

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CONTINENTAL CELTS*

IN the following discussion of the Continental Celts I should like to talk as an archaeologist and to leave to one side, the history of this people as revealed to us by Classical sources from the first mention of them to their final and complete incorporation in the Roman Empire under Caesar and Augustus. I shall attempt to make the archaeological remains tell their own story and only support their evidence by the written tradition where the possibility of important confirmation exists.

As a point of departure for our study I have selected a discovery made only a few years ago, one which occasioned much enthusiasm. This occurred in France, in the little village of Vix, on the upper Seine. It was a find which was widely and frequently publicised not only in the scientific journals but in daily newspapers and illustrated magazines.

Vix lies at the foot of a low, isolated height called Mont Lassois, the scene of excavations over a long period. These excavations have shown that the mountain repeatedly attracted men to settle there from late Stone Age times onwards. The site must, however, have been one of especial significance in the 2nd half of the 6th century B.C. At that time it was surrounded by a strong defensive wall within which innumerable sherds of Greek vessels were found, together with other settlement debris. These sherds prove that the inhabitants of Mont Lassois had extensive commercial contacts with the Mediterranean world. In addition, some burials with rich grave deposits, found in the immediate neighbourhood of the

*Translated from the German by the Editor.

mountain settlement, indicate clearly that we are here concerned with a group of people who were distinguished from their fellows by wealth and power: they must have been princes of a sort who dwelt on this spot.

The recent discovery, however, of the new grave, with unprecedentedly rich equipment, gave rise to great excitement. The skeleton of a young woman was found in a wooden chamber which, originally, was probably covered by a great tumulus. She lay on a bier provided by an ornamented, four-wheeled wagon. On her body lay several brooches, armlets and anklets and a string of stone and amber beads. The most significant single item of personal decoration, however, was a diadem of heavy gold, richly ornamented with, amongst other devices, a pair of winged horses which, in the fineness of their execution, betrayed the hand of a master schooled in the workshops of the south. Beside the body there stood a Greek vessel of bronze—a krater—of truly huge proportions, with figured ornament of the finest quality. Standing just 5 feet high, it can be stated that no vessel of this magnitude is known, although there are descriptions of such in Classical sources. Two Greek drinking vessels, made in Athens about 520 B.C., lay on the rim of the krater and, as well, there was a complete drinking set of bronze and silver vessels, including two bowls and a can certainly from Etruria.

These finds, then, show that we have to reckon, not only with trade relations with Greeks (who were probably inhabitants of the city of Massilia, the modern Marseilles and also lived along the Saône and Rhone valley), but also that the Etruscans participated in the commerce with Central Europe. This people had, by the end of the 6th century B.C., extended its power to the Po plains of Northern Italy; from here, passes through the central and western Alps provided contacts with the chieftains of the upper Seine.

Princely graves, like that at Vix, are known not only in eastern France but also in central Switzerland and

south-western Germany. Unfortunately, most of these were uncovered a long time ago and were, in consequence, not as carefully investigated as science nowadays demands. Fortified sites of these richly caparisoned dead include Hohenasperg near Stuttgart and especially the Heuneburg on the upper Danube, where for a number of years excavation has been in progress with results similar to those from Mont Lassois. As well, many simple graves of the ordinary people are known; and all these finds together are included by archaeologists in what is known as the western Hallstatt province, called after Hallstatt in the Austrian Alps where valuable finds of this period were made. These finds are proof of a socially differentiated population which, to judge by its possession of such a quantity of valuable Greek and Etruscan material, must have been equal trading partners with these Mediterranean folk.

In spite of all this, however, we do not get any more detailed information about this population from ancient tradition. With reasonable probability, we can deduce from the reports of Greek historians alone that we are dealing with Celts. Hecataeus of Miletos, who lived at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century B.C., can have referred to these people only when he mentioned the existence of Celts in the hinterland of Massilia. Herodotos, who wrote his historical work about a half century later, mentions Celts at the source of the Danube; but a detailed description of the Celts, with which we can compare the results of archaeological research, is first made available to us at that moment when the Gauls break into Italy.

