Was *Catu-* Really Celtic for Battle?

Anthony Durham & Michael Goormachtigh
www.proto-english.org/catu.pdf
First published March 2012, this version 14 January 2013

Summary

Many ancient proper names contain an element *Catu-* (or something similar), which is usually assumed to be Celtic for 'battle'. A comprehensive survey of where and how ancient names containing *cat*, *cad*, etc actually occurred contradicts that assumption. Those names mainly derive from the local topography where particular tribes lived, not from the personal characteristics of individuals. Tribal names such as *Caturiges*, *Cadurci*, *Catalauni*, and *Catubrini* mapped mainly to areas such as Lusitania, Aquitania, Liguria, Belgica, and Venetia and not to areas near Atlantic coasts that were Celtic in a modern linguistic sense. *Catu-* emerges as a general Indo-European word element, related to Greek κατα 'downwards', particularly applied to lowland valleys, and perhaps best translated in English by 'basin'. One of its descendants may be an element usually interpreted as 'woods' in British place names.

Introduction

It is widely believed that a single Celtic or Gaulish language was spoken across much of ancient continental Europe. Within that reconstructed language (Delamarre, 2003), a word element **catu-* 'battle, army' is "well attested in Continental Celtic", as in proper names such as *Catumarus* or *Caturiges* (Falileyev, 2010). We explain here why that logic is mistaken.

Some linguists still cherish an old theory that Celtic languages moved generally from east to west, out of an ancient Celtic homeland in central Europe, somewhere around modern Bavaria. However, the best modern thinking suggests that Celtic languages crystallised on the Atlantic seaboard of Europe and then diffused from west to east (Cunliffe & Koch, 2010, and see here).

Any "Celtic" etymology proposed for an ancient proper name far away from a river that flows into the Atlantic, or outside the part of Gaul that Julius Caesar described as Celtic, needs to be regarded with great suspicion. So we are gradually producing a series of research papers on ancient names in the borderlands between ancient Germanic and Celtic speech (Goormachtigh & Durham, 2009; Durham, 2011, Durham & Goormachtigh, 2012a,b, 2012a,b).

These papers chart our gradual coming to grips with ancient sources, and preprints are available on request. Their essential thrust is to suggest that a fresh look at geography must often overrule obsolete linguistic ideas. Past scholars, such as Kenneth Jackson, Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, Eilert Ekwall, or Ellis Evans, however brilliant, did not have instant desktop access to modern computer tools and their work needs to be updated.

Our research makes heavy use of the Internet for maps, for the best texts of ancient authors, and for dictionaries of Latin, Greek, Old English, Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Germanic, Proto-Celtic, and Sanskrit. Most importantly, epigraphic databases such as Clauss-Slaby, some specialised websites, and some one-by-one discussions of key names show the best forms of many ancient inscriptions. Some of our research articles are now posted online, for speed, and to permit hyperlinking, use of colour, and constant updating.

This investigation was triggered by *Catuvolcus*, one leader of a Belgic tribe defeated by Caesar in his conquest of Gaul, whose name is widely claimed to be Celtic for 'battle falcon' and is used to support the argument that in Roman times Celtic speech extended all the way to the Rhine – a belief dear to the hearts of 19th-century French nationalists. Also the name *Caturix* is often claimed to mean 'battle king', with an ending *–rix* that is widely but wrongly thought to be diagnostic for Celtic speech.

Current opinion holds that ancient **catu-* was cognate with old Irish *cath*, old Welsh and old Breton *cat-*, and modern Welsh *cad*, meaning 'fight'. The classic review of Gaulish *Catu-*

names is by Evans (1967, pp 171-175). For French place names see Lacroix (2003, pp 169-171), and for ancient place names in wider Europe see Falileyev (2010) and Sims-Williams (2006). These and other authors also consider that the hard core of Celtic 'battle' was just the three letters *cat*, which could also show up in many other spellings including *cad* and *cot*.

That is a reasonable point of view, since so many elements in personal names boast of martial valour. However, the big danger in this kind of work is cherry-picking of data. It is part of human nature to perceive patterns where none really exists, and even the best scholars struggle to avoid selectively focussing on observations that conform to their preconceptions.

The methodology of our investigation was simple: try to collect up <u>all</u> ancient names containing *cat*, *cad*, etc still known from the Roman Empire. Let geography take the lead in handling the data. Use linguistic ideas lightly, to help understand the sources and to decide which names to look at in detail. Look for common themes in the names and plot their locations on maps. Then try to understand them in human terms: where people lived, what they believed, etc.

We started out doubting that *catu* was diagnostically Celtic, but with no reason to doubt a translation of 'battle'. So it came as a surprise when evidence piled up that *catu* was primarily something geographical, used to label tribes and their people, and not a personal characteristic, such as belligerence. The association of *catu* with valleys suggested that its best cognate is Greek κατα, whose primary meaning was 'downwards'. Perhaps that should not be surprising, since Greek culture and commerce were never far below the surface across the Roman Empire.

Since the approximate meaning of *catu* is rather obvious, this investigation must try to answer some more difficult questions:
1. Can the meaning be defined more precisely than 'low ground'?
2. How did *catu*-like words vary across Europe?
3. Does that variation match up with any ethnic or linguistic groups?
4. How big a subset of *catu* names may also contain a 'battle' root?
5. Can the linguistic evolution of *catu* be explained?

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Early Classical Texts

The earliest known mentions of **catu-* names come from texts in Latin and Greek. Before Julius Caesar, the terms Celtic, Gaulish, and Galatian were used almost interchangeably by Mediterranean peoples to describe the tall, hairy, pale-faced, troublesome warriors from their north and west. The term German was hardly used in Rome before Julius Caesar reached the Rhine, so a lot of those northern barbarians who travelled south may have been (in modern ethnic and linguistic terms) Germanic not Celtic. Here are some names of those early "Celts".

Ambigatus – about 600 BC. In the early days of Rome, while Tarquin was king, the Celtic population of Gaul expanded so fast that *Ambigatus* sent some people to emigrate into Germany and others into northern Italy, where they founded Milan. See Livy *Ab Urbe Condita 5,34*.

Catumandus – 387 BC. Some transalpine Gauls set out to attack the Greek colony of Marseilles, but their commander, *Catumandus*, made peace instead and thereby helped lay the foundation of Roman Provence. See Justin's Epitome of *Pompeius Trogus*.

Catugnatus – 61 BC. The *Allobroges* tribe, from around the Rhone river, led by Κατουγνατος, attacked the Roman colony of Narbonne, but were repulsed. See *Cassius Dio* 37,47-48.

Catuvolcus – 54 BC. Among the toughest opponents faced by Caesar were the *Eburones*, led by *Ambiorix* and *Catuvolcus*, whose –*volcus* part looks a bit like Germanic 'folk'.

Cottius – around 30 BC. The Roman province of *Alpes Cottiae*, near *Caturiges* territory, was originally ruled by a Ligurian king whose family name was *Cottius*.

Catualda – around AD 20, *Catualda* was the leader of several major Germanic tribes.

Julius Caesar would have been culturally prepared to encounter someone with a name like *Catuvolcus*. Caesar's genocidal rampage through Gaul can be partially explained by the deep psychological scar left by early barbarian incursions, expecially that of 387 BC when Rome was sacked, and *Brennus* famously said *vae victis* 'woe to the conquered'.

Ancient historians writing about events centuries before their time often cited names that are transparent personifications of an idea, rather than accurate historical remembrances of real names, such as Rome's *Romulus* and *Remus*, or England's *Hengist* and *Horsa*. So *Ambigatus* (plus his two nephews) may represent a dimly remembered tradition of genuine migrations rather than some glorious ancient Celtic empire.

Stone Inscriptions

Most surviving inscriptions come from relatively late in the Roman Empire, from AD 0 to 400, when Latin was widely seen as the only proper language for writing. It took centuries after Roman conquest for people to choose to speak Latin at home, a process that can sometimes be inferred from the progressive adoption of Roman-style names and mistakes in Latin on the tombstones of soldiers, slaves, businessmen, and officials. AD 212, when Roman citizenship was granted to all free men in the Empire, probably marks the point when the original dialect mix in Gaul (Celtic, Germanic, Basque, etc) was on its way to extinction, even among the lower classes. Iberia and Provence passed that point much earlier, and Britain never reached it.

