The Archaeological Celts, unlike both the historical and linguistic ones, are traditionally centred around temperate Europe north of the Alps, in modern day Switzerland, Austria, Bohemia, parts of Germany and parts of northern France; an area commonly referred to as the 'Celtic homeland'. Two periods have been associated with the Celts, firstly the Hallstatt Iron Age, particularly Hallstatt D dating from c.600 – 475 BCE, followed by the even more closely associated La Tène period lasting from the fifth century BCE until the Roman conquest. Hallstatt and La Tène are both sites discovered in the nineteenth century.

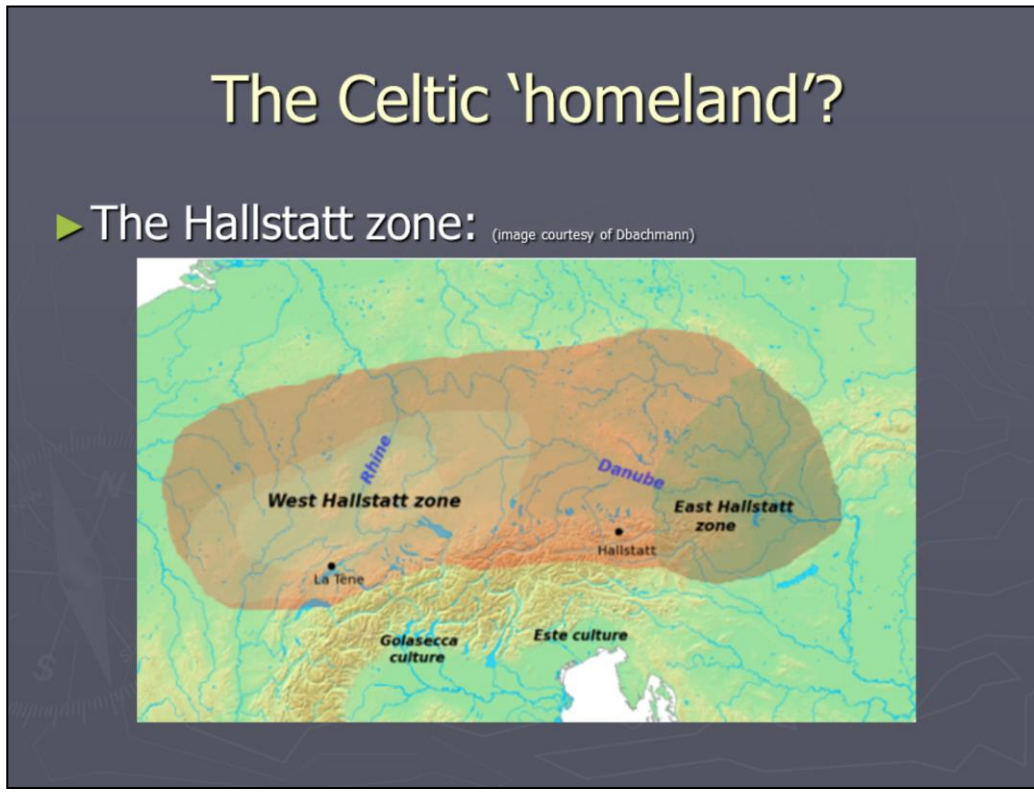
From this homeland, the Celts were thought to have radiated out in all directions, usually represented by arrows on maps. In some cases, such as the expansion southwards across the Alps into northern Italy and eastwards into the Balkans and Anatolia, there is no doubt that this reflects what actually happened, as numerous classical sources will testify (CFTW 13). We should consider ourselves lucky to have these classical sources, however, because *"If one was relying entirely on archaeological evidence, it would have been impossible to discern the Celtic raid on Delphi or, for that matter, the settlement of Celts in Asia Minor."* (BC L1420-1421)

This should serve as a warning that not everything that everyone has ever done manifests itself in 'archaeological evidence' and the regular refrain that 'there is no archaeological evidence to support it' often needs to be countered by the old adage that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'.

