

THE

CELTIC

TRADE, ART, AND WAR



CUTTING-EDGE STYLE

These iron and bronze scabbards were found in Switzerland, the product of the Celtic civilization known as La Tène. Emerging in the fifth-century B.C., aspects of the La Tène culture spread to western Europe and are closely associated with modern notions of Celtic patterns and style.

BERTHOLD STEINHILBER/LAIF/CORDON PRESS

The Celts used their metalworking skills to expand throughout Europe during the Iron Age. The Celtic presence stretched from Britain to Turkey and greatly shaped pre-Roman Europe, and questions about the exact nature of their culture and identity continue to fascinate archaeologists today.

BORJA PELEGERO



BIG BUSINESS

Mining and selling salt (above) was central to the flowering of Celtic culture in Hallstatt (located in modern Austria) during the Iron Age.

ILLUSTRATION: SAMSON GOETZE

Near the mouth of the Rhône River, 2,600 years ago, Greek traders founded a colony called Massilia, today the site of the French city of Marseille. Venturing inland along the Rhône Valley, those traders encountered a people who spoke a tongue the Greeks did not recognize. Ruled by wealthy chieftains and hungry for luxury goods, they seemed fierce and warlike. A century later, Greek geographer Hecataeus of Miletus gave them a name—Keltoi, translated into Latin by the Romans as Celtae.

Today, the word “Celtic” represents many things: a style of modern jewelry; a typeface; and an epithet of national pride among people of Scottish, Welsh, and Irish descent. In historical terms, however, “Celtic” is harder to define, in part because the Celts lived across such a wide area, inhabiting lands from Ireland to Turkey.

A few historians argue that the term “Celt” is almost historically meaningless. Many historians, however, concur with Barry Cunliffe, emeritus professor of European archaeology at Oxford, who believes that the Celts can be understood as

a culture with shared belief systems and a common language, versions of which are still spoken in western Europe, especially in Ireland and Scotland. In this spirit, historians now regard Celtic culture not in terms of a unified people, but as a bundle of shared linguistic and cultural traits distributed among various Iron Age peoples who profoundly shaped pre-Roman Europe.

The Celtic Jigsaw

The Celts of central Europe of this period are protohistoric: Aside from a few inscriptions, they did not fully develop a writing system, but modern historians have relied on accounts of them left by their neighbors, notably the Greeks and Romans.

Greek authors were aware of the scope of the Celtic world. Trade up and down the Rhône Valley informed them of the presence of Celts in central Europe. In the fourth century B.C., Pytheas, a geographer from Massilia, chronicled a sea voyage up the Atlantic coast of Europe and described how the Celtic people could be found in Armorica (Brittany, in northwestern France).

At first the Celts were noted for their trading habits, and later for their warlike nature. Roman writers, such as Livy, drew on the works of



BRONZE CUIRASS HALLSTATT CULTURE, CA 600 B.C., SLOVENIA
BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

An aerial photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a paved road with a white center line winds through a lush green valley. A river flows through the center of the valley, its path also winding. In the middle ground, a small cluster of buildings is visible. The background features steep, rocky mountainsides and a range of jagged, snow-capped peaks under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is a dramatic landscape of high mountains and a fertile valley.

THE RHÔNE CONNECTION

Originating from a glacier near Switzerland's Furka Pass, the Rhône River runs to the Mediterranean. It was the major artery that connected the central European Celts to the classical world.

IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

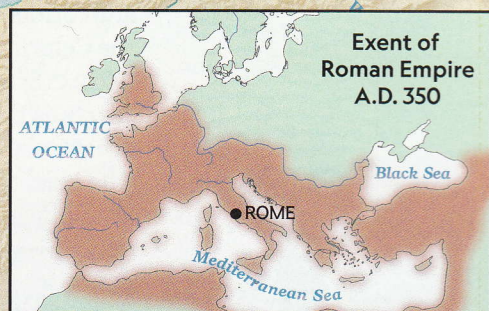
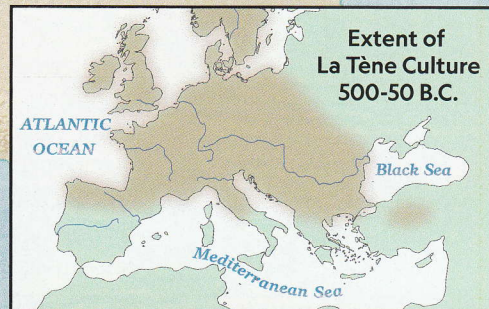
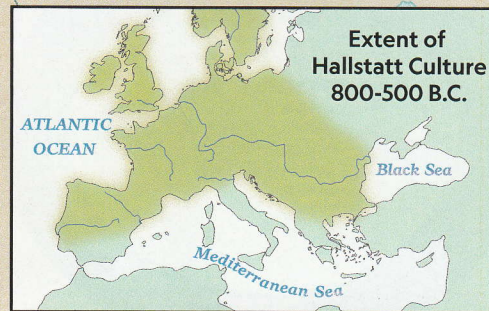




THE SPREAD OF CELTIC CULTURE

THE CELTIC languages belong to the Indo-European family of languages, which derive from a common tongue introduced to Europe by migrating farmers about 5,000 years ago. Atlantic-facing areas of Iberia, France, Britain, and Ireland were home to very ancient, Celtic-speaking communities. In central Europe, the Celtic-speaking Hallstatt culture started to form in the Late Bronze Age, in 1200 b.c. From 800 b.c., trade in iron goods, salt, and fur with Mediterranean traders fueled an economic boom, expressed in the sumptuous burial mounds of the Hallstatt

princes. The Hallstatt civilization rapidly declined from around 500 b.c., to be replaced by the more militaristic La Tène culture, whose artwork was marked by a distinctive geometric style. Soon after, migrating Celtic bands settled northern Italy, and by the third century b.c., the Celts had reached the Balkans and Galatia in Anatolia (Turkey). Celtic power and identity was eroded by the rise of Rome, but its linguistic legacy lives on in the six surviving Celtic languages of the west: Scottish, Irish, and Manx Gaelic; Cornish; Welsh; and Breton.

Expansion of Celtic and Roman Culture



-  Celtic culture, circa 800 B.C. - A.D. 100
-  Area where Celtic languages are spoken today
- Alesia Type site
- Vix Major site
- Emporion Minor site
- Massilia City (Modern name) (Marseille)

0 200 400 miles

0 200 400 kilometers

Present-day drainage and coastlines are represented. Modern city names appear in parentheses.



TRICHTINGEN TORQUE
SILVER NECK BAND, LA TÈNE
CULTURE, WÜRTTEMBERG
STATE MUSEUM,
STUTTGART, GERMANY
AKG/ALBUM

earlier Greek authors to describe how hordes of Celts had poured down through the Alps into the Italian Peninsula in the fifth century B.C. Roman generals would later seek glory in subduing them: In his first-century B.C. conquest of Gaul, Julius Caesar wrote: "We call them Gauls, though in their own language they are called Celts."

Although the Roman imperial period ended Celtic military power, its presence lingered on in Europe's collective memory. Renaissance French and English scholars became interested in establishing facts about the pre-Roman peoples that once inhabited their lands. In the 1870s archaeologists were hugely excited to dig up items in northern Italy that were clearly Celtic in design and corroborated classical authors' accounts of the Celts invading Italy from the north around 450 B.C. Scholars were able to identify these artifacts as Celtic, thanks to the excavation of a spectacular site in Austria a few years before. The objects found there served as key pieces with which scholars could start to put together the Celtic jigsaw.

Austrian Origins

Set against a backdrop of mountains plunging into a lake, the tiny town of Hallstatt in Austria is a major tourist attraction today. Historians are also drawn to the town to study an ancient cemetery that lies alongside it. The burial sites were first discovered in 1846 by mining engineer Johann Georg Ramsauer, who went on to uncover over 900 burials (in total, the remains of 2,000 individuals have been found there). Dating to 800 B.C., the Hallstatt graves provide detailed evidence of an Iron Age community whose economy was based on nearby salt mines.