A search for "catu" in the Clauss-Slaby epigraphic database immediately returns 1656 hits. All such numbers quoted here should be taken only as rough indications, because they depend on human judgment about missing or unreadable letters, which spelling variants to include, and so on. It is precisely in tasks such as decoding of Latin abbreviations that biases get introduced.

Many of those *catu* hits can be immediately eliminated, notably those due to obvious Latin words such as *vocatur* or *dedicatum*. 961 hits come from Latin adjective-type words that end in *-catus*, which often served as *cognomina* (nicknames), for example 391 instances of *Pacatus* 'peaceful', 273 of *Extricatus* 'disentangled', 125 of *Delicatus* 'pleasing', at least 20 of plain *Catus* 'wise', and 7 of *Bracatus* 'wearing breeches'. Some of the less common *–catus* names do not appear in dictionaries, but still look very Latin, including 65x *Donicatus*, 21x *Estricatus*, 10x *Cabucatus*, 9x *Divicatus*, and 7x *Revocatus*, plus smaller numbers of *Rocatus*, *Macatus*, *Hecatus*, *Igocatus*, *Iovincatus*, *Senicatus*, *Amicatus*, *Biracatus*, *Ucatus*, and *Vercatus*. It looks as if *–catus* was a promiscuous suffix (rather like modern -gate in scandalgate), useful for Latinizing original ethnic names, much as modern Hollywood stars often anglicize their names.

Potters' names are over-represented in epigraphic databases, because they put their marks on huge numbers of pots, which got traded far and wide, then broken and left for archaeologists to find. One potter from La Graufesenque in southern Gaul, *Bilicatus,* is known from at least 20 marks, including one as *Bilicatos*, which looks like Celtic spelling. *Donicatus*, who made pots near Toulouse, certainly hints at Irish *Donnchadh* (often anglicised to Duncan), though the Oxford Dictionary of First Names translates *-chadh* as Old Celtic for 'noble', not 'battle'.

Roman soldiers too could end up far from their place of origin. They tended to have *cognomina*, which might be descriptive (*Atticus*, *Calvus*, *Rufus*), aspirational (*Apollinaris*, *Crassus*, *Octavius*), or even rude (*Bibulus*, *Garrulus*, or *Sterceius* 'shitty'). Although always formed in a Latin style, such a name might well be inspired by its bearer's native language.

484 inscriptions contain names beginning with *Catul-*. We think that plotting them on a map would not provide any useful information because *Catullus* was such a well-known Roman family and *catulus* was just Latin for 'young animal'. Much the same goes for *Catus* (like *catus* 'wise'), *Cata*, *Catta*, *Catius*, *Cateius*, *Catullus*, *Catulus*, *Catilina*, *Catilius*, *Catienus*, etc. Meid (2005) saw those names as north Italian, having come over the Alps with immigrants from the north, but that does not necessarily make them Celtic or useful in this study.

Ancient names can get distorted when they are reported in modern texts. Commentators must best-guess their way through lots of messy data. There is a big issue of typography: stone originals mostly used Roman capitals (without modern G,J,U,W), with abbreviations, missing or unreadable, letters, weird letters, spelling variations, and haphazard grammar to confuse matters more. Here we mostly write ancient names in lower-case italics with initial capitals.

Insular Celtic Cats and Cads

As Evans (1967) cautiously pointed out, the precise spelling of *catu* is not grammatically sacred and across a range of dialects and dates one must be prepared to see each of its four letters replaced to some extent: C by K, or perhaps CH, G or Q; T by D, TT, or TH; and the vowels A and U by almost any other vowel. Therefore the 'battle' root is commonly perceived in a wide range of names containing *cat* or *cad*. This has two worrying consequences. It makes solid statistics almost impossible. And it focuses attention on ancient names like *Catelius*, *Catilla*, *Catena*, *Kattini*, and *Cotulo*, that come close to Latin dictionary words like *caterva* 'crowd', *catella* 'female puppy', *catena* 'chain', *catinus* 'bowl', and *cotula* 'measuring cup'.

Welsh genealogies and historical accounts of the post-Roman Dark Ages mention rulers' names such as **Cadwaladr**, **Cadwallon**, **Cadfan**, and **Cadafael**. Other names from roughly that period include saints *Cadou* and *Cadfan* from Brittany, *Cathal* from Ireland, *Cadoc* from Wales, and *Cathroe* from Scotland. Some names in Anglo-Saxon texts, such as *Caedmon* and *Caedwalla*, are even cited as evidence for a persisting Welsh aristocracy in England.

The [Celtic Inscribed Stones Project](#) contains 31 instances of an element *cat* in inscriptions, albeit sometimes uncertain or hard to read. Some of the better established *cat* names are *Trenacatus* (written in Ogham as *Trenaccatlo*), *Tegicatos*, **Catamanus**, **Catotigirni**, and **Ambicatos* (deduced from AMMECATI and ##B#CATOS). Just four names contain the full *catu*: **Cattubuttas**, **Catuoconi**, **Caturug**, and **Cattuvir** (plus variant spellings). Although it is not always easy to distinguish Welsh from Irish in these names (and their numerous spelling variants) there seems no doubt they belonged to real people in Celtic-speaking regions.

Generations of scholars, such as Jackson (1953), have taken *cad-* (etc) to mean 'battle' in these Insular Celtic names, and it is obvious that many warfare-related words begin with *cad-* in a modern Welsh dictionary, or its Gaelic, Cornish, and Breton counterparts. However, all these Celtic inscriptions are too short to provide any internal evidence of the meanings of the names, and there seems to be no other evidence, such as Latin glosses in texts, to back up that belief.

All surviving Celtic *cat* or *cad* inscriptions are post-Roman, dating between AD 400 and 1000. And all surviving manuscripts of Old Irish or early Welsh histories were produced centuries after the events they describe, by Christian monks with interests to promote. So these Celtic names, even if written in Ogham or applied to pre-Christian hooligans, were powerfully influenced by Latin, particularly via the church. Incised names such as *Abraham*, *Germanus*, and *Laurentius*, texts of early writers such as Gildas and Patrick, and archaeology at Tintagel, all portray a Dark-Age Celtic society heavily influenced by Rome, Byzantium, and the Bible.

Earlier in Roman Britain, the name **Catusminianus** appeared on a curse tablet from Bath and **Catugnavi** on a brick from Binchester, both surrounded by Roman names. Inscriptions found in Britain mention **Catonius**, **Catiotus**, and **Catidiosus**, while **Catavignus**, son of Ivomagus, was a British soldier in the Roman army commemorated by an inscription in north-west Italy. This list of *cat*/*cad* names is pitifully short, both for the supposed heartland of *catu-*, and by comparison with all the Germanic names that contain battle-related elements.

Other past claims for British and/or Celtic *catu-* names have collapsed upon more careful examination of the relevant inscription or else cannot now be substantiated at all. **Vellocatus** of the *Brigantes* (Tacitus History 3, 45) looks Celtic, but also like Latin word-play: *vello* means 'pluck, pull away' and he was the adulterous lover of queen *Cartimandua*. An inscription from Haute Savoie is often claimed to show a name like that of a druid *Cathbhadh* in Irish mythology, but in fact the stone shows ATHVBODVAE with no room for an initial C.

There is one definite *cat-* name from Britain before the Roman conquest. **CATTI** is written on 43 coins from about AD 0 that have been found in several parts of Britain, but with a strong bias towards western, probably Celtic areas. Several theories about this name exist. Majority opinion seems to favour the idea of a single ruler, a son of *Bodvoc*, called *Cattus*. Expert coin dealer Chris Rudd wrote that "there seem to have been quite a few rulers in Iron Age Britain with the name Cat or Catus or Catti" and he thought the names just meant 'cat'.

The idea that a *Cattus* dynasty in Britain came from Bronze Age Anatolia (Waddell, 1924) is a more serious proposition than may at first appear. *Hattusa* was the capital of a region called *Hatti*, *Kheta*, or *Kittim* by ancient peoples. It was occupied by Hittites, who spoke an Indo-European language, were pioneer metallurgists, and were dispersed by the Bronze Age Collapse around 1200 BC. By the time of Pytheas around 325 BC, ships had long been carrying tin from Cornwall towards Mediterranean markets, and it is not impossible that a hereditary elite (like a Hindu caste or a mediaeval guild) dominated metal processing and international trading for centuries. They, or a cultural tradition about them, would be logical early coin makers.

