JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

JOURNAL OF THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF ARCHAEOLOGISTS

VOLUME 3.2

1995
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CRUITHNE PRESS

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56 pp., published 1991, price £15/$24

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CONTENTS

'HONORARY MALES' OR WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE? GENDER, STATUS, AND POWER IN IRON-AGE EUROPE

Bettina Arnold

There are three sources of information regarding the social, political, and economic status of women in the European Iron Age, and all three are problematic. First, there are the classical sources, which describe Celtic society from the 'civilised' Mediterranean perspective, whether Greek or Roman. These often tell us more about the observer's culture than about the Celtic societies being described. Second, there are the insular Celtic laws and legends, which are compromised by time, distance, and the transformative effects of Christianity. Third, there is the archaeological record, which can only produce answers if the questions asked are the right ones, and is often seriously flawed with respect to preservation and recovery. Unfortunately, archaeologists are still some way from developing a methodology of reconstructing gender roles on the basis of excavated material culture remains. I would like to discuss an archaeological example which may provide some useful guidelines for generating such a methodology, with reference to all three of the sources mentioned above. The approach presented here makes use of written, ethnographic, and archaeological sources in a way that is not always possible in all research contexts. However, there have been a few recent attempts at such a synthesis (Claassen 1992; Spector 1993; Robb 1994), which suggest that a partnership between the written, ethnographic, and archaeological records regarding the subject of gender yields more than any of these sources of information alone can produce. Where such complementary data sets exist they should be made to work in tandem, as this discussion will show.

Spector and Whelan have developed a useful set of categories of gender designation, which can be applied cross-culturally, but which acknowledge the complexity of gender as a multifaceted social phenomenon made up of several components. These are defined as follows.

Gender identity concerns an individual's own feeling of whether he or she is a woman or man (or other) regardless of genetic makeup.

Gender role describes what men and women actually do – their activity patterns, social relations and behaviours – in specific cultural settings.

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Journal of European Archaeology (1995) 3.2:153-168.

Gender attribution refers to the biological, social, and/or material criteria people of a particular social group use to identify others as males, females, or any other culturally defined gender category (e.g., berdache, trans-sexual). The attribution may or may not conform to an individual's own sense of gender or the initial gender assignment made at birth by those observing the newborn's external genitals or chromosomes.

Gender ideology encompasses the meanings of male, female, masculine, feminine, sex, and reproduction in any given culture. These might include prescriptions and sanctions for appropriate male and female behaviour or cultural rationalisations and explanations for social and political relationships between males and females (Spector and Whelan 1989:69–70).

Gender role and attribution have material culture correlates in virtually all societies for which ethnographic evidence is available. Such categories of information should be recoverable archaeologically in cultures which express gender differences in burial. Any significant change in gender subsystems should result in corresponding changes in the others (with the possible exception of gender identity). These are the operating assumptions of the approach suggested below.

EARLY-LA-TÈNE ELITE WOMEN

The phenomenon of early-La-Tène elite women's graves in western Europe is of interest in the context of archaeological gender studies for several reasons. During the period from about 450 BC to about 380 BC, female burials containing elite status markers appeared relatively suddenly in central and southern Germany. The preceding late Hallstatt period, which began around 750 and ended around 450 BC, was dominated in the same region by elite burials of males. These high status graves contained a standardised grave-good inventory which included gold neck rings, four-wheeled wagons, bronze drinking vessels, and bronze daggers. The preeminent late-Hallstatt elite burial is the Hochdorf grave, excavated in the 1970s near Stuttgart (Biel 1985). Women are often found accompanying males in these burials, but before 480 BC there are no unequivocally female elite burials containing gold neck rings in association with the other high status markers listed above. After 480, the approximate date of the spectacular elite female burial of Vix in Burgundy, there was a sudden drop in male elite graves and an equally sudden appearance of female burials containing high-status grave-good inventories. Several questions suggest themselves. If the pattern is significant, it can be expected to be the result of other changes in the structure of Iron-Age society in this region. Is there any evidence for such changes? What conclusions can be drawn regarding changes in the relative social status of high-ranking women during this time? Can the insular Celtic literature and the classical sources shed any light on the problem of interpreting the archaeological pattern?

