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Bonn

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TSCHIRSCHKY, MALTE W.: *Die Erfindung der keltischen Nation Cornwall: Kultur, Identität und ethnischer Nationalismus in der britischen Peripherie*. (Britannica et Americana, Third Series, vol. 24). Heidelberg: Winter, 2006. XIV + 358 S. ISBN 978-3-8253-5278-3. € 52.

Malte W. Tschirschky makes it clear from the outset that his study *Die Erfindung der keltischen Nation Cornwall* ‘is not a nationalistic text’ and that ‘most people engaged in Cornish nationalism will not agree with the conclusions’ (p. 17).¹ The title of the book can be translated as ‘The invention of the Celtic nation Cornwall: culture, identity, and ethnic nationalism in the British periphery’, and even its cover art – a modern artist’s depiction of the Cornish rebellion of 1497 and a photo of a graffito reading ‘ENGLISH GO HOME – FREE KERNOW’ set against the red, white, and blue backdrop of the Winter Verlag’s *Britannica et Americana* series – seems designed to position the author and his work in opposition to the nationalist movement(s) the book examines. Yet while Tschirschky’s book is certainly not nationalistic in tone, neither is it inherently anti-nationalistic. Rather, the author acts as a critic in the best sense of the word, holding up a mirror to the cultural and political movements engaged in constructing (or reconstructing) Cornwall as a modern Celtic nation, and deconstructing these texts using the techniques of modern literary criticism and cultural studies. While the resulting image of Cornish nationalism may not always be a flattering one, historians, Celtists, and even ardent nationalists will certainly find much of value in the fresh perspective on the subject that Tschirschky’s study provides.

Much of the work is concerned with the concepts of *nation-building* and the ways in which ‘imagination, invention, tradition, [and] *invented tradition*’ (section heading, p. 279; see also p. 283) have been used since the late nineteenth century (p. 8) to con-

¹ This and most other quotations from the book have been translated by the reviewer from Tschirschky’s original German. In several places where Tschirschky uses an English term, this has been left in italics.

struct a Cornish national identity and thereby a Cornish nation (p. 286). This ‘*Cornish identity*’ relies heavily on emphasising Cornwall’s distinctiveness and ‘difference’ from neighbouring English counties or from ‘England’ construed as a separate entity outside of and in opposition to Cornwall (pp. 220–222, p. 285), and in articulating this difference the concept of ‘Celticity’ – variously defined and variously understood – plays a key role (p. 190). In his discussion of *nation-building*, Tschirschky returns repeatedly to the trope of the nation as a ‘text’ that must be ‘written’ so that it can subsequently be ‘read’ into existence by an audience of ‘potential *co-nationals*’ (p. 311, p. XI). While previous studies have used the phrase ‘writing the nation’ to describe the way in which the nation-building process can be documented through texts of various kinds, taking these texts as concrete evidence for the existence of an abstract concept of “nationhood”, Tschirschky takes the idea a step further, suggesting that ‘writing is not a secondary expression of the nation already existing in some form external to discourse’ but rather ‘the very creation of the nation itself; it is thus *equated* with nation-building’ (p. XI, emphasis original).² Tschirschky also likens the process of *nation-building* to the construction of a house (the nation), in which the creation of a common culture, history, and identity through the assembly of various ‘textual building blocks’ (p. 309) provide the necessary ‘foundation’ upon which the rest of the edifice may subsequently be built. In the case of Cornwall, however, it remains to be seen whether a significant portion of the population will choose to ‘move in’ to this new construct (p. 313) – or for that matter, whether this project of owning and occupying the conceptual framework of the Cornish ‘nation’ will be accepted and legitimated by other nations in the neighbourhood (p. 309). At present, in Tschirschky’s estimation, the concept of Cornwall as a Celtic nation has not yet reached far enough beyond the cultural ‘elite’ who have helped to create this Cornish national identity in the course of the last two centuries (pp. 302–303), and thus Cornwall is still a work in progress: ‘a nation *in statu nascendi*’ (p. 313, p. XII).

The lengthy opening chapter (pp. 1–76) of Tschirschky’s study is devoted to a discussion of the two most problematic words in the book’s title: *Celtic* and *nation*. From the outset, Tschirschky is careful to distinguish between the terms ‘nation’ (*Nation*) and ‘state’ (*Staat*), which have often been used interchangeably even by academics (p. 27). In Tschirschky’s study, ‘nation’ refers to a more or less abstract concept whereby people are united by a sense of shared ‘nationality’ that need not have anything to do with their citizenship, government, or geographic location, while ‘state’ describes a concrete political entity (pp. 27–28) that may or may not correspond to a single culturally, linguistically, or historically defined ‘nation’, such that the modern world teems with examples of ‘stateless nations’ (p. 16) and nations that include parts of several political states (p. 28 n. 66).³ As Tschirschky’s survey of literature on the topic shows, this concept of a ‘nation’ and the political idea(s) or movement(s) which can be described under the rubric ‘nationalism’ are of relatively recent origin, and can only be well documented from the 19th century onward (p. 308, p. 49). Cornwall,

² This is a direct quotation from Tschirschky’s English abstract on pp. XI–XII; this idea is discussed in the main body of the text on pp. 13–14, p. 309.