One may, perhaps, recall the report by Livy in which he describes how the Gauls pressed over the Alps into the valley of the Po, drove the Etruscans thence and settled themselves in their place. More briefly, if more factually, Polybius tells of the same events. Amongst the latest arrivals in northern Italy were the Boii, who occupied the territory south of the River Po and around

the modern Bologna, and the Senones, who established themselves near the Adriatic coast in the area between Rimini and Ancona. The Romans are said to have become involved in the battle between the Senones and the inhabitants of Clusium, the modern Chiusi. This it was that led to Brennus's march on Rome in 387 B.C., when the city was destroyed and the siege of the capital was lifted only after the payment of a heavy tribute. In the next hundred years, the Gauls, time and again, mounted plundering raids into the heart of central Italy, until the Romans were eventually successful in 283 B.C., in defeating the Senones decisively and driving them from their territory on the Adriatic coast. However, it took much longer for the rest of the Gauls in northern Italy to be subjugated by the Romans.

For our research into the history of the Celts in Italy, the International Congress of Archaeology, held in Bologna in 1871, was of the utmost importance. At that time the great excavations, which gave such a fine picture of the Etruscan past, were being conducted within the confines of the city itself and somewhat south of it, at Marzabotto in the Reno valley. Now, amongst the many Etruscan finds, French scholars began to recognise objects with which they were already familiar from ancient graves in France, and especially in the Champagne. As it was certain that recognisable weapons and items of personal ornament belonged to Celts in France, similar objects in Bologna could be accepted as the legacy of the Gauls who had penetrated to Italy. Once the character of these objects had been recognised it became possible in the succeeding years to collect so much material together that it is now possible to paint a reasonably accurate picture of the Celtic occupation of Northern Italy.

I should like to describe some graves, which were uncovered at the end of the last century at Montefortino and Filottrano in the neighbourhood of Ancona, and which⁸⁶ must be ascribed to the Senones. The dead were

buried in wooden coffins, which were sunk in the earth and often given the additional protection of a stone setting. Men were accompanied by those long swords of iron already well-known to us from the reports of classical writers. The dead also had spears, the iron tip and often the butt of which were preserved in the graves. Occasionally, a bronze or iron helmet was discovered. Though it is certain that these people had shields, it seems that, at the period in question, such had no metal mounts and the organic material of which they were comprised has completely disappeared.* In addition to weapons, men's graves also contained metal and pottery vessels, toilet implements and even spindle-whorls. Some of the women's graves were even richer: as well as drinking vessels and unguent and cosmetic jars they also contained great quantities of ornaments, generally including engraved bronze mirrors.

If we can accept the swords and spears of the men's graves as Celtic (the helmets belong to a type widespread in Italy and only rarely used by Celts), it is only now and then, through brooches and neck- and arm-rings, that we can detect the presence of Gaulish women. The earrings, the vast proportion of the collars and armlets and the rest of the grave goods do not differ in any way from similar objects found in Italo-Etruscan graves.

The decoration of the ornaments, too, resembles most closely that of Etruscan work and has only faint Celtic feeling. In Central Europe at this time a positive and easily recognisable Celtic art style flourished, but in the graves around Ancona there are only few objects which are ornamented in the typical Celtic manner. For example, in a man's grave at Filottrano there occurred, significantly enough, an ornamented, bronze sheath-mount and in a woman's grave in the same place there was found a neck-ring or torc, a form of ornament shown

*The only known example of wood and leather from all Europe was found recently in Littleton bog, Co. Tipperary.—*Editor*.

on Classical representations as *the* most typical item of personal ornament of the Gauls.

These truly Celtic fabrications will, however, scarcely have been produced in Italy, where the invaders were entirely absorbed by the strong Classical culture and their individuality suppressed. We know, from the middle Rhine, for instance, an exact parallel to the collar from Filottrano and it is to be assumed that that specimen came from the Rhine to Italy; likewise, the sheath mentioned above was probably made, not by one of the Senones in northern Italy, but by a Celt, north of the Alps and possibly in the Marne district of France.

The chronological position of the graves just described is securely established (by Greek pottery found in them) to the end of the 4th/beginning of the 3rd century B.C. The graves illustrate for us the rich and secure life of the Celts shortly before its destruction by the Romans. All the discoveries suggest that the Celts had become native to Italy and one would not recognise in them, any more, the strange and horrible foreigners who destroyed Rome under Brennus.

Now for some details about the invaders themselves. We know, of course, that they stood before Rome as early as 387 B.C. and we must, therefore, assume that it was somewhat earlier that they advanced into northern Italy, though the Classical authors assign contradictory dates to this event. This is, indeed, one of the thorniest of our research problems, for we have so far only few finds in Italy which can with any degree of certainty be dated to the beginning of the 4th century, B.C.: the hordes of Brennus cannot as yet be identified in the archaeological remains.