To date, at least five early-La-Tène burials with 'female' grave-good inventories are known that include some or all of the 'objects of power' typical of the late-

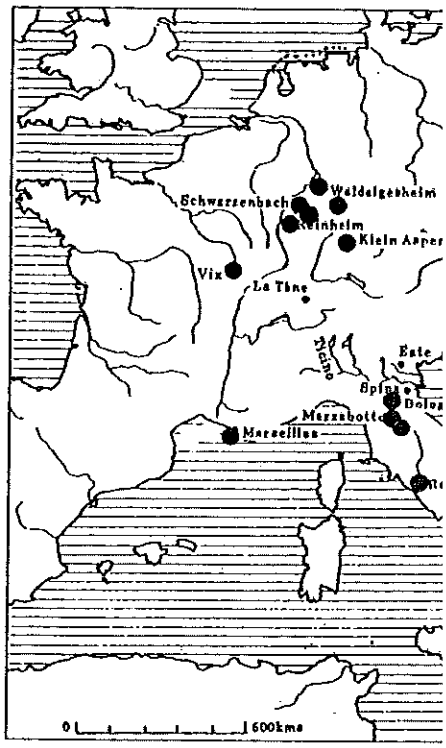

Figure 1. *Map of Iron-Age Europe. Circles ind*

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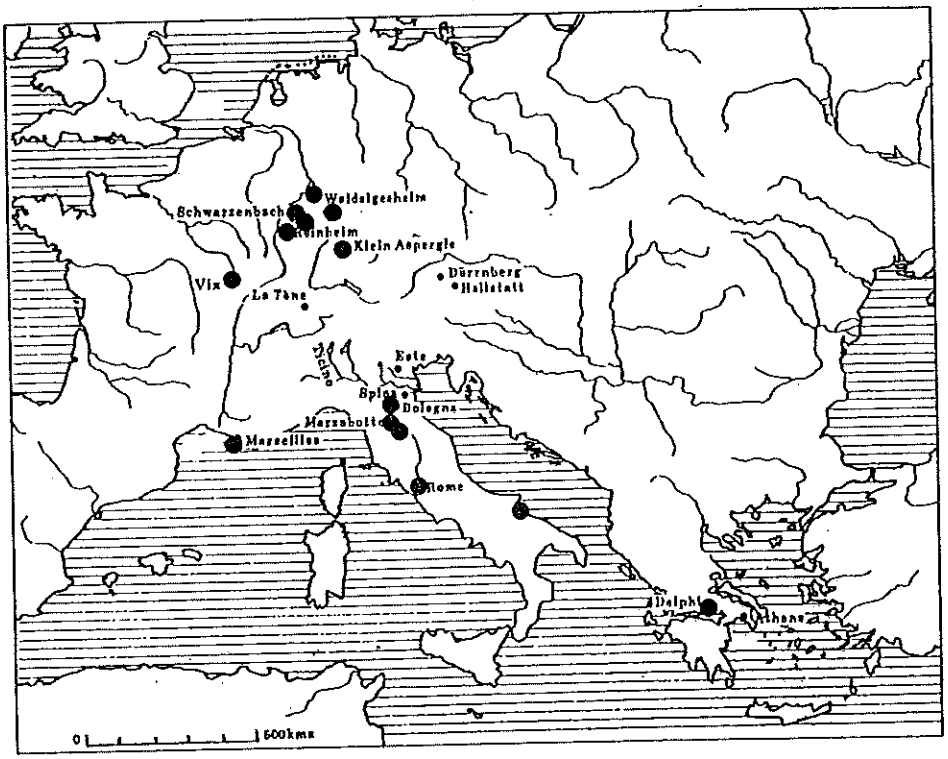

Figure 1. *Map of Iron-Age Europe. Circles indicate locations of principal sites mentioned in the text.*

Hallstatt male *Fürstengräber*: Schwarzenbach, Bad Dürkheim, Waldalgesheim, Reinheim, the Kleinaspergle. An additional burial, unsystematically excavated in Besseringen between 1858 and 1863, contained the remains of a two-wheeled wagon, a gold torc, and a bronze *Schnabelkanne* or beaked flagon, which contained cremated remains (Wells 1980:107). Since no weapons, bracelets, anklets, mirrors, or other 'gendered' grave-goods were reported for this burial, it is the only early-La-Tène gold neck ring grave to which no gender designation can be assigned. The most recent discovery was made in 1988 when what appeared to be a high-status elite grave was discovered in Büdingen near Frankfurt. The anatomical evidence suggests that the grave is probably male, but excavation and analysis of the finds from the site continue (Wais 1995; Herrmann 1995). The gold neck ring from this grave is very like that from the early-La-Tène burial of Besseringen (Wells 1980), which may also be a female grave.

While there are methodological problems with gender attribution on the basis of grave-goods alone, in general there is a good correlation between particular grave-good assemblages and male or female gender in Iron-Age western Europe (Arnold 1991b; Lorentzen 1993; Biel 1981). This correlation is confirmed by anthropological data where it is available, and it is assumed in this discussion that it is possible to

distinguish between male and female elite grave-good inventories during the late-Hallstatt/La-Tène periods.

