstrate how the application of a concept that traces sources back to Posidonius and exaggerates the significance of his work creates problems and contributes to the formation of an ahistorical image of the Druids. Therefore, in my work, I aim to highlight the unique data found in various descriptions, thereby demonstrating how individual authors have expanded our knowledge of the Druids. Additionally, I thoroughly examine the issue of sources for each author.

Furthermore, the dissertation addresses questions that, while not directly related to the Druids, contribute to a more accurate interpretation of the sources. These include, for instance, the dating of *De Chorographia* and the dating of the Claudian-era restrictions imposed against

the Druids. Clarifying these two issues is essential for the precise interpretation of the passages in Mela's work that mention the Druids.

## II.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, following the justification of my topic selection, I examine three themes that not only contextualize the subject under investigation but also provide guidance for the analysis in subsequent chapters.

In Section 1. 2., I address the concepts of 'Gaul' and 'Celt,' considering how both ancient and modern authors have understood these terms. The study of the Celts is particularly important because the Gauls are categorized among the Celtic peoples, and since numerous parallels can be observed among the Celtic groups, examining these parallels can facilitate a better understanding of certain Gallic phenomena. As a result of this overview, I concluded that although there are indeed similarities among the various Celtic peoples, because of the temporal and spatial distances careful consideration is required when applying these parallels in my work.

In Section 1. 3., I review the relationship between the Celts and the Greco-Roman world and the image that was constructed of them. The literary *topoi* and concepts formed about the Celts could have influenced the authors in the creation of their works. In my review, I present the major events and *topoi* that allow me to conclude that the depiction of the Celts was generally negative, mostly due to the conflicts with them. However, the formation of these *topoi* was also influenced by concepts that, for example, depicted Western and Eastern or Southern and Northern peoples as opposites. The negative perception of the Celts was further reinforced by the negative views on their religion, an aspect that is also significant in the context of the Druids.

In Section 1. 4., I situate the Druids in time and space. In this chapter, I briefly review the theories regarding their origin and their distribution. Based partly on Caesar's description and partly on the changes that followed the arrival of the Belgae in Gaul, I believe that the Druids were not present among all Celtic peoples. The arrival of the Belgae led to the establishment of permanent sanctuaries, which suggests the development of a more organized priesthood, and burial customs also changed, indicating a transformation in religious life. Therefore, the druid's emergence likely occurred in northern Gaul or Britain in the 4th century BC. They flourished in Gaul during the period of Arvernian power, in the 3rd to 2nd centuries BC.

Subsequently, in my dissertation, I examine Gallic society before the Roman conquest. In Section 2. 1., I primarily focus on the sources available for the study of Gallic society and the extent to which they can be used to clarify specific issues. Following this, I explore the position of the Druids within Gallic society, which requires an overview of what is known about Gallic social and political units, the offices that existed, and the significant political assemblies. These chapters are necessary because, based on Caesar's description, it is plausible that the Druids held leadership positions and participated in major political assemblies. My review highlights that these claims are valid, as the Druids, considered part of the *nobiles*, could have held leadership roles within the tribe, similar to the warriors. In this chapter, I place the Druids within Gallic society with a broader perspective than is typically done in studies focusing on them.

Following the chapters dealing with Gallic society, I examine how Greek and Roman authors depicted the Druids in their writings. In Section 3. 1., I outline the major issues typically associated with the ancient sources that mention the Druids, and I also address the modern concepts – and the inherent dangers in them – that may influence the interpretation of the texts I examine.

In Section 3. 2., I investigate, based on the description of Diogenes Laertius, which early authors might have written about the Druids, and which sources Diogenes might have used in reference to the Druids. According to his account, it is possible that Aristotle, Antisthenes, and Sotion wrote about them. However, due to the limitations of our sources, it is doubtful whether any of these authors actually wrote about the Druids. Among the three authors, Sotion is the most likely to have written about them, but even this cannot be definitively proven, as it is possible that Diogenes supplemented the list of barbarian philosophers found in earlier works with the Druids, meaning that they did not originally appear in any of the works he cited.

In Section 3. 3., I focus on Posidonius and the issues surrounding him. Since the author's statements regarding the Druids have survived only in fragments, and it is likely that several later authors also utilized Posidonius' descriptions, a concept has emerged in the scholarly literature suggesting that a significant portion of the later authors' statements about the Druids can be traced back to Posidonius. As a result, scholars have attempted to reconstruct Posidonius' description of the Druids based on the accounts of Caesar, Strabo, and Diodorus. Additionally, some exaggerated scholarly opinions have emerged, even claiming that the Gallic Diviciacus cited Posidonius to Cicero when telling him what the Druids were engaged in. In this chapter, I examine this concept, pointing out that this approach is methodologically problematic, as there are significant discrepancies among the descriptions provided by authors who presumably

followed Posidonius. This raises doubts about the extent to which later authors actually relied on his work.