The great migration can be indicated only in a negative way. Amongst the Greek and Etruscan cities in the Po valley, made known to us through excavation, Spina, on the estuary, had certainly flourished for a long time when the Gauls made themselves masters of the land. The well-dated Greek pottery of Adria, the other

great harbour, ceased about the thirties of the 5th century, B.C. and about the same time the importation of Greek wares into Numana near Ancona stopped. The only explanation of these facts must be the Gaulish attack. The Etruscan cemeteries round Bologna, the most important city in the valley of the Po, were in use throughout the whole of the 5th century and grave-stones exist on which the struggles of the natives with the Celts are represented. They show quite clearly that, at the end of the 5th century, the city had to wage a war with the Gauls and that the Celtic migration into Italy was in full swing at this time.

In the eastern ports of the Mediterranean, too, the Classical writers tell us in circumstantial detail of great Celtic migrations. The earliest document refers to the time of Alexander the Great who, before he set out in 334 to conquer the Persian Empire after his battles with the Thracians and Illyrians, received delegates of these people together with representatives of the Celts. This shows that the Celts must already have penetrated into the northern Balkans. A half century later, after the collapse of the Kingdom of Lysimachos, Celtic warrior bands pressed into Thrace and Macedonia. In 279 they plundered Delphi and large bodies of them moved further afield to Asia Minor where they were for long the terror of the colonial Greek cities.

Archaeologically speaking, however, it is practically impossible to identify the Celts who moved to the east in contradistinction to those who settled in Italy. It may be taken for granted that the eastern Celts came quickly under the strong influence of southern culture, losing, thereby, their individuality, though one clear archaeological proof of their presence in Asia Minor is provided at Pergamon. There, amongst the reliefs of the sanctuary of Athena, built by King Eumenes II about 180 B.C. to commemorate a victory over peoples called *Galatae* by the Greeks, trophies are depicted which include typical Celtic weapons.

A strong and individual Celtic culture can be recognised only in central and western Europe, from the east coast of Spain to Hungary and Yugoslavia; discoveries in England and Ireland indicate that Celts also reached the shores of those islands. This culture, called La Tène after the place of discovery, on Neuenburg Lake in Switzerland, of a huge hoard of weapons, comprises typical weapons and brooches, ornaments and pottery, and everything associated with them which we know from cemeteries and settlements.

The original source of the La Tène culture is not confined to the area occupied by the Hallstatt Culture, of which I wrote at the beginning of this chapter. Those areas north of the Hallstatt territory, including the Champagne in France, the middle Rhine and Bohemia, appear to be more important. In this area, in the 5th and more rarely also in the 4th century B.C., rich graves came to light which are reminiscent in many details of the older chieftains' graves of the Hallstatt Culture. The dead are buried under huge mounds; they are likewise placed on chariots, now, however, of the light, two-wheeled variety as opposed to the earlier four-wheeled type. Weapons are deposited with the dead and also rich ornaments, sometimes of precious metals, as well as drinking vessels manufactured in the south. These southern imports give us a lively picture of the commercial contacts the Celts had with the Etruscans before their attack on northern Italy. One can deduce that there were close connections between the trade from the south and the raids from the north.

How important the contact with the culture of the Mediterranean must have been for the Celts is, perhaps, demonstrated by the development of a new art style, of southern origin, in the citadels of the opulent chieftains whose wealthy graves we know. The ornamentation of the personal jewellery and the utility objects of the Hallstatt Period was geometrical. The artists and artificers of the La Tène epoch, however, took enthusi-

astically to foreign prototypes, some of which were brought to them from the east through the mediation of the neighbouring Scythian tribes; the most important influences, of course, were Greek and Etruscan. In spite of that, however, the rich figural art of the Greeks finds no echo. We do not know what it was that prevented the Celts from representing human beings, but true it is that it was only the rich Greek ornament of intertwined tendrils with palmettes and anthemion that is imitated. The plant character of southern ornament, however, is immediately lost amongst the Celts and curving, abstract shapes, whose origin can, only with difficulty, be recognised, take its place. These designs change constantly, they vary and have a charming ambiguity. A purely ornamental art of great beauty is born which, though brought to life by external influences, yet represents a tremendous achievement of the Celtic character. Though development in Central Europe is interrupted by the Roman conquest, it exercised a strong, if hidden, influence on provincial Roman art. In England and Ireland this Celtic art persists even through Roman imperial times and, indeed, at that time some of the finest Celtic objects were produced; it carried on in Ireland to contribute an important element to Early Christian art.