Now it is time to turn to geography. Most maps that follow are composites from multiple data sources, with modern coastlines, rivers, borders, etc hand-drawn mainly with the aid of Google Maps. Please be aware of their limitations and the many issues they raise: differential survival and excavation, multiple inscriptions at one site, overlapping symbols, debatable readings, etc.

Iberian *Catu-* Names

One type of *Catu-* name positively leaps out of the epigraphic database: 40 names begin with *Catur-* in the Roman provinces of Lusitania and Hispania Citerior. Here is a map of the Iberian peninsula showing solid black circles for the find-spots of 13x *Caturo*, 10x *Caturonis*, 6x *Catur*, 4x *Caturoni*, 2x *Catura*, 1x *Caturis*, 1x *Caturi*, 1x *Caturica*, 1x *Caturicae*, and 1x *Caturico*. Open circles mark the find-spots of 16 *Catu*-something-else inscriptions: 5x *Catueni*, 4x *Catuenus*, 2x *Catu*, 1x *Catuen*, 1x *Catueno*, 1x *Cattusio*, and 1x *Scaturo*.

A very clear message emerges from the diagonal band of find-spots that roughly follows the Roman road (dashed line) from *Emerita Augusta* (modern Merida) to *Bracara Augusta* (modern Braga). These *Catu*-named people lived in lowland valleys near the rivers Tagus and Douro, which was prosperous agricultural and cattle-ranching country, very Romanised and peaceful, but with a warlike past. However, they also controlled access through a band of hills that separated the the two river valleys.
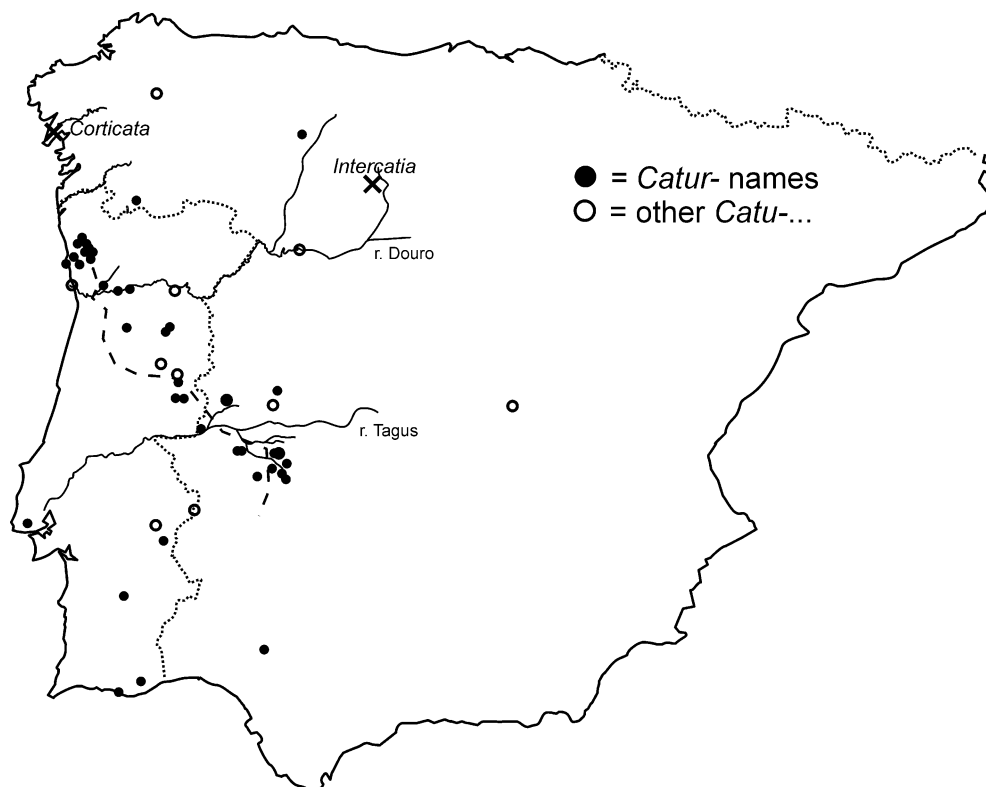
There is no obvious pattern to the spelling variants, which may be as trivial as the way that English Smith has variants Smythe, Smithers, Smithson, etc. And the few outliers could plausibly be people who migrated from the Lusitanian core. Similarly, the 20 *Catur-* names elsewhere in the Roman Empire could mostly be Iberian expatriates serving as soldiers or officials. They include a cluster of 4 finds in Dalmatia, 3 on the Danube, 2 in North Africa, and a scatter of singletons, including one *Caturg#* at Carmarthen.

Intercatia was a city of the *Vaccaei*, a Celtiberian tribe. Scipio Aemilianus fought a Homeric-style single combat in front of its walls according to Appian, Livy, Pliny, etc. It was probably at modern Paredes de Nava, in very flat, wheat-growing country. Its name was discussed by Alonso (2001). That whole part of Spain is a vast flat prairie ringed by mountains, but it is roughly bisected by a long range of hills, with a gap creating a bottleneck for modern roads and a tributary of the Douro to pass through, at Palencia, about 20 km away from Paredes.

Corticata is now a minuscule island, Illa de Cortegada, inside a river estuary, just north of where the *Catur*-scatter-pattern hits the Atlantic coast. Pliny singled it out for special mention, and it looks like a tin-trading site analogous with other coastal islands or peninsulas that were important in ancient times, like Tintagel, Hengistbury Head, Cadiz, or the mysterious *Ictis* and *Glaesaria*. *Corticata* was Latin for 'bark covered', but it can also be parsed as a two-part name with Latin *cors* 'court, enclosed place' followed by *catu*. Its estuary is an archetypal ria, a river valley catchment drowned by rising sea level, now shallow and sandy upstream of Cortegada.

Ancient Iberia contained a complex mix of languages and tribes, even including *Helleni* and *Germani*. Much of the west spoke Celtic (like Ireland), the north-east spoke proto-Basque. The middle was Indo-European, with Celtiberian speech much more advanced towards being fully Celtic than Lusitanian was, in the Catu-name region. Iberian was spoken in the east, where texts in Phoenician script mention **Katubareka**, **Katulati**, and **Katubare**.

French *Catu-* Names

French place-name specialists reckon that 20 modern place names can be traced back to Gaulish *catu-*, as in this map, which is based on pages 169-171 of Lacroix (2003). Notice how the *catu-* names occur preferentially in areas that became post-Roman Germanic kingdoms: Visigothic, Burgundian, Frankish, Flemish, or Norman. They are largely absent from areas that were solidly Celtic (near Britanny) or Romanised (Provence, south of the Alps) but are mostly in areas that the Romans called *Aquitania* (south-eastern) or *Belgica* (northern).