Hallstatt has become a "type site" and has given its name to a much wider culture that incorporates many other Celtic sites in what is now Austria, southern Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia. Objects found in all these regions share common traits, and together form a



PAINTING THE DEAD

Watercolors of the burials discovered at the Iron Age cemetery at Hallstatt in Austria provided careful documentation of the mid-19th century excavations and revolutionized understanding of the Celtic Iron Age.

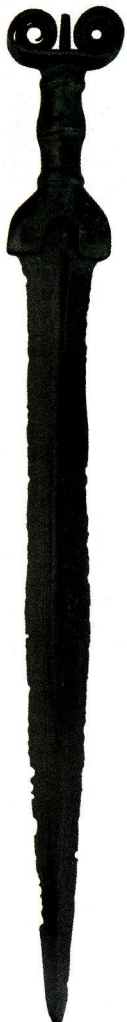
SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES/ALAMY

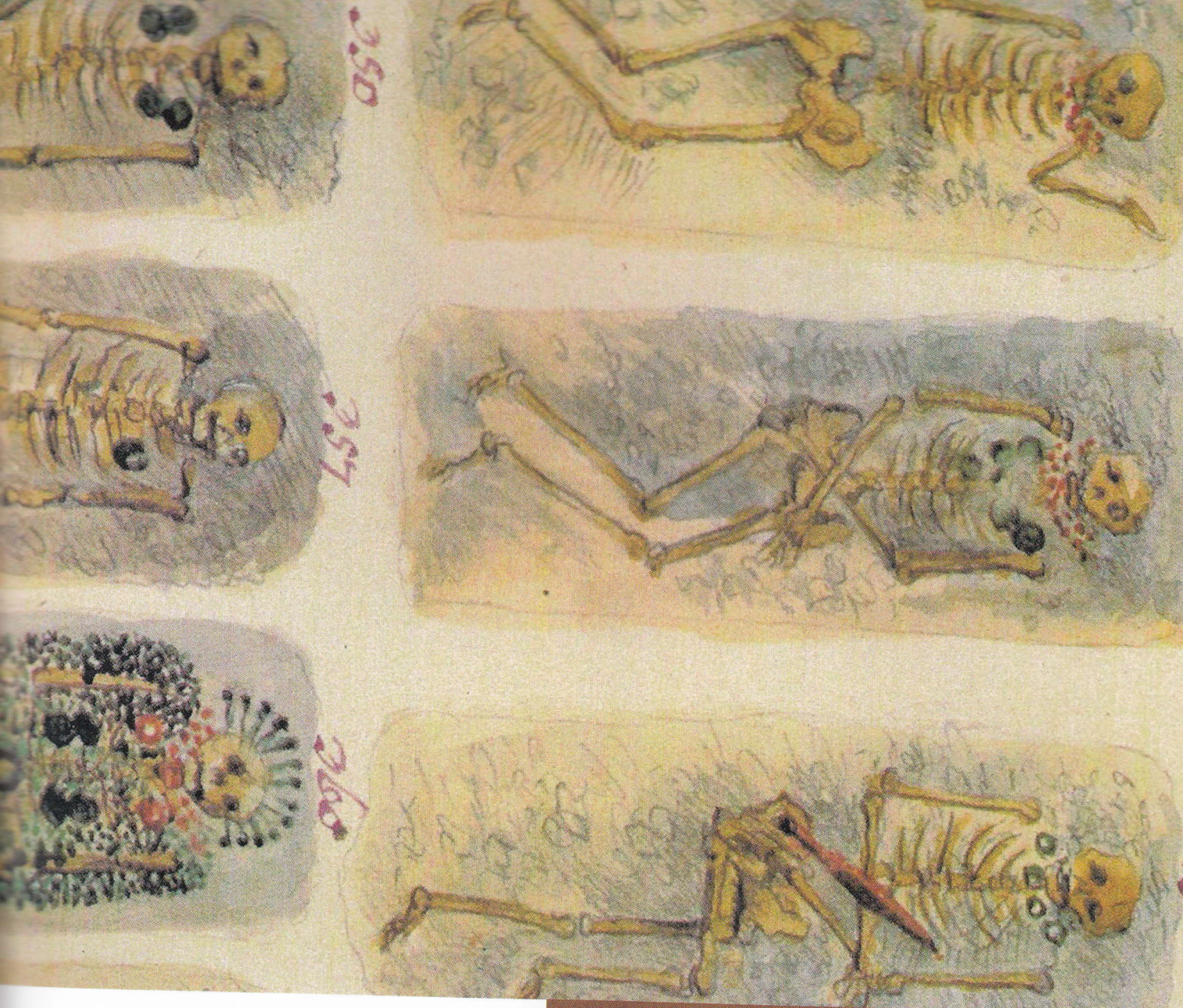
culture. At its height, in the seventh century B.C., this "Hallstatt culture" was formed by local chieftains, whose wealth derived from salt mining (in Hallstatt itself) or local agriculture. These sites featured elaborate tombs and burials. Among the artifacts were found distinctive weapons, like swords, made by their ironworkers. These objects, archaeologists believe, were traded for luxury goods, especially from Greek and Italian cultures.