We have shown, from rich graves of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., that in the Champagne, along the Middle Rhine and in Bohemia there existed local princelings whose centres of power were so important for the development of the La Tène culture. There are also, in the neighbouring territory to the South, where for the preceding century we have demonstrated the various establishments of the Hallstatt chieftains, graves with the typical Celtic swords, spears, brooches and so on. In this area, however, we do not find the dead, with rich grave goods, under burial mounds; rather are they placed in flat cemeteries in which no grave is more richly equipped than its fellows. Thus, not only in the

art but also in the manner of burial, do we see a marked change in this area. In addition, the occupation of the Hallstatt citadels, of which excavation has told us much, ceases with the beginning of the La Tène culture. This suggests a great social change in this area which had been completed before the beginning of the major Celtic migration. We cannot identify the leaders of these Celtic migrations through their graves; and the graves of the later lords who built the great defended seats, the *oppida* of which Caesar writes, or of the nobles such as Orgetorix or Dumnorix, are also unknown. Everywhere in central Europe the simple grave in the earth gradually becomes the dominant type and the objects deposited with the dead became scarcer throughout the La Tène period and, consequently, of less significance in the archaeological record.

It is not only the poverty of the graves that prevents our getting an adequate picture of later La Tène times: the great cities, the so-called *oppida*, of which we know a great number, are so extensive that, so far, only relatively tiny areas could be excavated scientifically. Important investigations were carried out already last century at the instigation of Napoleon III. In order to write his history of Caesar he had excavations made at Bibracte, Gergovia and especially at Alesia, the centre of the final Celtic resistance to Caesar. At that site the Roman barracks and fortification trenches were discovered and traces of the Celtic city were found, though largely destroyed by later buildings of Roman times.

A modern scientific excavation of an *oppidum* has been in progress for some years. This is at Manching near Ingolstadt in Bavaria, formerly the chief centre of the Vindels. We have as yet, however, only brief reports of the results. We can, therefore, not say more than, that Caesar's descriptions of the *oppida* are, in many details borne out and even supplemented by the results of the excavations.

I should now like to conclude by reverting briefly

to the origin of the Celts. We have described the La Tène culture as *the* Celtic culture. Its bearers did not immigrate into Central Europe in the 5th century B.C.; but rather can it be said that the La Tène culture bonded together, into a unity, the various peoples who lived there. I have suggested as one of their predecessors, which we may certainly describe as Celtic, the people of the western Hallstatt culture. I have given Hecataeus as a reference for this, when about 500 B.C. he talks of Celts. We may now, however, by virtue of Spanish discoveries, look upon the bearers of the Hallstatt Culture as early Celts.

Classical writings tell us repeatedly that the Meseta in the centre and the west of the Iberian Peninsula was occupied by Celts. In spite of this statement, however, a definite La Tène culture has never been identified in those regions; a Hallstatt culture has.

We have mentioned that Eastern France, central Switzerland and southern Germany formed the essential core of the western Hallstatt culture area. At the end of the 6th century B.C., typical Hallstatt forms are suddenly found far beyond this region. They occur as isolated specimens in the south-eastern Alps or even further away in northern Germany, though these stray objects may have been due to trading contacts. At the end of the 6th century, however, we find whole cemeteries of this culture in the Champagne. At the beginning of the 5th century we find further Hallstatt forms, such as typical fibulae, in southern France and, in one district in Iberia, we find the local culture changed to a Hallstatt complex which continued in unbroken tradition there for hundreds of years. If there were not already Celts of some sort in the peninsula, it can only have been the introduction of the powerful Hallstatt culture which made Celtic large tracts of Spain and Portugal.

The great expansion of the Hallstatt people to western Europe can be explained only through great migrations about which, of course, we know nothing from written sources. These older Celtic migrations caused revolution-

ary changes, not only over large areas of the Continent, but they must have affected England and Ireland also. The upheavals, at the end of the 6th and beginning of the 5th century B.C., on the Continent, must have been responsible for the appearance in Britain of the first Iron Age settlers, the so-called Iron Age A people. Though individual population groups from the territory of the La Tène culture came from the Continent at later stages, it seems that it was these earliest Iron Age peoples who first laid the foundations of the Celtic settlement of the western islands.*

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*This chapter was prepared as a radio talk in 1959. Since then the investigation of the late Celtic *oppida* has made considerable advances; not only are more precise reports on Manching available but from Czechoslovakia have come the results of important research. These cannot, however, be dealt with here.