If we take Celtic to mean 'Celtic speaking' (see Raimund Karl's contribution to *Celtic from the West* for a suggestion that we should not do this) then the extent to which archaeology can contribute towards a fuller understanding of these peoples is quite literally debatable. In the words of John Collis:

"I am highly sceptical how much archaeology can contribute to the debate. We cannot measure a skull and say what language the man spoke, or usually what language the blacksmith spoke who made a sword, or the warrior who wielded it, unless we have independent information." (JC 209)

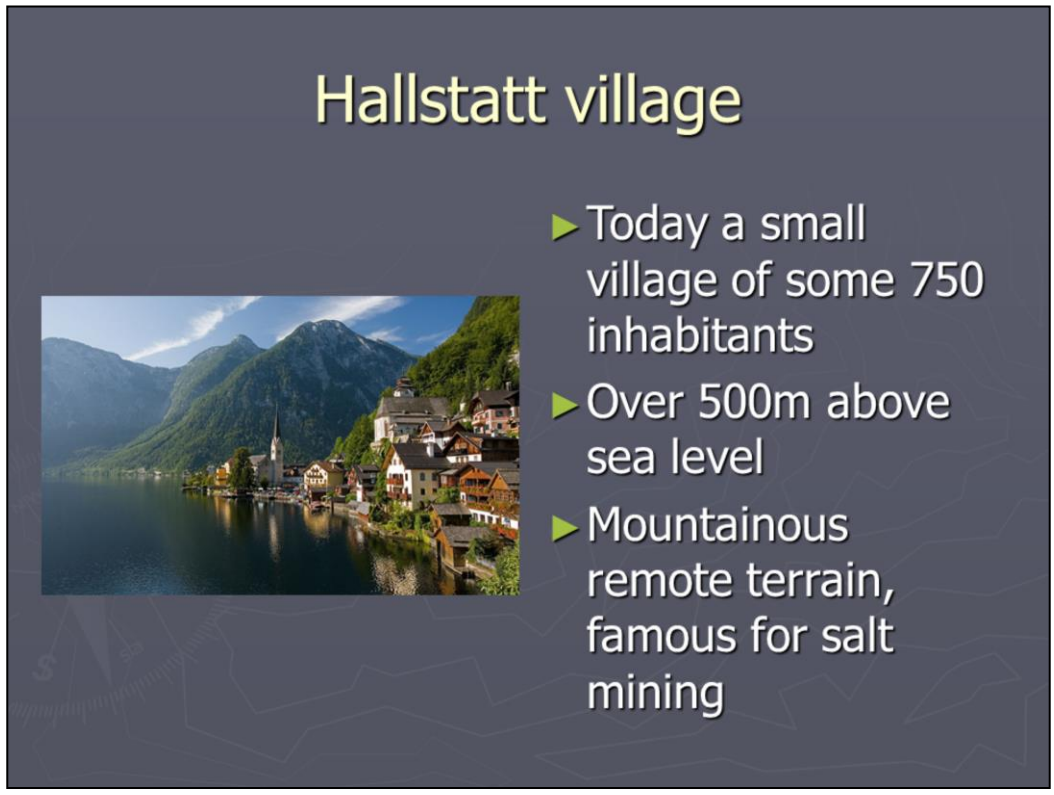
We can assess this for ourselves by taking a look at the evidence directly.



Hallstatt is the type site of the Hallstatt culture, named after a remote village in Austria's Salzkammergut, south west of Salzburg, which contained a huge cemetery consisting of over 1000 burials. The material culture associated with it is usually credited with marking the beginning of the European Iron Age. The Hallstatt area is normally geographically split into an Eastern zone comprising parts of Austria, Moravia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia, and a Western zone including other parts of Austria, Switzerland, Bohemia, Germany, and eastern France. Hallstatt itself is on the border between these two. The Western zone is held to be Celtic.

The west Hallstatt area is famous for its fortresses, such as the Heuneburg, which overlooks the Danube, and its 'princely' burial tombs like the ones at Hochdorf, near modern day Stuttgart, and Vix near the Mont Lassois hillfort overlooking the River Seine. The burial tombs are believed to be the graves of high-ranking members of society, often associated with a nearby fortress. The prince or princess would be buried alongside grave goods, including, most distinctively, a four-wheeled wagon, probably provided for the deceased's journey into the next world. The finds at these sites date from the fifth and sixth centuries BCE, and show evidence of links with the Mediterranean world, with both the Etruscans and the Greeks.