Aside from similarities in the objects and

Hallstatt is a "type site." It gives its name to the Hallstatt culture, which is expressed in objects spread over a wide area.

HALLSTATT SWORD FOUND IN ZIEGELRODA, GERMANY, SEVENTH TO EIGHTH CENTURIES B.C.
BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE



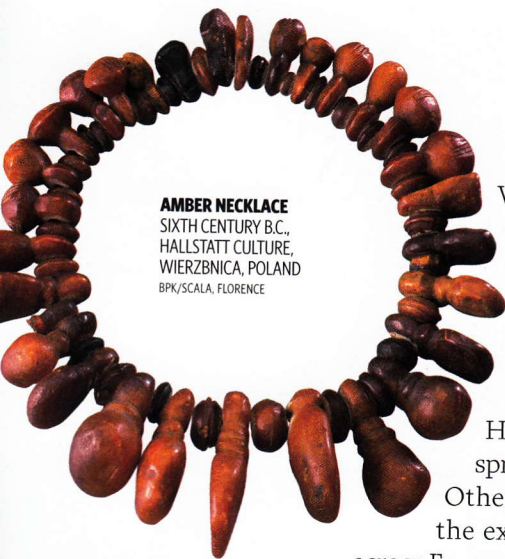


burial techniques, another important common thread links the Hallstatt culture: its language. The Hallstatt culture, therefore, can be regarded as Celtic. And the people who worked its mines and forges and fields—and their leaders, the chieftains who were buried with such pomp—were Celts.

As archaeologists began to piece together the finds across a series of Hallstatt sites, a question arose: If the Hallstatt culture of central Europe represented a Celtic “homeland,” then where did the Celtic areas of western Europe—the western Iberian Peninsula, Brittany (northwestern France), and the British Isles—fit into the picture? In addition to being areas associated with modern notions of “Celtic identity,” the Celtic languages of Scottish, Irish, and Manx Gaelic;

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE SALT MINES

IN THE 1800S salt was still central to the economy of Hallstatt, and Johann Georg Ramsauer became a mining apprentice at 13, which may seem an unlikely start for a career in archaeology. His awareness of the mines' long history helped him realize that the seven skeletons he uncovered in 1846 were part of an ancient cemetery of miners. With the help of an assistant, who meticulously produced watercolors of the remains (above), Ramsauer created vital documentation of the workers' objects found in the mines, including leather hats and iron tools. In the course of his career, he documented more than 900 skeletons from ancient history, which helped define the Celtic-speaking civilization of this region of Europe, dubbed the Hallstatt culture.



AMBER NECKLACE
SIXTH CENTURY B.C.,
HALLSTATT CULTURE,
WIERZBNICA, POLAND
BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

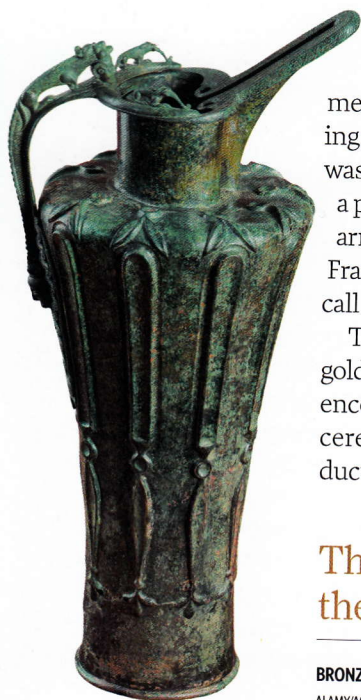
Welsh; Cornish; and Breton are still spoken there, indicating Celtic heritage.