For detailed maps of Gaulish *civitates* and a valuable discussion of their history between the 3rd and 7th centuries see Beaujard (2006). Regardless of ethnicity, it is hard to associate so many places with warfare-based names, so let's see if evidence from inscriptions can offer a better explanation.
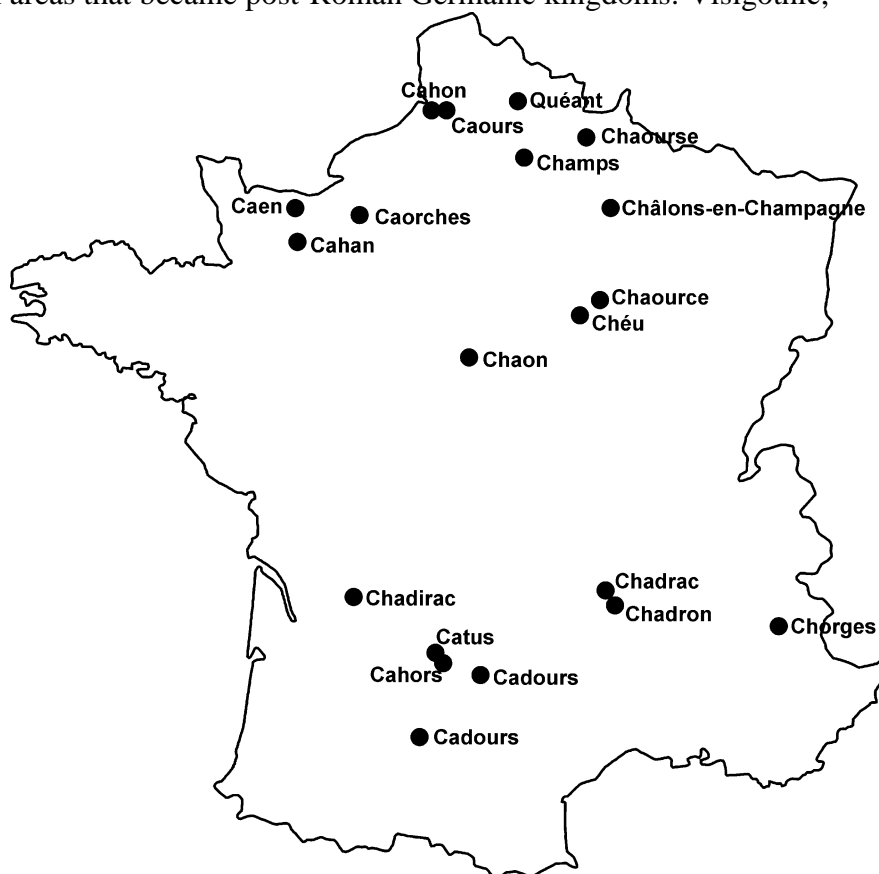
The next map shows southern France, where 20 inscriptions have been found with names beginning with *Cadur-*. 12 occur in the river catchment of the Gironde estuary, 3 occur a short sail up the coast in Britanny, 4 at the big city of Lyon, one inland at Autun, and one far away in Rome. Several classical authors (Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy) described a **Cadurci** tribe, with capital at *Divona*, which became *Civitas Cadurcorum* and now Cahors.
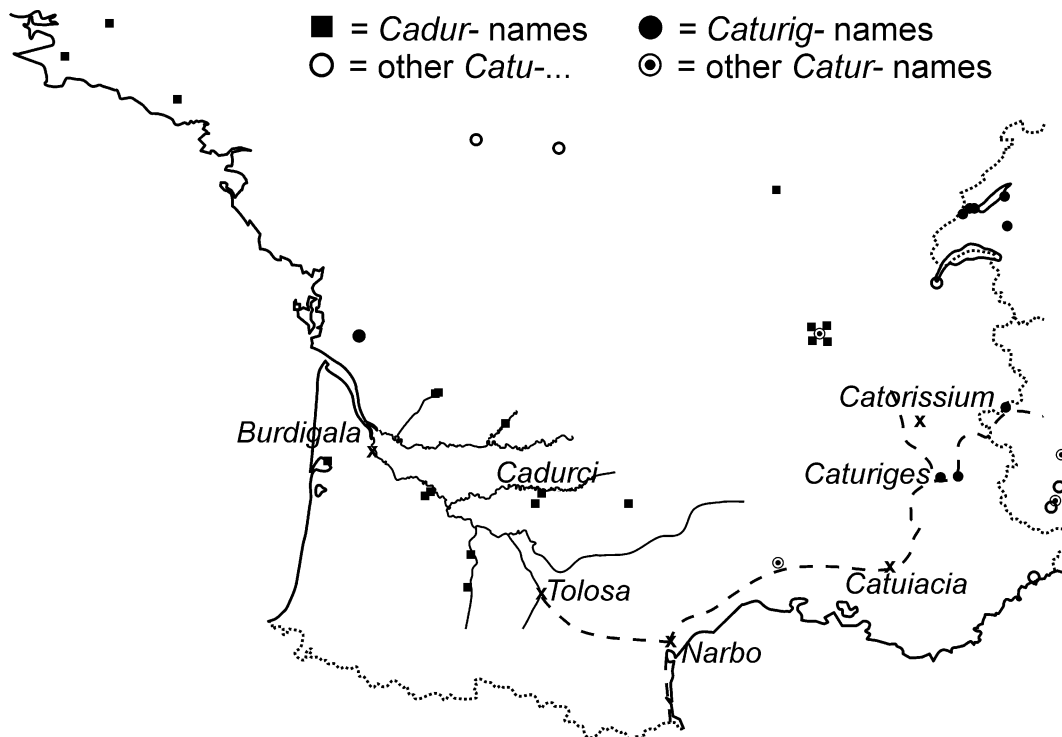
The inscription texts, plus the general frequency of locative names throughout history, suggest that *Cadur-* names came from the *Cadurci* tribe, most likely describing their environment or lifestyle in some way. Cahors is notable for being tightly squeezed into the valley of the river Lot in a wider region that is now known mainly for fine wine and holiday homes.

The indigenous language of ancient Aquitania was an early form of Basque, but there are multiple reasons for suspecting that northern immigrants also contributed to the population there. In the Bronze Age, long before any written records, an important trade route led inland from the Atlantic, up the Gironde estuary, past Bordeaux and Toulouse, through the Carcassonne Gap and down the river Aude to the Mediterranean. Around 120 BC, *Cimbri* led by *Boiorix* and *Teutones*, both probably largely Germanic, invaded from the north. Around AD 400, Visigoths set up the Kingdom of Toulouse with suspicious ease.

Many place names in the area around Cahors do not look Celtic, though the Germanic element might be as late as Viking. *Tolosa*, the early form of Toulouse, has not been explained in Celtic, but Germanic 'toll people' fits its topography. When Julius Caesar fought against the *Cadurci* in 52 BC (Gallic War 7,4,6; 7,5,1; 7,7,1), he named their leader as *Lucterius*, which is a bit like *Lutarius* (or Λουτουριος) one leader of the migration into Galatia in 277 BC, or *Lugotorix* whom Caesar fought in Britain. Presumably his original name was interpreted into Latin in the light of *luctor* 'to wrestle' and *lutarius* 'muddy'. One of the few solidly attested Gaulish words is *lutura* (on the Lezoux lead plaque), which is interpreted as 'vigorous'. We note the similarity with Frankish kings called *Chlothar*, which evolved into modern Lothar.

Further east in southern France, the **Caturiges** tribe can be firmly located by several lengthy inscriptions, notably an itinerary from Cadiz to Rome on the Goblets of Vicarello. A dashed line on our map marks part of that route, called the *Via Domitia* in the south of France. Through the Alps it largely followed the Durance river valley (the route taken by Hannibal and his elephants), with a rest stop at **Caturigomagus**, near modern Chorges. Lower down, it ran through **Catuiacia**, near modern Céreste, and on to the port of Narbonne. From there the road continued into Spain, or branched off as the *Via Aquitania* to Toulouse and Bordeaux.

The *Caturiges* were one of three tribes whom Julius Caesar had to defeat while marching his legions across the Alps into Gaul (Gallic War 1,10). If they lived only in the Alpine valleys they could not have been very numerous – maybe 10 to 20 thousand people, judging by modern populations in that area, and by an inscription at La Turbie that lists them among 46 alpine tribes that had submitted to Rome under Augustus. Another inscription at Susa lists 14 main *civitates* of the *Alpes Cottiae* province, including *Caturigum* as a genitive, which suggests that their name was being treated in Latin as the plural of **Caturix*, declined like *rex*, and not like the Latin verbal adjectives that end in *–trix* and are very common as names in inscriptions.

The precise spelling **Caturix** occurs in just two inscriptions. One in Dalmatia names *Caturix* as the home (or perhaps *cognomen*) of a Roman trumpeter of an alpine cohort. The second forms part of a very Roman name found near Nimes, in Provence. Mostly, the existence of a local protective god *Mars Caturix* is inferred from a cluster of 5 finds of **Marti Caturigi** near Lake Neuchatel (solid black circles on the French-Swiss border), plus one off the map in Germany that helpfully mentions *genio loci*. An analogous divinity, *Mars Albiorix* seems to have been venerated by the *Albici* or *Albienses* tribe, of the Albion plateau. Evidently one god cared for the mountain tops (*Alb-* = white, snowy, Alpine) and another for the valley bottoms (*Catu-*).

Pliny described the *Caturiges* as Ligurian, but they may well have incorporated some northern immigrants. Strategically, they controlled a key pass through the Alps between France and Italy, and also the junction where another Alpine valley route headed north towards modern Grenoble and Lyon, passing by **Catorissium** (or *Cantourisa*) probably near modern Bourg-d'Oisans or Pont de Gavet, marked by another X on the map.

Also in southern Gaul were the **Catenates,** another Alpine tribe mentioned by Pliny and on a triumphal inscription of Augustus. An inscription at **Cadenet**, on the river Durance, mentions *caudellensibus*, perhaps about a god. **Caderousse** (formerly *Kadarous*), on the river Rhone, has never been satisfactorily explained. The **Bercorcates** (Pliny 4,19) lived in Aquitania.