Unfortunately, androcentric bias still dominates most of the literature related to the pre-Roman Iron Age (and European prehistory in general) (Arnold 1991b). When the gender attribution of a burial is unclear, as is often the case, it is assumed that the burial is male if it includes objects of high status. A representative example is the entry in *Die Kelten in Baden-Württemberg* for the late-Hallstatt elite burial of Rottenburg-Baisingen (Bittel, Kimmig, and Schiek 1981:455). This tumulus was unsystematically excavated in 1893 and contained the remains of a bronze vessel, a gold neck ring, a gold bracelet, one amber ring, and one bronze ring. According to the authors, the burial was probably male on the basis of the gold neck ring found in the burial. No skeletal material was recovered, and the finds have since been lost (ibid.). This sort of circular reasoning obviously complicates the analysis of changes in the status of women relative to men over time in the western Hallstatt zone. On the other hand, in the few cases where we have skeletal material in association with gold neck rings in late-Hallstatt burial contexts, they *have* been identified as biologically male. The only exception is the high-status elite femal burial of Vix, which is technically considered a late-Hallstatt grave (dated to around 480 BC), but seems to be the first manifestation of the early-La-Tène elite female burial phenomenon (Arnold 1991b). Excavated in 1953 at the foot of the hillfort of Mont Lassois in Burgundy, it contained spectacular grave-goods, including an enormous bronze *krater*, a four-wheeled wagon, and a gold neck ring. The grave was interpreted as a male transvestite priest by the German archaeologist K. Spindler as recently as 1983 (Spindler 1983: fig. 82). Ian Hodder (1991:13) describes this as a reluctance on the part of researchers (both men and women), trained in the androcentric environment of archaeological research today, to accept evidence of male power in the archaeological record without question while attempting to explain away evidence of female power.

The high-status elite female burials of the early-La-Tène period then appear to represent a real phenomenon, though the possibility of a third gender cannot be ruled out (Arnold 1991a). Obviously such a gender transforming category would complicate the picture still further. DNA analysis of dental material could help to clarify this question, though skeletal material is not preserved for all of the graves in question, and at least one (the Kleinaspergle grave) was a cremation.

SOCIAL CHANGE IN EARLY LA TÈNE

Is there evidence for other changes in the social system of the Iron-Age population of western Europe during the transition from late-Hallstatt to early-La-Tène times? Several major transitions occurred at roughly the same time that these high-status women's graves first appeared. The trade routes north from Massalia into the western Hallstatt zone (Fig. 1) were disrupted as the focus of Greek mercantile activity shifted to the port of Spina and the Po plain (Wells 1980; 1984). A new art style, which gives the La-Tène period its name, emerged which is an amalgam of eastern, Mediterranean, and indigenous influences. Where geometric motifs predominated in

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the late-Hallstatt period, the La-Tène period art is characterised by a much more flowing, organic style of decoration, which included many fanciful half-human, half-animal creatures.

This period is also marked by the movement of Celtic peoples south and east from the western Hallstatt zone (Arnold and Murray n.d.; Ritchie and Ritchie 1995:55–56). The classical sources report that initially these incursions were carried out by small groups of men intent on raiding and collecting booty. Many of these early Celtic migrants became mercenaries for eastern potentates as far away as Macedonia. Large numbers of them struck terror into the Mediterranean region, sacking Rome in 387 BC and looting the temple of Apollo at Delphi in 279 BC.

Several classical authors describe Celtic mercenary activity in the Mediterranean and eastern territories. If the numbers quoted by classical sources are correct, then thousands of Celtic warriors seem to have been involved in this activity. According to the French Celticist Henri Hubert, 'No oriental sovereign was able to do without his contingent of Gauls' (Szabó 1991:333).

There is archaeological as well as textual evidence for these raids and later migrations at cemetery sites like Bologna, Marzabotto, and Monte Bibele in Italy, among others. The relative scarcity of male burials in the Marne and Rhineland regions, the La-Tène heartland, at the end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth centuries BC has been linked specifically to the military campaigns of Celtic mercenaries in northern Italy (Charpy 1991:245; Joachim 1991:262–63). An isolated Celtic chieftain's burial from Moscano di Fabriano dating to the fourth century BC is one of the earliest signs of the movement of Celtic warrior bands into the central Adriatic region (Landolfi 1991:287). The La-Tène object found furthest south is a ceremonial helmet from Canosa di Puglia on the eastern coast of southern Italy (Kruta 1991:201).

Other classical sources describe the Celtic diaspora as motivated by the 'barbarian' market for wine and other exotic consumables from the Mediterranean. The shift in the trade networks from Greek Massalia (Marseille) to Etruscan Spina and the Po plain around 400 BC has been described as the catalyst which led to the collapse of the western Hallstatt centres at the end of the early Iron Age (Wells 1980; 1984). The levelling of the early-Iron-Age social system which resulted may have been one of the motivating factors in the emigration of Celtic mercenaries and eventually whole tribes.