A traditional theory has been that, at the beginning of the Hallstatt period in the Late Bronze Age, peoples from the Hallstatt zone migrated west and spread Celtic language and customs. Other historians, however, point to the existence of Celtic place-names across Europe that date to before the Hallstatt period; they argue that the process may have happened in reverse. Communities in western Iberia, France, and British Isles—linked by sea routes—were the first Celtic speakers. Using trade (rather than migrating), they spread Celtic customs and language to central Europe, which would later develop into the Hallstatt culture. Complicating the picture further, this process then took a return route: Once the Hallstatt culture had become established, around 900 B.C., its customs spread westward again to places that were already associated with Celtic customs and language, such as western Iberia.

Princely Glory

Historians divide the Hallstatt period into four stages, starting with Hallstatt A, whose origins may extend as far back as 1200 B.C. Many changes took place in the Hallstatt zone in the next few centuries, including a preference for burial over cremation, and the development of increasingly sophisticated iron-working. Horses were introduced around 800 B.C. It was in Hallstatt D, at this last stage of the culture, a period beginning in 600 B.C., that the newly arrived Greek colonists at Massilia in southern France first encountered the people they would call the Celts.

The Hallstatt culture was on the brink of a golden age by the time the Greeks had these early encounters. Gone were the days of small-scale cereal farming, herding, and handicraft production. And gone too was the fairly egalitarian



The wine the Hallstatt princes drank—and often the vessels they drank from—were imported from the Mediterranean.

BRONZE FLAGON FEATURING CELTIC AND ETRUSCAN ELEMENTS, FIFTH CENTURY B.C. CELTIC MUSEUM, HALLEIN, AUSTRIA
ALAMY/ACI



DANUBE DOORWAY

The remains of a sixth-century B.C. gate of the Heuneburg citadel were discovered in 2005. Heuneburg is sited near the source of the Danube River, southwest of Stuttgart, in southern Germany.

AP IMAGES/GTRES

social structures of these tribes. From the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., close trading ties with the Greeks, and later the Etruscans, a people of central Italy, led to an influx of wealth that elevated the chieftains. Magnificent hill forts were built to proclaim their influence and riches.

The booming population was able to create an agricultural surplus, enslave laborers, and amass raw materials such as metals, salt (from Hallstatt itself), amber from the Baltic, and furs. With these, the chieftains could buy luxury goods from the



south: wine, finely crafted metalwork, and decorated ceramics. Many of these artifacts have been uncovered in the elaborate burials of the wealthy elite, dubbed “princely tombs” by archaeologists.

The influence of Greece and Italy could also be found in Celtic architecture, such as the late Hallstatt site Heuneburg, in southern Germany near the source of the Danube River. Major excavations took place there between 1950 and 1979, and since 2004 an ongoing research project has been under way. The Heuneburg settlement was built around 620 B.C. on the summit of the hill. About twenty years later a spectacular adobe wall, mounted on a stone plinth, was added for protection. This building technique, inspired by Mediterranean design, was an unusual feature so far north. Many scholars believe Heuneburg

THE FIRST CITY OF THE NORTH?

DISCOVERED IN THE 1800S, the hilltop site of Heuneburg near the source of the Danube in southern Germany, was initially regarded as a typical Hallstatt princely seat. Recent excavations have revealed a larger settlement of 100 hectares, once so densely populated that it is now regarded as a candidate for northern Europe’s first city. Black-figure Greek pottery found there attests to extensive trading links with the Greek colony of Massilia (Marseille). Greek characteristics are also evident in the use of mud bricks for the construction of the hilltop fortifications. In 2005, excavators found a monumental gateway built in the sixth century B.C. Set into the citadel’s 16-foot-high rampart, it would have dominated the landscape, a potent symbol of Celtic princely power.