In Section 3. 4. and *Appendix 4*, I address Caesar's ethnographic *excursus* on the Gauls, which appears in the sixth book of *De Bello Gallico*. In Section 3. 4. 1., I examine the circumstances surrounding the creation of the work and gather background information on the role of ethnographic descriptions in Caesar's work. A thorough philological analysis of the text is conducted in *Appendix 4*, and the disputed issues are discussed in the notes accompanying the text. Wherever possible, I compare Caesar's statements with data provided by other authors as well as with archaeological findings. At the conclusion of this chapter, in Section 3. 4. 2., I summarize what we can learn about the Druids from Caesar's account. Regarding the issue of sources, I have concluded that, although Caesar had unique experiences, but he likely also utilized literary works in crafting his description. However, his account contains numerous unique elements and primarily focuses on the social, political, and religious roles of the Druids.

In Chapter 3. 5. and *Appendix 5*, I examine Cicero's remark that Diviciacus was a Druid, meaning he engaged in physiology and divination. Due to the issues related to this statement, in Section 3. 5. 2., I investigate how Cicero and other authors used the term Druid, as the accounts of Diodorus and Strabo suggest the possibility that Diviciacus of the Haedui tribe might have been a Gallic seer (*mantis* or *uateis*). In this chapter, I conclude that the use of the term Druid was inconsistent, and it is likely that Roman authors referred to Gallic seers and other groups as Druids. Subsequently, in Section 3. 5. 3., I examine the references to Diviciacus in Caesar's writings to determine whether there are any indications that confirm Diviciacus' status as a Druid. I found no such evidence in Caesar's accounts, but I was able to refute several claims about Diviciacus. According to our sources, it cannot be proven that he traveled to Rome as a *vergobretus*, as Caesar states that a *vergobretus* could not leave the tribe's territory. Additionally, the claim that Diviciacus of the Haedui tribe was a king is also refutable. This misconception likely arose from a confusion with another Diviciacus mentioned by Caesar, who was a king of the Belgae. In conclusion, after reviewing the previous findings, I determined that Cicero's source was probably not Posidonius, and that Diviciacus was more likely a Gallic seer.

In Chapter 3. 6. and *Appendix 6*, I examine Diodorus' statements regarding the Druids. In Section 3. 6. 1., due to the issues outlined in Chapter 3. 3., I examine what sources Diodorus could have used. By comparing his account with other authors' descriptions who followed Posidonius, I concluded that Diodorus likely depended less on Posidonius than previously thought, due to the unique elements found in his description. From his account, we learn various details about the bards and their social roles, and about the Gallic seers (*mantis*), who performed

sacrifices. Regarding the Druids, it can be inferred that their roles likely involved leading rituals or reciting prayers during a ritual.

In Chapter 3. 7. and *Appendix 7*, I address the passages in Strabo's work in which the author discusses the religious and intellectual elite of the Gauls and mentions the abolition of certain Gallic religious customs. In Section 3. 7. 1., I focus on the prevailing modes of depiction during the author's time. In his work, fear of northern peoples had already been replaced by admiration for Rome, which made the changes occurring in the territories of the conquered peoples more significant. Therefore, the author recorded the old customs, which were considered barbaric, in his work, but he noted that these customs had already ceased to exist. The emphasis on *mirabilia* and *paradoxa*, such as the practice of human sacrifice and the presence of barbarian "philosophers" in these rituals, was also characteristic of the period. In addition to Posidonius, the author utilized other works for his description, such as Caesar, who had extensive knowledge of the Gauls. However, it cannot be confirmed that he used the account of Timagenes. After reviewing the scholarly opinions and conducting a thorough philological analysis of the text, I concluded that the data in Strabo's work cannot be linked to either the Augustan or Tiberian bans on the Druids, as the author only wrote about the abolition of certain practices, such as human sacrifice. Therefore, I assume that the work may reference either the *senatus consultum* of 97 BC, which banned human sacrifices, or the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*.

In Chapter 3. 8. and *Appendix 8*, I examine Pomponius Mela's description of Gaul. In Section 3. 8. 1., I investigate the sources from which Mela might have derived his information about Gaul. Due to the similarities between the texts, I believe that Mela primarily relied on Caesar when discussing the Druids, although he supplemented some of the data he borrowed. In Section 3. 8. 2., I explore several topics that, unlike the previous chapters, are not directly related to the Druids but influence the interpretation of the relevant passages in Mela's work. Therefore, I examine the dating of *De Chorographia*, as I consider the Claudian era origin of the work to be uncertain, and I find it possible that Mela wrote his work during the reign of Caligula. This fundamentally affects the question of whether Mela could have referenced Claudius' ban against the Druids, as suggested in the scholarly literature. Although the possibility of Caligula-era authorship had previously been raised in the literature, it lacked sufficient support, as there was no explanation as to why the upcoming triumph for the conquest of Britain, mentioned by Mela, would be linked to Caligula. As a result, the hypothesis of the work's origin during Caligula's reign has long been dismissed by scholars. However, by utilizing Suetonius' biography of Caligula, I presented a sequence of events in my dissertation that makes