As these sites are contemporary with the first historical records of Celts made by the Greeks, it would seem fair to wonder why there are no sites such as these behind Marseille, or in most of Iberia as far as Cadiz. Herodotus' statement that the Danube rises in the land of the Celts may be significant here, as if he has incorrectly placed the source of the Danube in Iberia, then alternative evidence is required to firmly place Hallstatt as a Celtic 'homeland'. We do have evidence of a Celtic presence this far east. The name of the Boii tribe, for instance, can still be seen in the name of Bohemia, and the name of the ancient Hercynian forest is believed by some to be Proto-Celtic. However, there is a difference between being *the home of (some) Celts* and *the homeland of the Celts*, whence all other Celts originate, and there may have been very different material cultures in the different Celtic speaking areas.



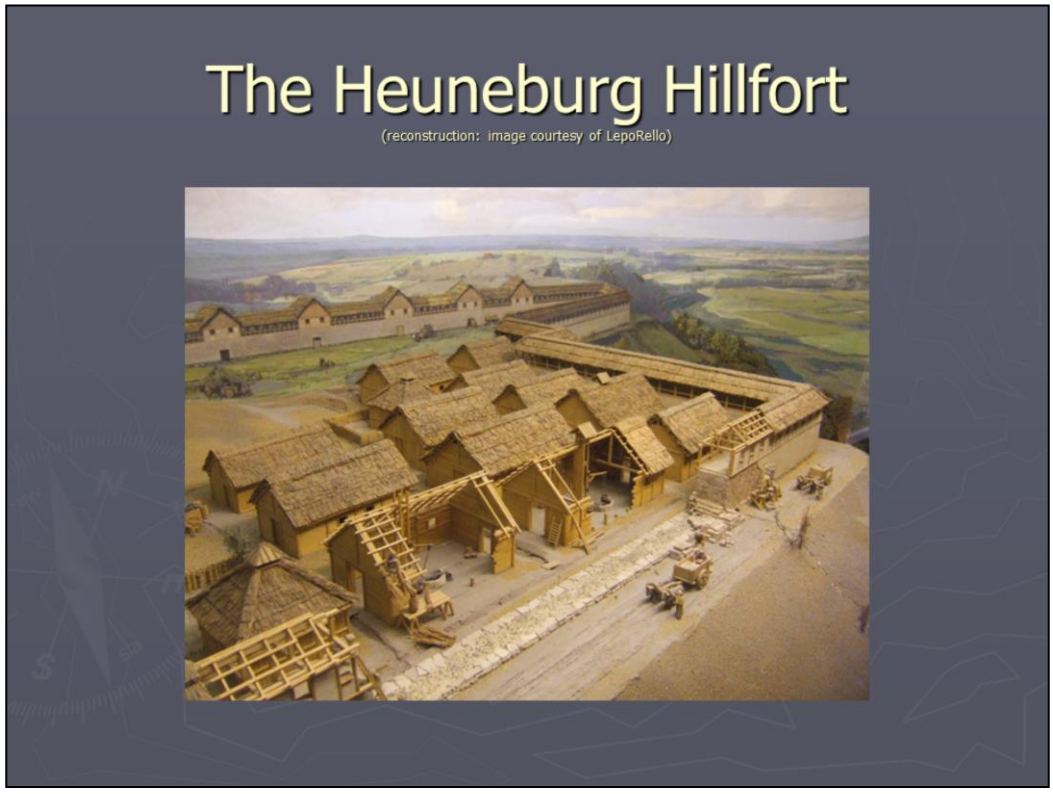
The Hallstatt period is divide into four phases:

HaA: 1200 – 1000 BCE; HaB: 1000 – 800 BCE; HaC: 800 – 600 BCE; HaD: 600 – 475 BCE. Hallstatt A and B are Bronze Age phases. Hallstatt C and D are Iron Age, and associated with the Celts.

Hallstatt C not only marks the beginning of the Iron Age but also sees the introduction of the princely burial rite. This is usually interpreted as symbolising a more hierarchical social structure. The rich graves are characterised by the grave goods which accompany the deceased and remain with them, rather than being burned in a funeral pyre. The four-wheeled wagon, as well as harnesses, daggers and swords (often decorative in nature), provide useful tools for the afterlife. Other burials from the same period in the western Hallstatt zone contain swords but no wagons. These are presumably the graves of people of a lower social status. (BC L585-593).