WHITE GOLD

Salt was a vital part of the livelihood for people who lived in the mountains around Hallstatt for millennia: The nearby city of Salzburg ("salt castle") is even named for it. In the Bronze and Iron Ages, the mineral was extremely valuable for its ability to preserve fish and meat. At Hallstatt and Dürrnberg, around 40 miles away, salt was extracted via shafts 650 to 1,000 feet deep, lit by torches and reinforced with timbers. In addition to being the type site of a whole civilization, the miners' cemetery at Hallstatt also yielded clues about what workers wore and carried, as their tools were often buried alongside them.

ILLUSTRATION: SAMISON GOETZE. BELOW: ERICH LESSING/ALBUM



◀ Backpack

Made from cowhide and wood, this hod-style bag dates to the tenth or ninth century B.C.

Tools

Wooden shovel and bronze pick with a wooden handle used by miners. Tenth or ninth century B.C.







INTRICATE WORK

A tiny gold sphere decorated with filigree (above) belonged to a gold-and-amber necklace found in the tomb of an elite woman at the site of Bettelbühl in southwestern Germany.

ALAMY/ACI

is the polis of Pyrene mentioned by the fifth-century B.C. Greek historian Herodotus in his *Histories*, making this the earliest reference to a city in northern Europe. The site occupied by Heuneburg extended far beyond its hilltop core and may have been home to some 5,000 inhabitants. By way of comparison, about 10,000 people lived in Athens during this period.

Another jewel of the late Hallstatt period is a lavish tomb at Vix in modern-day Burgundy, France, containing the remains of a woman who died around 480 B.C. The grave contained traditionally feminine adornments, including a gold torque (neck ring). Standing out among the grave goods is a vast Greek wine-mixing pot, or krater. Made of bronze and weighing 458 pounds, it was probably hauled 380 miles from Massilia, and it would have been the last word in Greek luxury.

New discoveries are still being made about the opulence of Hallstatt sites, although many have been scoured by plowing over the centuries. One such site is at Bettelbühl, not far from Heuneburg, where initial digging uncovered the burial of a wealthy child dating to the sixth century B.C.

In 2010 another large burial chamber was detected close by. Its oak structure had been well preserved by immersion in a stream, but the site itself was at risk from farming. It was decided to extract the chamber and move it to the laboratories of the Archaeological State Office of Baden-Württemberg for close study. After the structure was transferred, analysis of the wood lining of the chamber dated it to the late sixth century B.C.

Two burials were found inside the chamber. The first belonged to a woman in her 30s, buried with lavish funerary objects, including two gold fibulae and a beautifully crafted gold sphere; these treasures, which may have been locally made, reveal a strong Mediterranean influence.

The second burial's remains were too degraded for a conclusive identification. The grave goods near this body were more modest: a simple bronze bracelet on each wrist and one bronze ornament near the head.



The jewelry found in the Bettelbühl tomb shows Mediterranean inspiration in its design.

TWO GOLD FIBULAE (BROOCHES), SIXTH CENTURY B.C., BETTELBUHL, GERMANY
AP IMAGES/GTRES

GRAVE MOVE

Workers lift the 80-ton section of earth containing an intact burial chamber from the site of Bettelbühl, Germany, in December 2010.

AP IMAGES/GTRES



Cultural Transitions

Lavish royal tombs became rarer in the late Hallstatt, but one in Lavau, France, is remarkable not only for its wealth but also for the presence of distinctly Mediterranean objects. Around 130 feet in diameter, the tomb formed part of a necropolis that had been in use since the Late Bronze Age. Inside the burial chamber was a body accompanied by a very rich collection of grave goods: gold bracelets, an iron-and-gold brooch, an amber necklace, and a leather belt



adorned with silver threads. The most spectacular find at Lavau was a large bronze cauldron used at banquets, decorated around the edge with eight feline heads and four heads of the Greek river god Achelous.