Pliny the elder, a Roman author, tells an apocryphal tale of a blacksmith who had been working in Rome and returned to his tribesmen the Helvetii with a dried fig, a bunch of grapes, and samples of wine and oil. According to the story, the Helvetii then crossed the Alps to procure more of these delicacies. Livy recounts a related story about an Etruscan trader who lured Celtic mercenaries to his city with figs and wine to assist him against a rival Etruscan family (Arnold and Murray n.d.). We are probably dealing with what Tierney (1960) refers to as *Wandermotive* here. Such stories were reported routinely in the classical sources as an example of the naivete and uncivilised nature of 'barbarian' peoples. However, the archaeological evidence for the trade in wine and possibly olive oil in the preceding late-Hallstatt period (Dietler 1990) indicates that Mediterranean imports *did* act as a 'pull factor', while

Figure 2. 'Rose the Riverter' poster advertising US war jobs for women (reproduced with permission from the Minnesota Historical Society, St Paul, Minnesota, poster #64146 US History, WWII MN 'Find your war job').

overpopulation in the Celtic homelands, also mentioned by several classical sources, acted as a 'push factor' (Anthony 1990:898) in Celtic mercenary activity and large-scale migration.

Tomb inscriptions document intermarriage between local Etruscan populations and Celtic immigrants. An example from Este, Benvenuti tomb 123, dated to the fifth/fourth centuries BC, links a Veneti woman named Frema to a man called Boialos, a member of the Celtic tribe called the Boii, originally from Bohemia (Vitali 1991:225). Eventually whole tribes participated in this movement south and east, but initially it seems to have been a predominantly male affair, as the warrior burials, Celtic military equipment, and Celtic male/indigenous female marriages indicate.

There is archaeological evidence for the return of some of these mercenaries to the Rhineland. One example is the Rodenbach burial in the Rheinland-Palatinate, which is dated between 420–350 BC. The grave was the central inhumation in a large tumulus known locally as the Fuchshübel, and was excavated in 1874. It contained a La-Tène style gold bracelet, a gold finger ring, a decorated bronze canteen, a bronze belt hook, four or five bronze rings, an iron sword, an iron knife, three iron spear points, a bronze Etruscan *Schnabelkanne*, a large bronze platter with handles, a small bronze bowl without handles (possibly of Etruscan manufacture), the handle of another bronze vessel, possibly a sieve, and a ceramic *kantharos* from an Attic workshop (Pauli 1980). There are several points worth noting here: the absence of a gold

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MALE MIGRATIONS AND CHANGING GEND

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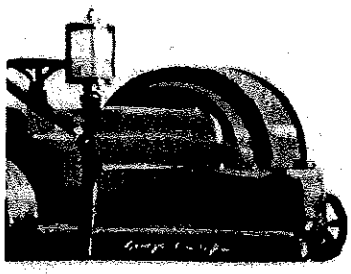

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neck ring, the presence of a sword *and* several spear points, and the presence of objects of Mediterranean manufacture at a time when the trade routes from the area to the Mediterranean had been cut off. The interpretation of this grave as that of one of the many Celtic mercenaries who made their way south and east during this time seems supportable.

MALE MIGRATIONS AND CHANGING GENDER ROLES

The appearance of elite female burials in the early-La-Tène heartland may be a manifestation of the primarily male emigration episodes in the late fifth/early fourth centuries BC. This phase preceded the large-scale tribal migrations of the later fourth and third centuries BC. The archaeological and documentary evidence indicates that large numbers of Celtic men left this Rhineland and Marne regions beginning around 400 BC or even earlier. Some of them did not return, perhaps marrying and probably dying abroad. What impact did this have on the social groups they left behind? The exodus of much of the elite male population in search of mercenary action in the south and east may have afforded high-status women the opportunity to expand their own spheres of influence, an early-La-Tène version of the 'Rosie the Riveter' phenomenon (Fig. 2).

The basis of social power in Celtic society was agrarian, as was, to a certain extent (less on the continent than in the British Isles), pastoral wealth, especially in cattle (Gibson 1988; Patterson 1991; 1995). Warfare seems to have been endemic in Celtic society, as documented in the written sources from both the classical world and the British Isles (Ritchie and Ritchie 1995) as well as the archaeological evidence for severe traumatic injury found in Iron-Age mortuary contexts from the continent (Arnold 1991a:89). The landowning class was made up of a military elite which seems to have been linked intra-regionally via clan-based kinship structures. There is some evidence to suggest that this system may have been matrilocal and possibly matrilineal during the late-Hallstatt/early-La-Tène peiod (Alt, Muza, and Vach 1995; Pauli 1972:133).