There are about 100 elite burials extending across a fairly narrow zone from east central Gaul to southwest Germany, an area of approximately 600 x 200 kilometres. Within this zone lie the sources of all the major rivers such as the Danube, Rhine, Seine and Rhone/Saone, which importantly all flow in different directions. Control of this area would have led to considerable influence and *"the wealth of the society is vividly demonstrated not only by the distribution of Mediterranean imports but by the extensive use and deposition of gold."* Mediterranean imports have been found at the large hillforts such as Heuneburg and Mont Lassois as well as amongst the grave goods in the burial chambers at Vix, Hochdorf, and Homichele. (BC L611-617).

The Hallstatt elite burials of the early Iron Age do not extend to other regions of the Celtic world such as the Iberian peninsula and southern Gaul, i.e. precisely those areas where the earliest historical sources place the Celts. (BC L1445-1447)

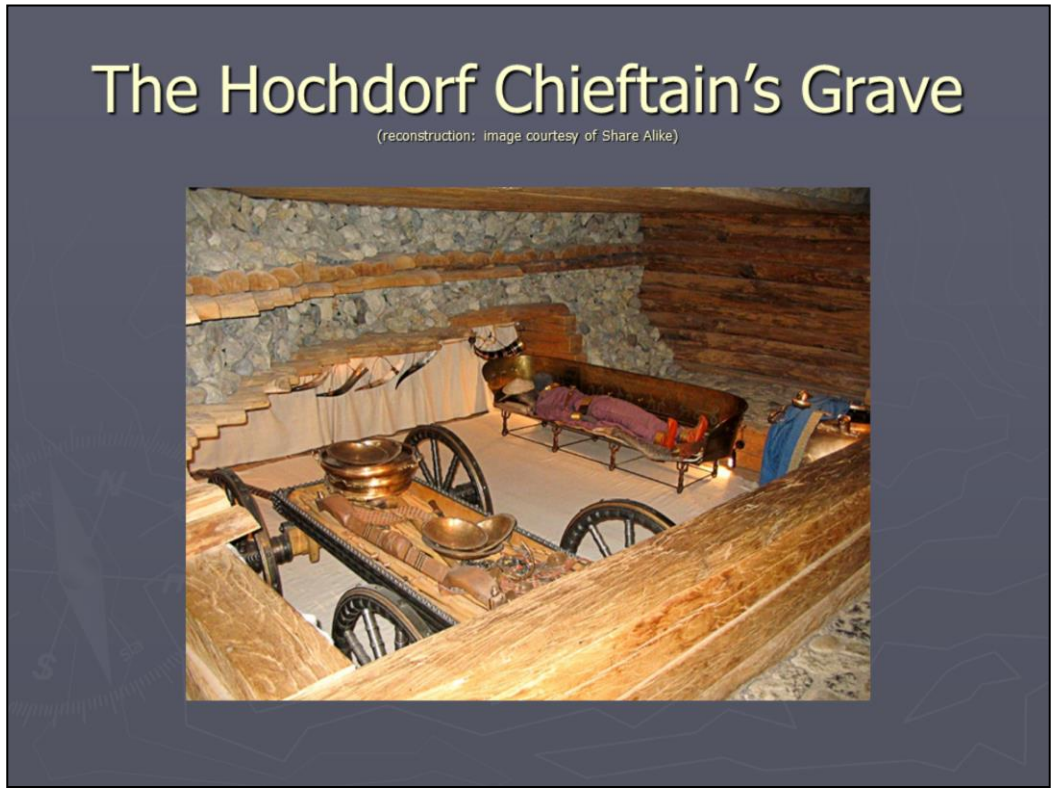


The Heuneburg hillfort stands on the west bank of the Danube. Its strategic position overlooking a major river is a characteristic it shares with other hillforts of the period, and these rivers would have been major trade routes providing links to the Greek and Etruscan worlds of southern Europe, with all of their associated goods. It is not difficult here to envisage salt heading south while wine flowed north. The Heuneburg's heyday was during Hallstatt D, although it was in use for much longer than that, up until the medieval period. At its peak, it was in essence a walled town, covering an area of 3 hectares.

The discovery of a mudbrick wall erected in about 600 BCE shows further evidence of connections with the Mediterranean as this was a Greek-influenced feature unheard of this far north. Heuneburg has recently been labelled 'the first city north of the Alps'.