The body in the tomb at Lavau was initially assumed to be that of a man and a later CT scan of the skeleton's pelvis confirmed it. The tomb was dated to around 450 B.C., during a transitional period in Celtic culture.

Dramatic changes were occurring in the Hallstatt zone. As princely burials were becoming rare, settlements, including Heuneburg, were abandoned. Trading routes shifted away from the Rhône River, which may have disrupted the Celtic economy. As Hallstatt culture waned, a vigorous new Celtic culture was rising on its

THE ETRUSCAN FINDS OF BETTELBUHL

THE FIRST EXCAVATION at Bettelbühl found two gold fibulae (brooches) among the grave goods of a young child. Two more fibulae were found among an elite woman's grave goods in a later excavation. All the pieces look similar; they probably came from the same workshop and may even have been made by the same craftsman. All bear traits of the style associated with the Etruscans, a pre-Roman civilization in central Italy who traded with the Celts. Recently, researchers have documented a small fragment of gold wire excavated in a workshop at the nearby Hallstatt site of Heuneburg. It is identical to the wires of the four fibulae. Had these objects made their way there on the Mediterranean trade routes? Or was an Etruscan goldsmith living in Heuneburg?

THE VIX TREASURE

Discovered near Vix in 1953, the grave goods of a Celtic noblewoman (now held by the Museum of the Pays Châtillonnais, in Burgundy, France) reflect both native Celtic styles and influences of the Greek world during the later Hallstatt period. The noblewoman died around 480 B.C., as the Hallstatt culture was declining.

GOLD TORQUE ►

Closely associated with Celtic style, this torque (neck ring) is decorated with two winged horses.