it conceivable that *De Chorographia* was written during Caligula's reign, as the Suetonius passages I examined provide an explanation for why Mela might have believed that Caligula's campaign was successful and that he would hold a triumph for his achievements. Nevertheless, the possibility of the work being dated to the Claudian era cannot be completely ruled out either, as the available sources do not make it clear which princeps' campaign Mela regarded as successful. Therefore, the work may have been composed between AD 40 and 44.

The dating of Claudius' ban is also problematic, and I address this in Section 3. 8. 2. 2., where I also review the other restrictions that Mela might have referred to in his work. As a result, regarding the Claudian era ban on the Druids, I pointed out that it is unfounded to date the emperor's actions to AD 54 solely based on Suetonius. The event cannot be dated with certainty from our sources. Additionally, I argue that the statements in Mela's work do not refer to Claudius' ban on the Druids, because, similar to Strabo, Mela only reported the abolition of human sacrifices. Therefore, it is likely that Mela was also referring to the *senatus consultum* of 97 BC, which banned human sacrifices, or to the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*.

In Chapter 3. 9. and *Appendices 9–12*, I examine the passages in which Pliny mentions the Druids. Through a detailed philological analysis of Book XXX, I made several conclusions. In the 13th paragraph of the *Naturalis Historia* Book XXX, the focus is entirely on magic, thus I rejected the scholarly interpretation that Pliny introduced a tradition in his work that differed from Caesar's, suggesting that the teachings of the Druids originated on the continent and then spread to Britain. At this point, Pliny was writing about the spread of magic, not about the spread of Druidic teachings. Furthermore, I pointed out that Sextius Niger was likely Pliny's source on the Druids, as only his name is listed among the sources in all four books of *Natural History* that mention the Druids. Additionally, I find it unlikely that Pliny derived his information about the Druids from Posidonius, as the image of the Druids in his work differs significantly from that of the authors who did indeed utilize Posidonius to some extent.

In Chapter 4, I address the issue of human sacrifices. In Section 4. 1., I review how the Romans perceived human sacrifices and ritual killings. This chapter discusses the human sacrifices conducted in Rome and then examines how the perception of human sacrifices in Rome changed after they were banned, based on the written sources. In Section 4. 2., I explore what can be learned about Gallic human sacrifices from the passages mentioning the Druids and these sacrifices, and by incorporating religious parallels, I seek to determine the reliability of these accounts. The data in these descriptions can be considered credible based on religious parallels, and we can also infer the reasons behind the sacrifices. However, since human sacrifices are no longer found in the Gallic archaeological record during and after the Roman

conquest, it is possible that the authors were describing an earlier tradition and that the rites, already condemned by the Romans, were only presented as *topoi* in the texts. In the case of some authors, such as Caesar and Strabo, it is also conceivable that they used these *topoi* for propaganda purposes. However, our available sources do not allow us to definitively resolve this question.

### III.

1. Regarding the prohibition mentioned by Strabo, I concluded that it is incorrect to associate the data he provides with the bans of the Augustan or Tiberian periods. The author likely referred to either the *senatus consultum* of 97 BC, which banned human sacrifices, or the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*, which also prohibited human sacrifices. The latter possibility has not yet been considered by the scholarship on the Druids.

2. Contrary to the widely accepted view that Mela wrote his work in AD 43–44, during the reign of Claudius, I argued that it is also conceivable that the work was written during the reign of Caligula. Therefore, the work may have been composed between AD 40 and 44.

3. Regarding Claudius' ban on the Druids, I pointed out that it is unfounded to date the emperor's actions to AD 54 solely based on Suetonius. The event cannot actually be dated with certainty from our sources.

4. The statements in *De Chorographia* are likely not related to the bans on the Druids. Mela may have been referring to the *senatus consultum* of 97 BC, which banned human sacrifices, or to the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*.

5. In the 13th paragraph of *Naturalis Historia* Book XXX, the focus is entirely on magic, thus rejecting the scholarly interpretation that Pliny introduced a tradition in his work suggesting that the teachings of the Druids originated on the continent and then spread to Britain.

6. Pliny's source on the Druids was likely Sextius Niger. Additionally, I find it unlikely that Pliny derived his information about the Druids from Posidonius.

7. Although Cicero referred to Diviciacus of the Haedui as a Druid, based on the available sources, I consider it more likely that Diviciacus belonged to the group known by Greek authors as *mantis*, *uateis*, or *euhages*. Furthermore, the opinion that Diviciacus traveled to Rome as a *vergobretus* or that he was a king is not substantiated.



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