³ Here, as elsewhere in his discussion of these terms, Tschirschky refers to Hugh SETON-WATSON’s *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London: Methuen, 1977).

Tschirschky tells us, makes a particularly good subject for a case study of *nation-building*, since in his view its ‘national’ identity has been constructed primarily in the course of the 20th century, in a process which has not yet reached completion even in the 21st century. As a result, the relevant material is of more recent date and the process of *nation-building* can be more easily documented and deconstructed than is possible in the case of ‘longer-established nations’ like Scotland and Wales (p. 7). The remainder of the first chapter (pp. 65–76) is devoted to a discussion of the terms ‘Celt’ (*Kelt*) and ‘Celtic’ (*keltisch*) as they have been used and interpreted by a variety of authors including archaeologists, historians, and linguists. While he includes the views of both ‘Celtic-skeptic’ and ‘Celtic-accepting’ writers (p. 72), Tschirschky remains here as elsewhere a spectator and is not interested in presenting his own answer to the question, “What is a Celt?” Rather, he examines the ways a variety of scholars – including some who would no doubt describe themselves as “Celticists” – have chosen to answer this question, setting the stage for his subsequent analysis of how various concepts of ‘Cornwall’s Celticity’ (*Keltizität Cornwalls*) have been used to define or create a ‘*Cornish identity*’ (p. 190), and, by extension, the ‘Celtic nation Cornwall’ in the book’s title.

Chapter 2 (pp. 77–104) presents a synopsis of Cornish history from the first millennium BCE to the 21st century, touching on the people, events, and institutions that have contributed to the historical perception of Cornwall as a culturally, linguistically, and politically distinct area enjoying a ‘peculiar special status between county [*Grafschaft*] and “region [*Landesteil*]”’ (p. 92). These examples of ‘*Cornish difference*’ (p. 98) comprise ‘the “raw material”... that is used in nationalist discourse’ (p. 78), and as such, provide the necessary background for Tschirschky’s subsequent examination of that discourse. Chapter 3, the longest section of the book (pp. 105–228), is devoted to the analysis and close reading of a variety of such nationalistic ‘texts’ – which term here, as elsewhere in modern literary and cultural studies, refers not just to printed documents but in a much broader sense to ‘all co-ordinated actions and representations, insofar as they have been given a fixed form comparable to the conversion of spoken into written language’ (p. 12). These ‘texts’ include the (traditional and revived) Cornish language(s), the various interpretations and re-interpretations of Cornish history, Cornish political institutions, movements, and parties, Cornish literature, music, and art, and even the discipline of Cornish Studies itself, which, according to Tschirschky, developed from a ‘conservative,’⁴ antiquarian discipline embracing ‘Cornish history, archaeology, language, natural history, and the like’ into a more modern but more tightly focused field ‘*New Cornish Studies*’ in which ‘*Cornish difference*’ and the ‘ethnic aspects’ of Cornish history, culture and identity are emphasised (p. 220).

In Chapter 4, ‘Aspects of Cornish Nationality,’ Tschirschky discusses various ‘symbols’ which through their increasing acceptance as emotionally charged icons of ‘*Cornish identity*’ among a broad spectrum of people in Cornwall and ‘not only in

⁴ For this characterisation (p. 220) Tschirschky cites Malcolm WILLIAMS’ article ‘The New Cornish Social Science’ (*Cornish Studies [Second Series]* 10, 2002, 44–66). The mere fact that there is a ‘first’ and a ‘second’ series of the journal *Cornish Studies* – the latter embodying the ethos Tschirschky describes as *New Cornish Studies* – serves to highlight the difference between the two phases.

explicitly nationalist circles' contribute to the process of 'Cornish *nation-building*' (p. 230). These 'icons' include such disparate elements as the St. Piran's flag (a white cross on a black field, now widely accepted as the 'Cornish "national flag"' [p. 237]), St. Piran's Day (5 March, now celebrated by many as the 'Cornish "national holiday"' [p. 241]), the song 'Trelawny' (often described as 'the unofficial Cornish "national anthem"' [p. 242]), the Cornish pasty, and popular sports like rugby football and surfing that have become identified as 'Cornish' despite having originated elsewhere (pp. 236, 243). Having examined the ways in which this 'national' identity has been constructed, perceived, and (to some extent) embraced within Cornwall, Tschirschky then explores how it relates to larger political, geographical, and cultural concepts and entities, in sections treating political '*devolution* and the "Europe of the Regions"' (pp. 246–253), the 'pan-Celtic' aspects of the Cornish nationalist movement (pp. 253–271), and the concepts of '*peripheralism*' and '*internal colonialism*' as used in the works of Cornish historians Philip Payton and Bernard Deacon (pp. 271–278).