Northern Gaul and Neighbouring Low Lands

The next map shows some rivers and modern national frontiers in northern France, plus Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of Germany, England and Holland.
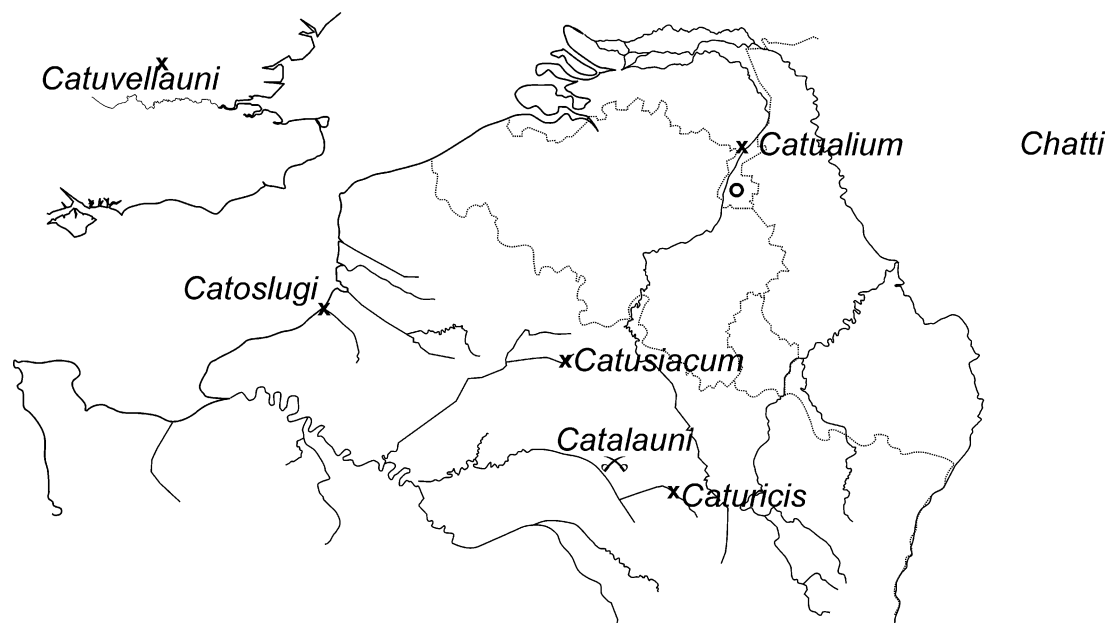
The **Catalauni** were a Belgic tribe around Châlons-en-Champagne (formerly called Châlons-sur-Marne, *Civitas Catalaunorum*, and probably *Durocatalaunum*). Most likely they were a subset of the *Remi*, who lived around modern Reims. At the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields in AD 451 a Roman/Germanic/Christian coalition beat off an Asiatic/pagan incursion led by Attila the Hun. Its exact location is uncertain but a battlefield symbol on the map (near Châlons) shows the most likely site, in a region that has seen many huge battles over the centuries.

The exact spelling of *Catalauni* is [debatable](#), and easy to confuse with the *Catuvellauni* in Britain, but it looks very much like a compound of *catu-* with an element *alauna*. The name *Alauna* behaved like an adjective, analogous with river deities: *abona*, *Divona*, etc. It has never been convincingly translated (though suggestions include 'nourishing', 'winding', and 'shining') for the usual reason: too much focus on Celtic, not enough on Germanic.

Rivet and Smith (1979, pp 243-247) listed ten or more Roman-era instances of *Alauna* or *Alaunus* in Britain, with a dozen or more descendant river names, plus associated modern places such as Alnwick or Alcester. All their positively identified locations are consistent with a meaning like 'eel river'. Many modern place names incorporate 'eel', such as Aalsmeer in the Netherlands, Ely in England, or Eel River in California.

The proto-Germanic root of eel was **Ælaz*. A poem by Ausonius about the river Moselle (around Trier) mentioned a fish named *alausa*, and the word passed into Late Latin and the Romance languages to describe the shad or "river herring". Usually *alausa* is described as "Gaulish" despite the remark by Saint Jerome (who was in Trier about a generation after Ausonius) that the local Treverian language was very like Galatian, which was actually [Danube-Germanic](#), not Celtic in the modern linguistic sense.

Modern France is mad keen on recreational fishing, especially around [Châlons](#), where a glance at Google Maps shows a profusion of ponds in the valley of the river Marne. Nowadays those ponds are artificially stocked with trout, but originally eels would have preferentially colonised the swampy areas of all braided rivers, because they can travel over wet ground. Of course, *Alauna* might have applied to several fish species, but all ancient rivers that ultimately reached the Atlantic would have teemed with eels. For example, in the [Rhine-Meuse estuary](#):

> The eel has always been a desired fish. The Romans were great lovers of eels, a dish for gentlemen. .... In the Middle Ages, eel fishing was carried out wherever eels were found .... Specific locations offered particularly favourable opportunities for catching the migratory eels: the river dams. ... Weirs, large complexes of wattle-screens that led the eels into dozens of eel-traps and baskets.

Fish traps are a very ancient technology, capable of feeding many people, and we suspect that an ancestor of the word 'weir' may have left its mark on some place names. Candidates in Britain include Workington, and ancient *Viroconium*. A good fish-trap site was at ancient *Virodunum*, modern Verdun, near Châlons but on the next river over, the Meuse.

Catualium was a long way downstream from Verdun, at modern Heel, near Roermond. Its surrounding area is very vulnerable to flooding, peppered with ponds, and starting to rediscover the [fishing potential](#) (including eel-like lampreys) of the river Roer, which feeds into the river Meuse/Maas to make the whole area very vulnerable to flooding.

Caturicis (or *Caturices* etc) was upstream from Châlons, at modern Bar-le-Duc. It occupies the low ground at a gap in some hills, through which modern roads, a canal, and the river Ornain (a tributary of the Marne) are constrained to squeeze tightly.

Catusiacum, mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary, was probably at modern Chaourse, in northern France. The ending *-acum* suggests 'people', so perhaps *Catus-* referred to the broad flat valley about 70 km wide, rather than to the topographically unremarkable site where the Roman road from Bavay to Reims crossed the river Serre.

The *Catoslugi* were a Belgic tribe mentioned by Pliny (NH 4,106), living near the coast north of Rouen, but spelled as *Catuslou* and as *Catuslovio* on two inscriptions found at Eu by the mouth of the river Bresle. An Irish word that became 'slogan' has been suggested to explain the second part, but English slough (or Irish *slogaire*) would fit the local topography very well.

The *Abrincatuos* ([Pliny 4,107](#)) plus different spellings by other classical authors listed by Falileyev, 2010) lived near modern Avranches in Normandy. Lots of rather unconvincing Celtic interpretations of the name have been proposed. The ancient topography there was a gentle river valley (*catu*) turning into coastal marshes, where Welsh *bryn* 'hill' would fit the slightly elevated situation of Avranches better than Celtic *aber* 'estuary'.

The **Chatti** were a German tribe mentioned by Strabo and Tacitus, living somewhere from Frankfurt-am-Main into Lower Saxony, around the headwaters of the river Weser. Their name may have led to modern Hesse and Kassel.

By the standards of Alpine tribes, northern *Catu-* tribes did not control much in the way of strategic mountain passes, but even quite modest hills can still dominate a landscape, as World War 1 demonstrated. The **Catuvellauni** lived around modern Hertfordshire but their territory extended west up to, and possibly beyond, the Chiltern Hills, which were high enough to carry the ancient Ridgeway plus several hill-forts, and are notorious for their effects on local climate. The *Catuvellauni* were easily confused, even in ancient times, with the *Catalauni*. Cassius Dio spelled them Κατουελλανοι, while Ptolemy had Κατυευχλανοι etc, so the commonly cited spelling owes a lot to an inscription on Hadrian's Wall that mentions *civitate catuvellaunorum*. In another inscription from the Wall, a man from Palmyra described his wife as *Catvallauna*.

