

Celtic Lifestyle

During the period when the Celts existed, which is approximately 800 BC - 400 AD, they were just a little tribe compared to other large civilizations such as the Romans and Greeks. They still managed to conquer many regions and prove victorious in most of their battles. Who were these Celts that survived numerous struggles? Where did they originate? What kind of social structure did they have? What kinds of beliefs did they have? What sort of weapons and armor did they use in battle? What were some of their military tactics? These are some of the questions that will be evaluated in the following paragraphs.

The Celts were tall, fair-skinned warriors who were well built, had blond hair and blue eyes. Some of them washed their hair in lime water to increase the hue of it. Some of them shaved their beards, but others let them grow long. Some also shaved their cheeks and let their moustaches grow so long that they would cover their mouth. While eating, they sat on wolves or dog skins. They ate at low tables, like the Chinese, and were served by young boys and girls. They cooked big quarters, usually from a pig or calf over a fire on a spit and the hero was served the biggest portion. Seeing as how they were so aggressive and easy to anger, they often fought during meals or challenged each other to fights.

The Celts lived in the Western region of Europe called the Normandy region. Normandy is a small region in the north of France, but they spread out from that region through all of France and Belgium. They also conquered areas in the western part of Germany, through the Black Forest region, along the Jura Mountains of Switzerland, along the Alps and to the upper part of Spain in the Pyrenees Mountains. They expanded their region to Spain and Portugal in 600 BC and through Italy, beyond the Alps in 386 BC. In 325 BC - 279 BC, they conquered areas throughout Greece, and in 278 BC they expanded into Asia Minor. But around 250 BC, the Romans regained their power in Italy and pushed the Celts back towards Gaul (modern day France) until 52 BC when the Romans, under

command of Julius Caesar finally pushed them out of main land Europe and into England and then into Ireland, where the Celts fended themselves from any further attack from their southern and eastern neighbors.

Celtic society was basically divided into three classes, the Nobility, the Aes Dana and the Commoners or Churls. The Nobility, or warrior class, were the landowners who were in control of the land, herds and most of the physical wealth. They spent their time conducting business, playing board games and watching youths at field games. The Aes Dana were men of art and learning and included many skilled craftsmen. The Commoners owned no land, but were free, not slaves. These three groups made up the major clan which was called the Tuath. The Tuath was ruled by the Ri. His role was primarily in dealings outside the Tuath and was a war leader. His authority was held up and carried out by a council of Nobles.

The Celtic tribes had many religious beliefs and were also very superstitious. They believed certain animals represented different omens or messages. For example, the fish symbolized clairvoyance; the serpent was divine wisdom; the hare was good fortune; the birds were spirits of prophecy; the horse represented sovereignty; the dragon was a guardian spirit. Gods played very important roles in people's daily routines. Not a single job could be done without having the gods involved somehow. They were responsible for the seasons and they controlled the natural world of which man was a part: they therefore had to be placated through intermediaries-the druids-who knew the ancient wisdom and could ensure that the correct procedures were at all times followed. There were three religious occupations that were exempted from taxes and military service. They were the Bards, the Augurers and the Druids. The Bards, who were scholars, were responsible for recording poetry and traditions of the tribes. Augurers oversaw sacrifices and foretold the future, like the prophets of ancient times. The Druids, meaning "knowledge of the oak" or alternatively "profound knowledge" were trained in law and philosophy, they were considered "conceivers of wisdom" like Socrates, Aristotle or Hippocrates of Greece. They studied the movements of the heavenly bodies, gave instruction to young

men in astronomy, the size of the universe and of the earth, and the power and abilities of the gods. They also taught about the afterlife; they believed that the soul does not perish, it just passes from the earthly body to the heavenly body. It is said that this belief in the afterlife is what gave them their extreme bravery in battle. The Druids were not only teachers, but priests, magicians and judges too. They were highly respected by all of the Celtic tribes and other cultures as well. Some of the Celtic gods were Lugh, De Dagda and Oghma. Lugh was like Ra in the Egyptian culture, he was the Sun god, but he was also the god of war, like Mars of the Roman culture. De Dagda was the high king of the Tuatha de Dannan (Folk of the goddess Dana). His name meant 'The Good god'. He was the Celtic god of the earth, heavens, and magic amongst others. He had a harp made of oak which, and when he played it, it put the seasons in their order, so that spring came after winter, summer after spring and autumn followed summer. He had a wife named Boand, who gave birth to nine children, the most important being Angus, Brigid, Oghma, Midir and Bodb the Red. Oghma was the Irish god of literature and eloquence, one of the sons of De Dagda and the champion of the Tuatha de Dannan. He invented the Ogham Script, which was originally intended to be carved upon the edges of standing stones. Each Tuath would have had a divine father or tribal god, who was linked to the welfare of the Tuath and the power and authority of the Ri.

Celtic warriors were well equipped with an arsenal of weapons and armor, and were always ready to fight. During battles, they dressed in long oval shields that covered most of their body. These oval shields were usually made of wicker or wood and might have been covered with leather. Some warriors carried spears, which looked like javelins. These spears were made of wood, which the Celts would throw at opposing forces to knock down some of the enemies. The range was greater than an arrow, so they had more of an advantage over the enemy. The common warriors would wear leather helmets that provided little to no protection, but wealthy warriors could afford bronze helmets that were very protective. During the Bronze Age, they carried a sword that was only designed for thrusting, not cutting. Eventually, the Celts developed a 'Cut - Thrust' Sword which was a long iron double-edged sword. In the Iron Age,

they developed their most popular sword, which was the double-edged Broad sword. It was made of iron and bronze, and it was one of the heaviest swords ever created. It had a wooden scabbard covered with leather and was lined with fur, with bronze chaps, and an iron or bronze blade.

The Celts used only a few battle tactics to overcome their enemies, but they were still very successful in battle. Chariots were an important part of Celtic warfare, a method that was very effective against the Romans. Warrior and driver were a strong team. The driver would bring the chariot to the point of battle, at which the warrior would leap from the chariot and engage the enemy, the driver would then wheel off to one side, ready to come sweeping in to retrieve the warrior when needed. Psychological warfare was used quite often by the Celts. They would paint their faces to look like demonic creatures to scare the enemies to get the first hit against the enemy. They would also scream while attacking enemies which also brought fear into their enemies which usually made them hesitate, which allowed them to get the first hit. The last psychological technique used by the Celts was attacking their enemies naked, which made the enemy either run away or hesitate, so they could get the first hit on their enemies. Fighting was very religious in the Celtic culture, which is why most of them went into battle with almost no fear at all. The Druids also sometimes raised their spirits or encouraged them before the battles. The other battle tactic the Celts used was guerilla warfare, which enabled them to ambush the enemy. They were the first people to use guerilla warfare; other civilizations were still using formation tactics to attack the enemy. This gave them the advantage of surprise against their enemies, which is very useful, especially went outnumbered.

As you can see, the Celts were a culture that thrived and were able to dominate almost all of Europe, from the Bronze Age well into the early Christian period. The areas that remained Celtic after the Romans took over were the Isle of Man, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Brittany and Cornwall. The Celts were excellent artisans and warriors who were very creative. They invented the chariot and the idea of chariot warfare long before the Romans did. They were one of the first people to use the

horse as a beast of burden and they also used the horse in warfare. They were inventive storytellers and poets. They combined their religious beliefs with almost everything they did, which is what gave them their bravery, perseverance and strength to overcome and defeat their enemies. Finally, their ancient wisdom and understanding is thought, by many to be beyond other cultures.