Chapter 5 (pp. 279–313) presents an overview of the current state of Cornish culture – actually five different and interrelated 'Cornish cultures', expanding a list of three given by Bernard Deacon in a 1986 article⁵ – as well as a summary of Tschirschky's analysis and overall conclusions, which are helpfully recapitulated in bullet point form on pp. 307–313. Three appendices are also provided: the text of the song *Trelawny or The Song of the Western Men*; a report of the results of the 2005 parliamentary elections in Great Britain (in which the Cornish nationalist party Mebyon Kernow once again failed to gain a seat in Westminster and did not receive more than 2% of the total vote in Cornwall [p. 319]); and a summary of Tschirschky's rebuttal of Charles Penglase's contention that the Bible had been translated into Middle Cornish,⁶ a claim which Tschirschky discusses in Chapter 3 (p. 107) as part of his analysis in of the use of the (traditional and revived) Cornish language(s) as part of the '*nation-building*' process. The last-mentioned of these appendices represents one of the few places in the book where Tschirschky personally sets out to debunk the work of a scholar who presents a "nationalistic" (or at least potentially nationalistic) view of Cornwall's history, and should perhaps have been omitted as unnecessary or potentially distracting in a study of this kind, particularly given that Tschirschky has treated the subject elsewhere (p. 315 n. 1).⁷ Finally, the book's extensive bibliography (pp. 323–352) is an excellent resource for anyone interested in the subject of Cornish nationalism or modern Cornish history and historiography in general. A particularly interesting feature of the bibliography is Tschirschky's use of an asterisk to mark works which '(in their entirety or in individual passages) can be viewed as part of the Cornish nationalist text corpus, reproduce material which may be so described, or serve as sources for such material' (p. 323); a few authors may be surprised to find their works so designated.

As a discipline, Celtic studies has traditionally placed strong emphasis on long-established subject areas like philology, palaeography, history, and archaeology. A work like Tschirschky's *Die Erfindung der keltischen Nation Cornwall* which brings our

⁵ DEACON, Bernard, 1986: 'Cornish Culture or the Culture of the Cornish?'. In: *An Baner Kernewek* 46, 1986, 9–10.

⁶ As presented in PENGLASE's article 'La Bible en moyen-cornique' (*Etudes celtiques* 33, 1997, 233–243).

⁷ TSCHIRSCHKY, Malte W., 2003: 'The Medieval „Cornish Bible“'. In: *Cornish Studies (Second Series)* 11, 2003, pp. 308–316.

field to the “cutting edge” of modern literary criticism has the potential to breathe new life into the study of Celtic cultures, languages, and literatures, and should therefore be especially welcome to Celticists. The impact of Tschirschky’s book in the comparatively smaller and related field of Cornish studies will doubtless be even more profound. Given Tschirschky’s deconstruction of the concept ‘Cornish Studies’ in Chapter 3.5 (pp. 220–225), it is perhaps ironic that he should be the author of what may one day be seen as a seminal work on the subject. Yet in light of his metatextual approach to ‘reading the Cornish nation’ (p. 305), Tschirschky is doubtless fully aware that in writing about Cornish nationalism – even from a critical perspective – he is also helping to ‘write’ the Cornish nation.⁸

Its importance as a work of Celtic, Cornish, and cultural studies notwithstanding, Tschirschky’s book will appeal to many readers primarily for its detailed and engaging discussion of the Cornish nationalist movements of the ‘long 20th century’ (p. 7) and their construction and reconstruction of Cornish culture, history, and politics rather than for Tschirschky’s deconstruction of these nation-building texts. Through Tschirschky’s process of close reading, *Die Erfindung der keltischen Nation Cornwall* provides a fascinating insight into the history, activities, and aims of institutions like the Cornish Gorsedd, the Cornish Stannary Parliament, and the Cornish political party Mebyon Kernow that are largely unknown outside of Cornwall. That this work is written in German is a boon to German-language Celtic studies, as up until now the main sources of information about modern Cornish history in general and Cornish nationalism in particular have been available only in English. There can be no doubt, however, that an English translation of Tschirschky’s book would find a large audience among non-academic readers in Cornwall and elsewhere in the Anglophone world.

Bonn

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TSURUSHIMA, HIROKAZU (Hrsg.): *Nations in Medieval Britain*. Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010. 160 S., ISBN 978-1-90028-908-5, € 30,99 (gebunden). ISBN 978-1-90028-906-1, € 18,99 (Paperback).

Seit etwa 20 Jahren wird in England, angestoßen vor allem durch den verstorbenen Waliser Rees R. Davies, der in Oxford lehrte, die Geschichte der Britischen Inseln insgesamt von der Forschung in den Blick genommen, womit man sich konsequent von der Schilderung einer auf die Nation hin ausgerichteten englischen Geschichte entfernt hat. Der Anstoß hat für die Historiker des mittelalterlichen England entscheidende Fortschritte bewirkt, und vor diesem Hintergrund ist der Titel des zu besprechenden Sammelbandes nicht verwunderlich. Britannien wird hier als geographische Einheit verstanden, in denen mehrere *nationes* zu ihrem Recht kommen, nicht nur die englische. TSURUSHIMA („What do we mean by „nations“ in Early Medieval Britain“,

⁸ See for example p. 311 and p. XI, where Tschirschky mentions ‘researchers’ alongside ‘potential co-nationals’ as the people who ‘read’ the nation that nationalists have “written”.