Socio-economic status in the community was established and maintained by competitive feasting (Arnold 1995; Dietler 1990), including the distribution of large quantities of alcoholic beverages. The drinking and feasting equipment found in continental Celtic burials beginning at least as early as the Hallstatt period plays a significant role in the literature and laws of the insular Celts. The gold torc, or neck ring, as a symbol of the highest socio-economic status is another common element linking the Celtic cultures of western Europe. The appearance of these two categories of material culture in women's graves in the early La Tène on the continent appears difficult to explain except in terms of an association with real socio-economic power.

With the men of an extended high-status family marauding abroad – whether they were husbands, brothers, or sons – it could have been the responsibility of senior women to take on the social and political leadership roles in their kin groups. They would have had to keep the economic basis of the group's social status secure by supervising all production activity and by organising the feasts which established

and maintained social ties and obligations. The insignia and equipment that went along with this role would have devolved to the women who stepped in to fill these temporarily vacant leadership positions. In some of those cases where the men never returned, or where the spoils of war were brought back to a widow or daughter or mother by a kinsman, women who had grown accustomed to leading simply may have continued to do so. The gold neck rings and drinking equipment would, by the time they died, have been associated permanently with their social personae and would have been placed in the grave with them.

Women's graves in the late-Hallstatt period frequently contain metal drinking vessel sets, and the early-La-Tène elite graves all contain such equipment. It has been suggested that women in Iron-Age Europe may have been simply servitors rather than active participants in drinking and feasting events. This case might be made for some of the late-Hallstatt multiple burials (male/female) in which drinking equipment is placed in the grave at the side of the female individual. It is difficult to envision this as an appropriate interpretation of the Vix burial, however, or the early-La-Tène elite women's graves like that of Reinheim.

A comparison of the role of women in drinking and feasting activity in those contemporary cultures with whom the Celts of western central Europe had regular contact might be useful in resolving this issue. Women are conspicuously absent in depictions of most Greek feasting scenes (Pasquier 1988:329). When they appear at all, they are seen in the passive role of servitors. Etruscan art, on the other hand, depicts women as active participants in drinking and feasting activity, apparently on a par with men. Pallottino (1975:137) notes that

> in Etruria woman's place in society was remarkably high, and certainly quite different from that of Greek women. The fact that women took part with men in banquets, far from being a sign of dissolution – as maliciously stated by many classical Greek writers, astonished and scandalised at a custom quite foreign to the Greeks of Classical times – is a mark of social equality.

Pasquier (1988:330) regards this as evidence of a close affinity between Celtic and Etruscan drinking practices, and notes that a burial like the Vix grave would have been an impossibility in a contemporary Greek context. Interestingly enough, very similar motivations are in operation in the reluctance of archaeologists to classify early-La-Tène burials like the Kleinaspergle grave with its drinking equipment as female. This tumulus was originally erected for an individual of high status associated with the Hohenasperg hillfort during the late-Hallstatt period. The tomb of interest here is a secondary burial dating to the early La-Tène period. Jacobsthal and Langsdorff (1929) originally interpreted the grave as female, but later Jacobsthal reinterpreted it as male. The reason? The residue of an alcoholic beverage had been found in the bottom of one of the imported bronze vessels in the burial. 'Are we to assume of prehistoric Swabian women', Jacobsthal asks indignantly, 'that they were as dissolute imbibers as Etruscan females?' (Kimmig 1988:73). His outrage at such an outlandish idea could almost have been lifted directly from the writings of a classical author like Strabo or Poseidonius. In fact, the archaeological evidence of burials like

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ght back to a widow or daughter or
. accustomed to leading simply may
d drinking equipment would, by the
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he Vix burial, however, or the early-
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Women are conspicuously absent in
uier 1988:329). When they appear at
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those of Vix and Reinheim suggests women, possibly acting as surrogates for their absent or deceased mercenary husbands, engaged not only in competetive feasting but also in the political brokering that accompanied it.

The early-La-Tène *'Fürstinnengrab'* phenomenon cannot be adequately explained as the result of either the 'appendage syndrome' or the 'honorary male' syndrome (Fraser 1988: 12, 21, 32, 107, 332), which need to be addressed in this context. The two syndromes are related. In some cases where a woman attains a position of political power in a patriarchal society as the result of the appendage syndrome, she is required to take on certain honorary male attributes. Examples include the Egyptian pharaoh Hatschepsut, whose statues at her tomb at Deir el-Bahri present her in full male regalia, complete with false beard, and Elizabeth I of England, who was required to review her troops in full armour. The necessity for such transvestism is principally found in cultures where women are accorded low social status relative to men, and where such female rulers are the 'singular exception' (Fraser 1988:3).