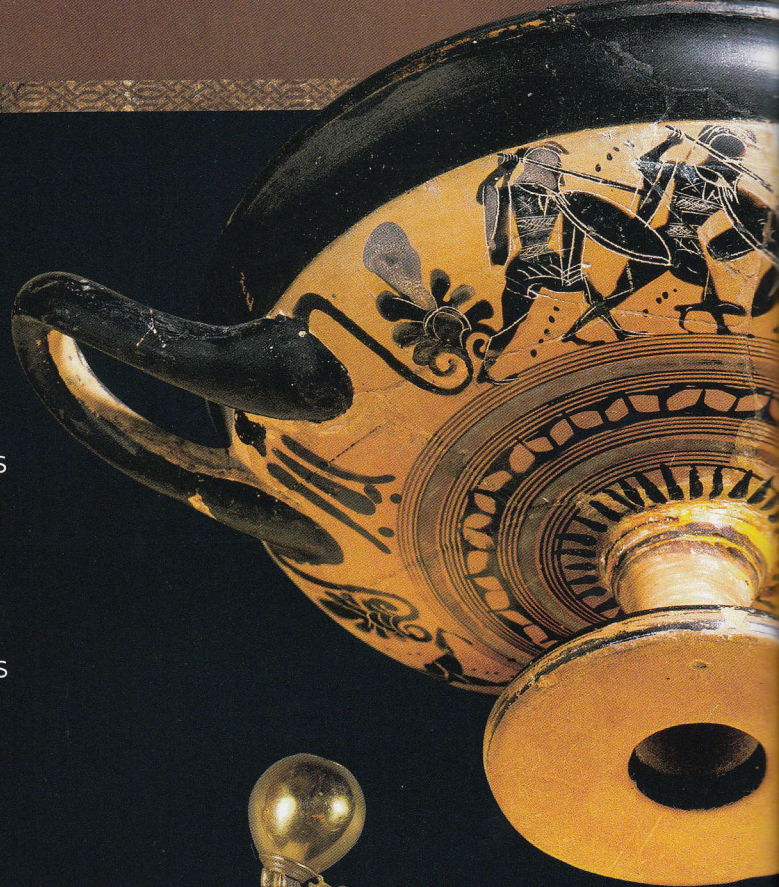
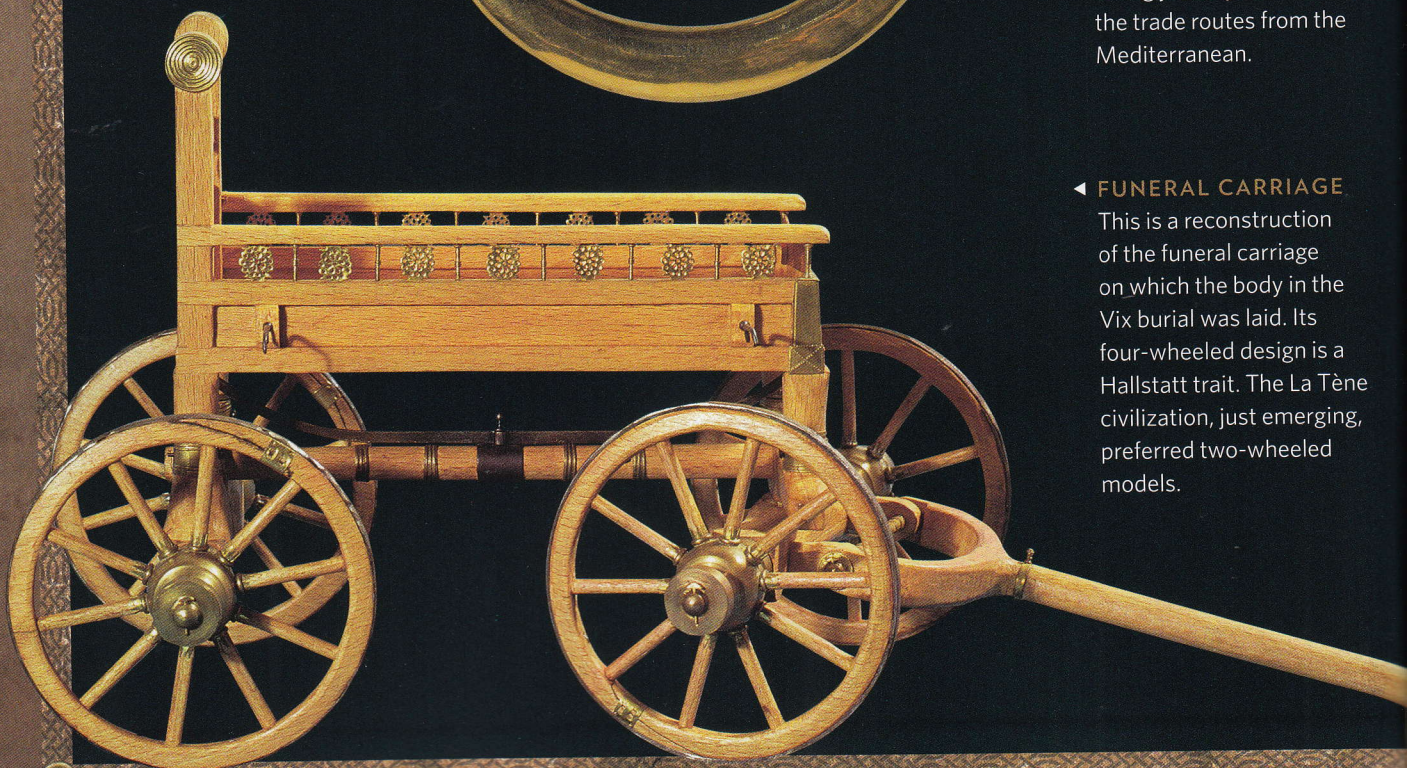



▲ KYLIX

This wine cup is made in the Attic style and decorated with black figures of hoplites (Greek soldiers). It is a quintessentially Greek luxury item that had made a long journey north along the trade routes from the Mediterranean.

◀ FUNERAL CARRIAGE

This is a reconstruction of the funeral carriage on which the body in the Vix burial was laid. Its four-wheeled design is a Hallstatt trait. The La Tène civilization, just emerging, preferred two-wheeled models.





The neck of this enormous jug is decorated with a rank of hoplites (Greek soldiers).

The ornate handles are adorned with fearsome Gorgons and serpents.

KRATER ▶

Standing more than five feet tall, this magnificent bronze krater was used for diluting wine with water during feasts. Weighing 458 pounds and able to hold 290 gallons, it was probably acquired from Greek traders via Massilia (Marseille).