The ethnicity of the *Catuvellauni* is uncertain, but no place names in their territory have been convincingly explained, for the usual reason: obsessive fixation on Celtic. Their "capital" of *Verlamio*, Roman *Verulamium*, modern St Albans, x on the map, is a perfect topographical fit to 'road through marsh': compare modern English fare + loam. To their east, the three river estuaries of Essex match the tribal name *Trinovantes*, Latin for 'three renewings'. Their southern neighbours the *Atrebates*, had a city at *Calleva*, which is straightforward Germanic for 'bare hill', like Latin *calvus* 'bald'. So the common claim that -*vellaunus* was Celtic for 'commander' does not convince us. Is there an adjective analogous to *alaunus* with an economic or geographical sense appropriate for *Catuvellauni* territory?

In modern English the words most similar to *vell* are vellum 'parchment' and vellus 'fine hair', both traceable back to Latin words for hairy animal skins, with possible links also to modern veal, wool, veil, and weald. Strabo described hides as one of Britannia's main exports and Caesar wrote that "Most of the inland people do not sow corn, but live on milk and meat, and dress in skins" (Gallic War 5,24,2). So maybe *Catuvellauni* meant something like 'lowland pastoralists'. An alternative link to modern English 'wealth' might make them mixed farmers. That would certainly fit the *Segovellauni* tribe in southern Gaul, whose first element resembles Latin *seges* 'cornfield'. So, with due respect to German *Sieg Heil*, the long-cherished "Gaulish" root **sego-* 'victory' needs to be regarded with grave suspicion.

The Eastern Alps

North-eastern Italy is rather like north-eastern France, in that modern political frontiers exceed the natural borders of Latin-derived speech, and that the last two millennia have seen multiple battles, some extremely bloody. Much writing about both areas' ancient ethnicities is politically contaminated, but the present consensus about the South Tyrol (the Italian side of the eastern Alps) is that German speech arrived after Roman times. So the Cadore valley there is often said to contain a Celtic *catu* 'battle' root, left by pre-Roman migrants across the Alps.
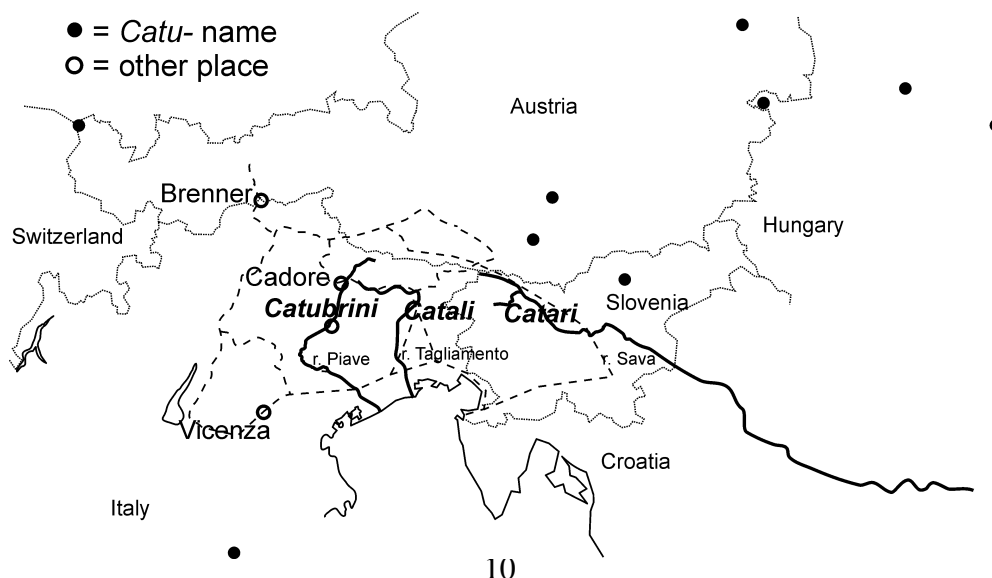
Our map of the area looks quite complex, because it shows the frontiers between six modern countries, plus an approximation of the Roman [road network in that area](#) partly deduced from modern roads, all wiggling around the mountains of the Alps and the Dolomites. The find-spots of 9 *Catu-* names (solid black circles on the map) are not particularly interesting. No two names are alike but all are in solidly Roman contexts. One inscription mentions *Catumarus*, a name that is routinely, but unconvincingly, described as "Celtic".

The main interest in this map lies in how three distinct tribes with *cat-* names appear to match up with the valleys of three main rivers descending from the hills. Those valleys served as trade routes, notably for amber and salt long before the Romans. The main route over the Alps from southern Germany into northern Italy ran via modern Innsbruck, the Brenner Pass, then down the valley of the river Adige past Bolzano and Lake Garda.

Another ancient route to its east followed the valley of the river Piave, through **Cadore** (open circle on the map). Two inscriptions found at [Belluno](#) (another open circle) on the map refer to carpenters and *patrono catubrinorum*, which makes the local tribe ***Catubrini***. The ending *-brini* makes one think of nearby place names such as Bruneck, Brixen, and Brenner, none of which has a really satisfactory ancient explanation, and possibly of Welsh *bryn* 'hill'.

The ancient language around there was Venetic, little understood, but most likely intermediate between Germanic and Italic. A pre-Roman [inscription](#) from Vicenza, read as something like *Osts **Katusiaios** donasto atraes termonios deivos*, might be a sample. The tribal name *Veneti* has been much discussed, because it occurs in multiple regions and it resembles Old English *Winedas* 'Wends' or 'border people'. A similar root might also be present in such old place names as *Vindolanda* and *Vindobona* (modern Vienna).

Other tribes in valleys to the east, mentioned by Pliny (2,24 and 3,28), included the ***Catali*** living in the Alps above modern Trieste (most likely in the valley of the braided river now called Tagliamento) and the ***Catari*** living in the valley of the river Sava heading towards the Danube. Alpine valleys to the west contain modern place names Ceto and Cedegolo in territory of the *Camunni* tribe. North of the Alps, ancient ***Cetium*** is now Sankt Pölten in Austria, in a broad valley between the Alps and the Dunkelsteinerwald. Tacitus mentioned the ***Quadi*** as a German tribe living somewhere near the Danube border of Roman territory. We have failed to track down *Cattenates* as a [Raetian](#) tribe, possibly the same as Strabo's Κλαυτηνατιοι. The name *Cornacates*, from *Cornacum* on the Danube, probably does not contain *catu*.

Also in northern Italy, way off to the left of this map but not quite into our map of southern France, is Liguria. At *Velleia* ,"the Pompeii of northern Italy", a long Latin screed on a [brass plaque](#) describes land ownership in the foothills of the Appennines, including proper names (cited here as likely nominatives) ***Catusanianus***, ***Catunius***, ***Caturnianus***, ***Catusianus*** and ***Caturniacus***, attached to such nouns as *fundus* 'low ground', *pagus* 'district', and *vicus* 'neighbourhood'. Ancient *Caturniacus* is probably modern [Guadernago](#), on the way to Piacenza. Modern Cattaragna is also in the hills nearby.

Pots, Kettles, Bowls, and Basins

The comprehensive survey of ancient potters' marks by Hartley and Dickinson (2008) provides one of the best lists of names from ancient Gaul and we started wondering if any potters had occupational names analogous to modern Potter and Bowler. Ancient ***Catello***, *Catelto*, *Catillus*, *Catiolus*, *Cadilo*, *Catenus*, *Catianus*, and *Cotulo* would have sounded like Latin words for pots and bowls. Amazingly, those names survive today in surnames like Kettle and Cattell, usually said to come from a Norse tradition of a divine cauldron. Even more amazingly, one of William the Conqueror's followers, Anquetil de Grai, is our favourite example of [Nominative Determinism](#) – career choice influenced by personal name. (He made a grab for the best places to mine *craie* 'chalk' near the Thames, at Grays and by the river Cray.) Unfortunately, all these interesting potters' names seem to have been very minor players in the ancient Samian pottery industry, not in the same league as *Calvus* or *Cantus*, for example.

One busy potter was **Cadurcus,** who worked near *Cadurci* territory. (His pots may be misreported as inscribed stones in one map above). Many potters had names too close to *Catullus*, Cato, Cadmus, *catulus*, or *catus* to be interesting. Just two *cat/cad* named potters, both active at Lezoux, in a probably Celtic zone of Gaul, seem to have been prolific: **Cadgatus** and **Catianus**. Less active names include *Catacius*, *Catasextus*, *Caitirrius*, and *Cadulino*.