Https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279961330_Heuneburg_First_city_north_of_the_Alps

About a mile west of Heuneburg is the enormous Hohmichele burial mound, which can basically be considered as Heuneburg's cemetery (PBE 910-915).



One of the best ever examples of a princely grave is the one excavated in 1978–79 at Hochdorf an der Enz, in the Baden-Württemberg region of Germany, not far from Stuttgart. A chieftain of about forty years of age had been lain to rest on a long couch on wheels, wearing numerous items of gold – a bracelet on his arm, a torc around his neck and pointed shoes. He also had a gilded dagger sheath, more for decorative than practical purposes, and a gold belt-plate. The traditional four-wheeled wagon was also nearby. The absence of weapons such as a slashing sword suggests that the chieftain was not himself a warrior, but played some other influential role in society (PBE L876-898).

The content of the grave has been reconstructed as seen in the image above.

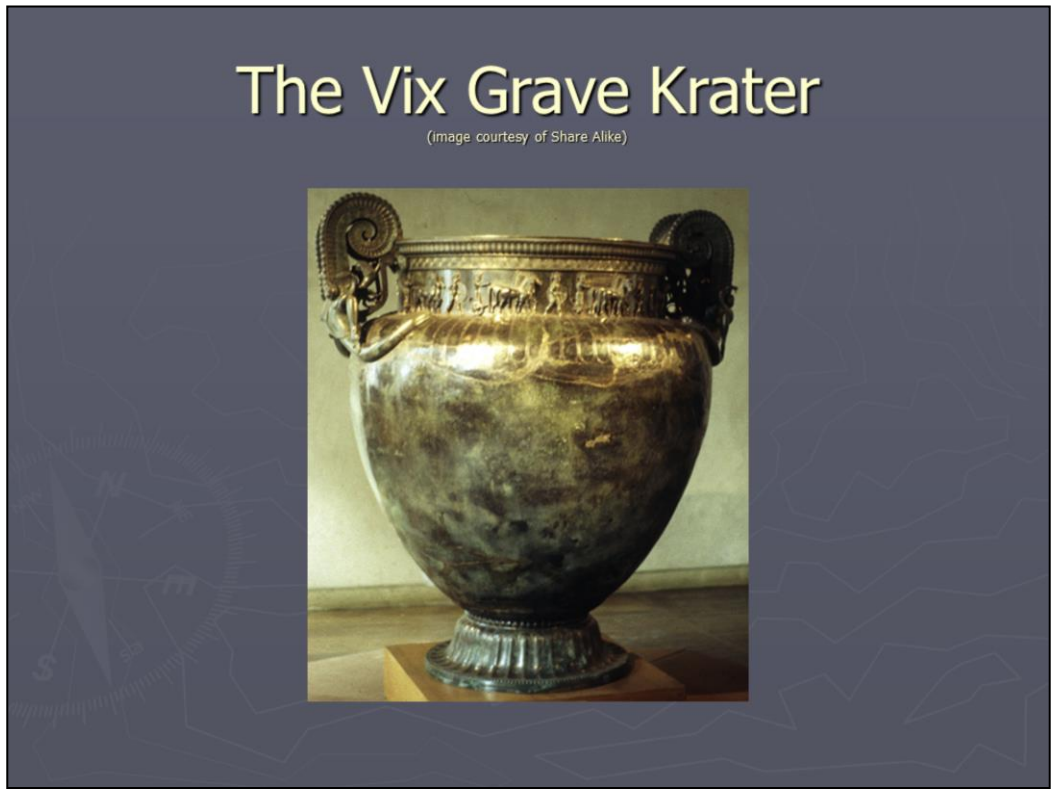
Above are the golden pointed plaques which would have been placed over the chieftain's shoes (the shoes themselves have long since disintegrated) and the golden plated dagger sheath from the Hochdorf grave. The actual dagger is made of bronze and iron. The burial chamber dates from around 540–530 BCE. The chieftain himself was over 6ft in height, which was unusually tall for this period.

The grave would originally have been covered with an enormous burial mound some 6 metres (20 ft) high and 60 metres (200 ft) across. A reconstructed burial mound has been built about 500 metres from the grave, and there is now a 'Celtic Museum' near to the grave itself:

http://www.keltenmuseum.de/English/The-Celtic-Museum/

During the construction of this museum in the 1990s, the remains of a small settlement were uncovered there

The nearest hillfort settlement to the Hochdorf burial chamber is the Hohenasperg, both of which are on the 'Celtic Path'. There is a clear line of view from the burial chamber to the Hohenasperg, suggesting that being able to 'see' it from the grave had some symbolic value.