Both of these 'syndromes' complicate the interpretation of the status of women in societies which are extremely patriarchal but which have female leaders. The honorary male phenomenon in particular is a good example of the disjunction that can exist between gender attribution and gender ideology, as defined by Spector and Whelan (1989). Modern examples of the appendage sydrome include Indira Gandhi (daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister); Corazon Aquino (wife of the assassinated Filipino leader); and Benazir Bhutto (daughter of the executed Pakistani leader) (Fraser 1988: 307–22). It would be totally misleading to infer anything about the relative status of women in general in these countries on the basis of the presence of a biologically female political leader.

The archaeological record alone does not allow us to decide whether the appendage syndrome was operating in the early La Tène or whether women in Celtic cultures were able to be leaders in their own right. Fortunately, we do have contemporary written sources from the Mediterranean and the later insular Celtic cultures which can be of considerable value here (Markale 1972). The temporal and geographic limitations of such comparisons must be recognised, however.

The classical and the insular sources are unanimous on the subject of Celtic women's rights in marriage and property ownership. Divorce proceedings, for example, could be initiated by either partner, and the wife kept not only her dowry but also any interest which had accrued in the interim. In Ireland in the late seventh century AD, the form of marriage referred to in the laws as the *lánamnas comthincuir* was one in which both husband and wife contributed equally to the marriage goods. The woman's right to own property is clearly defined (O Corráin 1979:2). In a variant of this form of marriage, the woman even contributed the majority of the marriage goods.

According to O Corráin, such a woman was known as a *banchomarba*, or 'female heir'. If there was no male issue in a marriage, a daughter could inherit a life interest in her father's estate, and could preserve an interest in the estate for her own children, provided that she married one of her father's close male relatives. *Lánamnas for bantinchur* referred to a marriage in which such an heiress married a man who

had no land or other property, but was a close relative of her deceased father. As O Corráin (1979:3) describes it, 'here the roles are reversed: as the laws put it: "the man goes in the path of the woman, the woman in the path of the man".' This and other similarly outlandish practices so shocked Greek and Roman observers that they felt compelled to make a note of the fact that in Celtic societies the roles of men and women were the reverse of those in the Mediterranean world (Fraser 1988:63).

The later Irish legal texts provide evidence for continuity with regard to such divorce practices and the relatively high social status of women among the island Celts (Patterson 1994:261). The legal passages cited by O Corráin provide a model for the type of inheritance and marital system, in this case from a later Celtic culture in the British Isles, which could have produced the *'Fürstinnengrab'* phenomenon in the early La Tène on the continent. Some women, inheriting property from their deceased fathers in the absence of sons, may have consciously chosen closely related but impecunious men as husbands in order to maintain control of the property and the social power that went with it.

The juridical record of the island Celts documents a fluid and dynamic gender ideology in which the status of elite women relative to elite men went through considerable permutations through time. During periods of social upheaval, women could even take on roles which were considered exclusively male under 'normal' conditions. For example, Nerys Patterson (1994:22) describes women becoming widely involved in combat during the violence of the fifth and sixth centuries AD in Ireland. Irish noblewomen were also able to take advantage of the absence of their husbands during the Norman period, another phase of Irish history that was marked by social unrest (Patterson pers. comm.). This strengthens the hypothesis presented here that in socieites in which women are already accorded a considerable amount of autonomy, episodes of intensive male mobility coincide with the emergence of female leaders. The archaeological record from the continent seems to reflect a similar pattern. There is no doubt that this time period was marked by considerable social unrest. This is documented archaeologically on several levels: 1) wide-spread tomb robbing (Arnold 1991a); 2) an increase in numbers of amulets per grave and the number of graves with amulets (Pauli 1975); 3) the abandonment of most late-Hallstatt hillforts and return to a more dispersed settlement pattern (Wells 1980); 4) the movement of peoples both into and out of the western Hallstatt area (Arnold and Murray n.d.); and 5) the sudden appearance of elite women's graves with gold neck rings (Arnold 1991b). To what extent these shifts affected women in the rest of society is difficult to judge, though it is likely that this phenomenon was restricted to the upper echelons of society.

Making use of the Irish literature to 'engender' the study of the early European Iron Age poses an even more complex problem than a comparative analysis of the insular legal texts. It is difficult, for example, to assess the importance of the persistent association between sovereignty and female deities in the Irish tradition (Mac Cana 1982:520) with respect to the question of the status of women in Irish society. As Mac Cana points out, the 'perennial significance of the goddess rested on her intimate connection with the pivotal institution in Irish society, that of scaral kingship.'