Yet again, the evidence of *cat/cad* as a direct contributor to ancient personal names is meagre. However, once one starts thinking about pots and kettles, it is interesting to look at the large bowl of flat land surrounded by hills in which Gloucester sits. Yeates (2008) wrote:

"...in the land of the *Dobunni* there was a widespread cult worshipping a goddess with a cauldron, tub, or sacred vessel, whose temples can be detected in both major and minor settlements. That the cult of this goddess was carried out in the pre-Roman period is evident in the high status burial practices of the elite; that it continued afterwards is evident in the tribal name. That the centre of this tribal cult was a large natural circular valley is apparent from the location of the elite Iron Age burials who fed symbolically from the cult vessel. ... The cauldron, in all mythical interpretations, is considered to be the place of creation and knowledge, and of life and death."

Yeates (2006, 2008, 2009) arrived at this conclusion while trying to reconstruct the long-lost religion of the *Dobunni* from a range of archaeological, historical and geographical information. He suggested that a tradition of the sacred cauldron lingered on after the coming of Christianity in various forms. *Hwicce*, the name of the people who inherited Dobunnic territory, was Old English for a container like the Ark of the Covenant in the Bible. A *wicce* 'witch' knew the sacred vessel, as in Shakespeare's three witches in Macbeth. Maybe also relevant was the Holy Grail. He also put a name to a pre-Christian local divinity – ***Cuda*** – that still survives in place and river names in that region, such as Cotswolds, Cutsdean, and Codswell.

Strabo called the ancient people around the Cotswolds Βοδουννων, which is commonly (on weak evidence) spoonerised into *Dobunni*. Since the Cotswolds are the next range of hills west of the Chilterns, we note that Strabo's spelling can be parsed as 'upland pastoralists' ('bulls on the downs'), a topographically neat contrast with the *Catuvellauni* lowlanders. We would also add to Yeates' discussion, with *Catti* (mentioned above), and the whole etymological puzzle of *cassis* 'helmet' and its relation to bronze, tin, and the Cassiterides.

Names such as *Cædmon*, the Northumbrian poet mentioned by Bede, *Cædwalla*, *Cuthwine*, and *Cutha* in the dynasty of [Kings of Wessex](), and *Cædbæd* in the dynasty of [Lindsey]() are widely cited as evidence for Celtic people surviving among incoming Anglo-Saxons, with the spurious argument that *cæd* is distinctively Celtic. This conveniently ignores OE *caed* 'boat', and later English cade 'barrel'. So *Cædbæd* was probably just 'boat commander'.

With attention focussed on England, one can ask if *catu* has any previously unrecognised descendants. English place names embody a remarkably wide range of different types of valley. Here are some elements recognised by Gelling and Cole (2003), mostly in modern spellings: bottom, byden, canne, chine, clofa, combe, corf, dale, dell, dene, gill, hollow, hope, kettle, slade, slough, trough, vale, plus Celtic *glen* and *nant*.

One word in that list jumps out as resembling *catu*. Old English *cytel* or *cetel* 'kettle' appears in place names such as Chettle in Dorset, Cheddleton in Staffordshire, and Chittlehampton in Devon. The standard German word for a valley with a flat bottom of alluvial deposits is *Talkessel*. Kettle must be a general Indo-European word, since besides its Germanic, Latin and Greek relatives there are Russian *котёл* 'cauldron' and Indian *katori* 'serving bowl'.

However, there is an even better relative. According to Gelling and Cole (2003, pp 223-224), Celtic *ced* or *coid* 'wood', the ancestor of modern Welsh *coed*, is "one of the commonest Celtic words in English place names", and it "occurs in a number of hybrid British/OE names". It also occurs as an adjective *cediog* 'wooded' in three west-country names and possibly in some English place names beginning with Chat- or Chet-.

Of the 18 examples of places that Gelling and Cole mentioned as named after woodland, only four still show woodland in the modern landscape and all are in river valleys. The more general common feature is to be in low ground. Thus the parish of **Chideock** lies in a valley leading

down to the most spectacular cliffs in Dorset beside Golden Cap. The very similar **Dunchideock**, in a valley in Devon, adds a Dun-, presumably for the Iron-Age and Roman forts nearby. **Chatburn**, Lancashire is situated in a hollow between two ridges. Even the very Welsh **Betws-y-Coed** is a flat patch at the foot of hills.

Most people nowadays expect trees to grow on hills, because most low land has been drained, ploughed, treated with lime, and used to grow crops or houses. However, in Iron-Age Celtic society on the rainy Atlantic coasts, the opposite was true. Pastoralists liked hills, where their flocks could roam freely, and they shunned river valleys, which were full of bogs, bears, wolves, evil spirits – and above all, trees. Maybe therefore a basic Indo-European root with primary meaning 'low ground' developed towards 'forest' in Celtic.

Most modern British place names containing cat- (or similar elements) are attributed by reference books to wild cats, Celtic woods, or strange personal names. However, it would make an interesting student's research project to take the long list of *Catti*-like place names from Waddell (1924) and see how many of them actually lie in wide valleys. We happen to know two of them well. **Catford** in south-east London fits the pattern perfectly. **Chatham** lies where Watling Street swoops down into the broad Medway valley. Explaining Chatham with *catu* seems better than our previous guess based on cot 'humble dwelling'. A similar argument might fit for **Caterham** and many other Chat- or Cat- places.

Kesteven (Domesday *Chetsteven*) was one of the three historic subdivisions of Lincolnshire. Its two modern administrative districts occupy precisedly the land that Environment Agency maps show as not liable to flooding from the river Trent on one side or the Wash on the other. Since its second part comes fromScandinavian *stefna* 'meeting place', its initial *chet* seems far more likely to have meant something like 'basin' in a Germanic language than 'wood' in Celtic.

Lichfield in Staffordshire is usually explained as **Leitocaiton* 'grey wood' (Rivet & Smith, 1979, pp 387-388), a Celtic outlier in an otherwise Anglo-Saxon area. For the name's second element, the Roman settlement's situation high up the relatively flat catchment valley of the river Trent fits an interpretation of 'basin'. For the first element, 'grey' is unconvincing, even though Coates (1979) invoked it to concoct a daft Celtic etymology for Leatherhead (whose water-mill topography and early name forms actually fit Anglo-Saxon lode-rithe). One might as well point to Latin *leto* 'kill' and make Lichfield 'death valley'. Fortunately, early texts actually mentioned *#etoceto* and *lectoceto*, so Latin *laetus* 'happy' or *lectus* 'selected' offer a kinder translation as 'happy valley'. However, the best explanation for the first element of Lichfield, and also in **Lytchett**, is the other meaning of Latin *laetus*, probably a German loan word that led to Old English *laet* 'semi-free farmer, serf' and to modern laity and liege.

Also-Rans

Has anything been missed out? (Apart from verbal-adjective names in –*catus*, and obviously Roman names: *Catus*, *Catullus*, etc.) Other *Catu-* inscriptions not touched on above include 3x in North Africa, 4x in Dalmatia, 3x in Italy, and one in Sardinia, which do not obviously reveal much, except that the Roman Empire posted many soldiers and officials far from their birthplaces. Now here are a few slightly *Catu*-like names that books or websites try to explain with 'battle', or else that look interesting to us.

When reading the list of ancient names drawn up by Whatmough (1944-1970), building upon Holder (1896-1913), one thinks of the famous remark by *Nennius* "I have made a heap of all that I could find". Both authors gathered names from all over ancient Europe and called them "Celtic" as freely as any ancient Greek and with as little verifiable provenance or indexing. Fortunately Delamarre has published a full alphabetic list of Whatmough's names. The fullest list of ancient names we know is by Köbler.

Since "Celtic" etymologies are cheerfully cited for so many ancient names, it seems only fair to point out alternatives. It is an old truism that every word has ten potential etymologies, out of which there is not always one clear winner. It can be a mistake to say that etymology A is right

and etymology B is wrong, where it would be far better to give A and B (plus C, D, etc) marks out of 100, and then repeat the process for all the other proper names in a particular region. Readers must form their own opinions about relative plausibilities.

Καταονια was in ancient Cappadocia, part of Anatolia that was formerly Hatti, mentioned above. Strabo (11,12) described it as a [level plain surrounded by mountains](#).

Catina (modern Catania) was in Sicily, originally a Greek colony. It sits in low ground beside the sea, backed by a semicircle of mountains, including Mount Etna, like giant amphitheatre.