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In fact, the Celtic literature contains many references to autonomous and powerful women rulers. Probably the best known is Queen Medb of Connaught, whose argument with her husband over which of them owned more property set in motion the most celebrated cattle raid of all time in the epic poem the *Táin* (Kelly 1992). It is true that Medb, as portrayed in the *Táin*, is perhaps more accurately considered a euhemerised goddess of sovereignty than a female ruler in her own right. She had nine kings of Ireland as her mates, and of her it was said 'Great indeed was the power and influence of that Medb over the men of Ireland, for she it was who would not permit a king in Tara unless he had her for his wife' (Mac Cana 1982:522). The important question here is whether a society which in its literature attributes such independence to its female characters would on the other hand deny or rigidly curtail their independence in real life (ibid.:523). Unfortunately, the Irish archaeological record is still very fragmentary and cannot contribute much to this discussion at present.

Some insights may be gained from a closer reading of the *Táin* itself. The anti-feminist tone of the poem (which was the product of several generations of scribes working under the auspices of the Irish church) is worth noting in this context. Muireann ní Bhrolcháin (1982:525) points out that, as far as is known, women were not involved in the writing or transcription of the early Irish literature which survives in manuscript form today. The misogynist attitude toward Medb in the narrative of the *Táin* can therefore be assumed to reflect both the gender of the authors and the patriarchal authority of the church (Kelly 1992).

On the one hand, Medb is described as the leader of the army, the one responsible for 'mustering the hosting' (Kelly 1992:77), and indeed she even engages in single combat with Cú Chulainn. On the other hand, in the last scene in which she appears she is 'viciously disparaged as a woman for aspiring to military leadership' (p. 79) and in the final battle is 'in the ignominious position of having to beg Cú Chulainn to spare her' (p. 79).

Frank O'Connor (1967:32, 34) concluded in his analysis of the *Táin* that 'the purpose of the original author would seem to have been to warn his readers against women, particularly women in positions of authority.' Passages like the following seem to bear out this assessment (Kelly 1992:79): 'That is what usually happens . . . to a herd of horses led by a mare. Their substance is taken and carried off and guarded as they follow a woman who has misled them.' The raid itself is only necessary because Medb's own stud bull had voluntarily migrated to the herd of her husband, King Aillil, ostensibly because he refused to belong to a herd of cattle owned by a woman.

As Kelly (1992:81) points out, 'Medb does not confine herself to traditionally female spheres of activity and the narrative judges her in accordance with the traditional criteria for the male role she aspires to.' The 'traditional female spheres of activity' of which Medb is the embodied antithesis are, according to her (p. 82), the product of monastic *literati*. 'One could go a step further', she argues (p. 87), 'and see in the *Táin*, not just an exploration of the nature of legitimate kingship, but a comment on the literary treatments of the topic, and on the dangerous potential of the sovereignty goddess myth to privilege the female at the expense of the male.'

Why should it have been of such importance to early Irish male monastic scribes to

present the story of the *Táin* in the form of an anti-feminist cautionary tale vituperatively critical of female rulers? It is hard to believe that the repetition of the theme 'woman: authority = unnatural/dangerous' which is documented in the various recensions was solely an exercise in literary criticism on the part of what Kelly calls the monastic *literati*. Rather it seems worth exploring the idea that this treatment of women in positions of political power was a response to a real, although pre-Christian, phenomenon of female rulers in early Ireland and other parts of the British Isles.

There *are* historical references to such female Celtic leaders. One of the most famous examples is Boudicca, queen of the Iceni. Her military success against the Romans is permanently preserved in the so-called Red Layer which marks the destruction of London by fire in 60 AD (Fraser 1988). Her story to some extent conforms to the appendage syndrome, but not to the honorary male syndrome. She was chosen to lead her tribe, and eventually a tribal confederacy, against the Romans after the death of her husband. On the other hand, she achieved that position as a result of her qualities as a war leader, and was not required to take on the trappings of an honorary male.

Unfortunately, the written evidence from continental Celtic groups regarding women in positions of social and political power is extremely scanty. One of the few exceptions comes from Brittany. In the early Middle Ages, there were few public offices as such, but there were respected community leaders, usually elders. In the ninth century there existed in Brittany a hereditary and propertied office for village business which was known as the *machtiern*. This officer was responsible for the regulation of transactions. In at least one documented case the position was held by a woman, the wife of the *machtiern* of a neighboring village. As Wendy Davies (1983: 149–50) has pointed out, 'although their number was small a few women presumably played a direct part in politics when they had control of large properties and when the course of politics was directly related to property interests.' We have therefore at least one example from the continent of female autonomy and political power in a Celtic society which is analogous to the much more extensive written evidence from the British Isles. Obviously these examples are not intended to be directly applicable to the early-Iron-Age material from the western Hallstatt zone. However, they do provide us with a more closely related source of models than studies of women in contexts geographically and temporally even further removed from the culture being studied.