Catomocus was a freed slave in Pannonia, whose 'battle pig' [translation](#) looks inferior to 'damp valley', with second element related to the English words moch, muggy, and mucus.

Catterick (*Cataractonium*) in Yorkshire was spelled Κατουρακτονιον by Ptolemy, which prompted Rivet and Smith (1979) to [suggest](#) it was a Celtic *catu-* name. However, they wrote when the importance of river transport to the Roman army was not appreciated, and seem to have missed the sense of Latin *cataracta* as ' portcullis' or sluice gate to control water levels.

Catamantaloedes was an ally of Rome (Caesar, Gallic War 1,3). He was king of the *Sequani*, who occupied the hilly river basin (which obviously fits *Cata-*) of the river Saone (formerly Arar, also possibly in the name *Caderousse* mentioned above). The element *mantal-* has been much discussed as meaning 'way', but without any really good etymology and without exploring Germanic possibilities based around *tal* 'valley'.

Ancient curses, called καταδεσμοι in Greek, often contained *kata-* words among a stream of Latin, poorly understood "Gaulish", and magical hocus-pocus. Thus Bath curse tablet 14 mentions **catacim**, taken by Mullen (2007) as Celtic, though another ancient [curse tablet](#) from Carthage described **Καταξιν** as a great demon from Egypt, reminiscent of καταξις 'fracture'. A curse tablet from Rom in western France, with hard-to-read handwriting and much argued-over language, mentions **caticato** .... **cato** that might perhaps be referring to *Catugnatus*.

The name Vienna probably derives from 'woodland streams', whose sources in the valleys of the Wienerwald were called **κετιος** ορος by Ptolemy. A **Γαδενι** tribe mentioned by Ptolemy, and **Jedburgh** in the Scottish borders, are often invoked to explain a tantalisingly truncated inscription *Deo mogonito cad##* found at the Roman fort of *Habitancum* in Northumberland. The god *Mogons* is often claimed as Celtic, but has left most traces in Germanic territory. Both the Roman fort and Jedburgh lie in broad river valleys.

The *Catraige* tribe, with a name that looks like *Caturiges,* lived (some time well before AD 1393) in central Ireland around the river Suck. The local town of Ballinasloe is explained as having a final element derived from *sluaighe* 'hosts', which neatly exemplifies the whole battle-versus-basin question posed by *catu*. The local landscape is a wide river valley with extensive peat bogs, so we would point instead to *slogaire* 'swamp' and to the *Catoslugi*.

Caithness, a name derived from the Pictish kingdom of *Cait*, occupies the top-right corner of Scotland, which is flat low ground quite different from the Scottish highlands. The old Irish name for Shetland, *inse catt*, might also be relevant since Shetland is so low-lying. **Baliscate**, with an [early Christian chapel](#) on the Isle of Mull, would fit a translation of 'valley farm'.

Cetaria was the name of four ancient places, three in Basque territory, one in Italy, whose name is very suggestive of *cetarium* a tank in which fish guts were left to rot into *garum* 'fish sauce'. The *Cetarini* or Κυτατταρινοι, an unlocated people of Sicily, might be related.

Burtscheid in Germany, formerly *Porcetum* and **Borvocetum*, is now a suburb of Aachen. **Setubal** in Portugal, *Cetobriga* according to Ptolemy, then *Xetubre*, sits beside the mouth of the river Sado, in the low ground at the foot of an escarpment. The river **Keteios** skirted the ancient city of Pergamon, modern Bergama, in a flat valley at the foot of hills.

Catadupi lived near the cataracts on the river Nile, **Καταβαθμος** was in Libya, and the *Catizos* were in Thrace. **Catalonia** in Spain and the **Cathar** religious group in the southern France

have no very satisfactory etymology. **Catalacum** was possibly at Chaptelat, near modern Limoges, in France.

Conclusions and Linguistic Questions

The single English word that comes closest to translating *catu* in the names considered here is probably 'basin'. 'Mountain valley' is not right, because so many *catu* tribes lived well away from serious hills, and because only small populations could ever live in such environments. And 'belligerent' is not right either: a strategic bottleneck or mountain pass may need to be defended fiercely, but long-term it can be exploited better by trade than by warfare.

However one can still ask if any *catu* names considered here contain an element that cries out to be translated as 'battle'. As far as we can see, absolutely none do. There seem to be no *catu* names attached to hill-fort sites. A fair number of *catu* individuals were almost certainly Celtic speakers, but there seems to be no compelling evidence (apart from modern Celtic dictionaries) for thinking that their *catu*-like element was inspired by belligerence rather than by a divine cauldron, a small animal, or mental acuity.

The great majority of *catu* names occurred in areas whose ancient languages were not properly Celtic in a modern sense: Lusitania, Aquitania, Belgica, Liguria, Venetia. No one disputes that Old Irish, modern Breton, etc are very helpful for understanding proper names in those areas, but that is merely because the Celtic Fringe retained parts of a common European heritage that got lost inside the core of the Roman Empire.

Possibly the single biggest reason why people label large areas of continental Europe as "Celtic" is that they once had many names ending in –*rix*. We have therefore conducted a big survey of all –*rix* names which shows very clearly that that ending is not diagnostically Celtic. Please ask if you would like to see a draft version of our paper before it is published.

All those Welsh and Irish dictionary entries for 'battle' words etc acted as what an animal psychologist would call a superstimulus – something that excites instincts powerful enough to overrule reason. So when Pokorny drew up his dictionary of proto-Indo-European roots he invented a special root *[*kat-](#)* just to hold Welsh *cad*, Irish *cath*, etc with Germanic Hedwig, etc. They actually belong far more logically to a broader root *[*kad-](#)*, along with English hate, Greek κοτος 'anger', etc. The correct home of *catu* is probably the root *[*kaito-](#)*, whose descendants include English heath and Welsh *coed* 'forest'.

In fact this whole area of Pokorny's dictionary contains a huge pile-up of possibly confusable roots, most easily listed as their English descendants [hit](#), [hat](#), [head](#), [hut](#), [herd](#), [cat](#), [chain](#), [corner](#), [cum](#), and [kettle](#). Maybe some very experienced historical linguist will take up the challenge to revise this whole area of the Indo-European language tree. Some awkward words that need to be fitted in have already been mentioned above, but here are some more: Latin *cassis* 'helmet', *cassus* 'hollow', *caterva* 'band', *catena* 'chain', and *canthus* 'corner'; Greek κασσιτερος 'tin' and καθαρος 'pure'; Welsh *cadw* 'protection', *cadafael* 'simpleton' and *catwrdd* 'numbskull'; Gaelic *cathar* 'marsh'; and English cade, meaning 'barrel' or 'pet'.

Latin *caput* 'head' is thought to have led to cathedral and to cadet, to Welsh *cader* 'fort' and to chair. Up, down, up, down – no wonder people get confused. How exactly does Latin *cado* 'fall' relate to *caedo* 'cut' and *catus* 'clever', and is it related to 'hate'? A core notion of 'low down' seems to unite many of the words in this whole semantic area. Sense development towards small, humble, degraded, cut down, even hollow, would be logical. Certainly the English words cot and hut describe smaller and humbler structures than mansion and house.

If the modern English cognate of Welsh *coed* is heath, what was *chet*? It looks as if *catu* has two descendants in English, one of which has undergone the typically Germanic sound change from K to H, while the other has merely softened K to CH. Presumably the two words reached English by different paths, and one stayed as an ordinary dictionary word, while the other is only a part of place names. Maybe *chet* is a survival from "British" Celtic? That seems unlikely, since so many Germanic words are similar and confusable, notably kettle and chit.

Our core view of linguistic prehistory is that a whole belt of Roman-era Europe, from eastern Britain to central Anatolia, spoke languages that were not yet fully Italic, Germanic, or Celtic. Furthermore the range of dialects was far more heterogeneous than is usually acknowledged. Considering that only a tiny fraction of Napoleonic France could understand French, the proposition that all of ancient Gaul, let alone much of Europe, spoke a single Celtic language is ridiculous. The peoples of ancient Britain, Belgium, Bohemia, and Bulgaria shared a common European heritage, with similarities in language, religion, and naming customs, but they did not understand any common language apart from Latin. "Gaulish" should really be acknowledged as a hodge-podge of what little is known about ancient middle European dialects.

There are probably many more name elements like *catu* that need to cease being labelled Celtic and properly situated in a multilingual Europe.

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