It is also very likely that the early-La-Tène elite female graves represent a phenomenon restricted to the upper echelons of Iron-Age society. Nerys Patterson's work in early Ireland provides a model for this phenomenon of a change in the relative status of women in only a restricted segment of society as the result of externally imposed social stress She (1994:288–322) argues that

> the status of married women was enhanced, in tandem with the increased power of the upper nobility in the phase of recovery from the Viking attacks, while the marital status of poorer women of the farming classes was in danger of being assimilated to that of the concubine, whose domestic power was highly circumscribed . . . The new wealth of the period (largely gener-

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CONCLUSION

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ated by the Viking slave-trade) helped consolidate royal networks of clients, vassals, allies and mercenaries, and also made possible the emergence of formidably wealthy royal daughters.

CONCLUSION

Let us turn again to the archaeological evidence. In a society which expresses social differences in mortuary ritual, one would expect to find 'honorary males' represented by biologically female individuals buried with male grave-good inventories. The neck ring or torc in early-Iron-Age burials on the continent was not an exclusively male grave-good, although apart from the Vix burial only male graves contained *gold* torcs before 450 BC. Drinking equipment is also found in female burials before 450, although usually not as an elaborate set, and only in association with a gold neck ring in the case of the atypical Vix burial. The only pan-regional exclusively male grave-goods in the western European Iron Age were weapons, especially daggers (late Hallstatt) and swords (La Tène).

An 'honorary male' Iron-Age burial, then, should contain a biologically female individual in conjunction not only with items of power (gold torc, drinking vessels, wagons, or chariots) but also with weapons (dagger or sword or spears). None of the early-La-Tène high-status elite women's graves contains weapons, however, and I argue that this is because weapons are intended to convey a message primarily regarding gender, and only secondarily status. Weapons are found in graves that do not belong to the highest-ranking group, but gold torcs are clearly an exclusive high-status marker. Burials like the Reinheim grave then represent high-status *women as women*, not high-status women as men, i.e. analogous to a Boudicca rather than a Hatshepsut.

Were women in the La-Tène heartland who benefitted from the 'Rosie the Riveter' phenomenon described here able to maintain their elevated socio-economic positions over time? In other words, do the early-La-Tène elite female burials reflect a lasting change in gender ideology or merely a short-lived response to a specific set of circumstances during a time of social flux? This is a difficult question to answer, largely because the burial record of the La-Tène period after La Tène A is characterised by the disappearance of high-status elite burials of any kind, male or female. The impact of the Roman conquest, especially in Gaul, followed by the displacement and absorption of Celtic-speaking peoples by Germanic tribes, further blurs the picture of the fate of continental Celtic women.

Most likely the phenomenon described here was short lived. It is of interest because it provides us with a brief window on women in a pre-literate culture who maximised the opportunities which presented themselves in their favour at least for a short time. It is also significant that this occurred on the fringes of a Mediterranean world where women had no legal rights, could not own property, and were for the most part confined to their households. In addition, it provides us with an ideal opportunity to test the application of multi-disciplinary approaches to the archaeology of gender.

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ABSTRACT

The Archaeology of gender in Iron-Age Europe

The study of prehistoric Europe continues to be simplified in favour of a male-dominated world view. The interpretation of high-status female burials has been particularly plagued by gender bias, since such graves imply that women in these societies may have achieved positions of social and economic power. Changing burial customs and grave-good inventories, as well as documentary evidence from the Mediterranean, indicates that gender relations were affected in significant ways during the early Iron Age. The social changes that accompanied the late-Hallstatt/early-La-Tène transition cannot be understood without reference to gender, as the paper tries to show.

IDENTITIES, MA
CHANGE: 'C
IN LATE-IRO

INTRODUCTION

The names 'Celt', or 'Gaul', and 'Ge
cussion and scholarly literature co
Europe before, during, and after th
century before Christ (Moscati et al
been scholarly interest in sorting ou
western and central Europe. Identi
named groups had powerful politic
during the first half of the twentiet
these groups plays an important role
the New Europe emerges, as Michael
Celtic past. This function is well illu
hibition entitled 'The Celts' mounted

The problem of sorting out Celts
with interpreting a few ancient
summarise data that have stimulate
debate – Caesar, writing during the
from the Celts, whom he called Gaul
and religion, and they lived east of t
Tacitus, writing around AD 100,
peoples whom Caesar called Germa
features of individual Germanic trib
we know to use the word *Germani*,
peoples inhabiting the lands east
attributed to the writer Poseidonius
and his usage of the word set the sta
(Much 1918; Wenskus 1986). Our m
and his reference to Germans. Tradi

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