The Vix grave is located near the ancient hillfort of Mont Lassois. The burial chamber of the ‘princess’ or ‘lady’ of Vix was excavated in 1953 and dates from around 500 BCE. It is distinctive for several reasons, one of which being that it was the grave of a woman of about 35 years of age, whereas most graves of this type are of men. In terms of the grave goods found, its most famous feature is the enormous bronze krater discovered there, capable of holding 1100 litres of liquid, and probably used for wine (mixed with water). The krater is over 1.5 metres (5ft) tall, weighs over 200 kg (450lbs) and is the largest container of its kind found in Western Europe from this period. Reflecting the importance of the Hallstatt zone elite, it is of Greek style, and was most likely a diplomatic gift taken north to cement trading relationships.

Unlike the Hochdorf chieftain, the princess of Vix had been lain to rest, not on a couch, but on the four-wheeled wagon itself, albeit with the wheels removed. Like the Hochdorf chieftain, however, she was wearing a gold torc. From the same area, and also dating from the sixth or fifth centuries BCE, another four elite graves were found within a 5 kilometre radius of Mont Lassois. This suggests that it was likely the ‘capital’ or main focal point of a significant local kingdom.

(PBE L852-864) (BC L608-610).

We have already mentioned the importance of rivers as a means of transportation, but there would have been land routes as well, and the Alpine passes would have provided another means of accessing the ‘barbarian north’ from the Italian peninsula. Between about 520-480 BCE, the Etruscans expanded their influence into northern Italy and increased trade with areas north of the Alps as a consequence. During this time, Como grew rapidly as a settlement, and Etruscan bronze goods, especially flagons and stamnoi (see Basse-Yutz flagons below) are increasingly found in *“the graves of a newly emerging elite occupying a broad zone around the northern periphery of the old Hallstatt D chiefdoms. In the archaeological nomenclature these burials belong to the La Tène A or La Tène I period. The change of name does not imply that there was any great dislocation or movement of population:”* (BC L632-639)

The period 480-475 BCE or so marks the transition from Hallstatt to La Tène, and it is to the latter of these that we now turn.

La Tène is named after a site at Lake Neuchatel in Switzerland, where over 2500 objects, mostly metal, have been found. The area central to the La Tène culture, despite the location of the site itself, is immediately above the west Hallstatt zone from Champagne to Bohemia. Britain first starts to show evidence of La Tène influence in the fourth or third centuries BC, later than mainland Europe. Importantly, the two Celtic areas noted for their significant lack of La Tène material are Iberia and Ireland, both of which produced 'Q-Celtic' languages. A large part of southern Gaul is also lacking.

As with Hallstatt, elite burials are a feature of early La Tène, and they are once again found in strategic locations overlooking major rivers such as the Moselle, the Marne and the Loire. There is also a smaller area in Bohemia. There are however a number of differences between the burial patterns of the two periods (BC L646-648). The four-wheeled wagon is now out of style, and in its place we see a two-wheeled chariot. The daggers of the Hallstatt era, useful for practical tasks such as cutting skins or slicing food, are replaced with tools of a more military nature, such as swords, spears, shields and the like, in the case of those thought to be males. It seems that we are witnessing the emergence of a more warlike society. Women's graves often contain pins, brooches and various other forms of jewellery. The deceased in La Tène burials are interned in single graves, which are in turn located in cemeteries. (BC L655-661). Over time though, cremation becomes more popular at the expense of internment, and the elite burials reduce in number.

Geographically, La Tène can be recognised across a large area, albeit with regional differences. The style is nevertheless distinctive enough to be acknowledged as part of an overall La Tène package. Barry Cunliffe notes that: "….*quite close similarities do exist over surprisingly large areas. Burials as far afield as the Marne, the Po valley, and Transylvania recognizably belong to the same general tradition and imply similar values and beliefs held by these disparate communities. The decorative styles used (that is, the Celtic Art) tell much the same story"* (BC L1075-1082). The characteristic patterns of the La Tène style are what most people recognise as 'Celtic' art forms today. Swirling curvilinear designs, including many with vegetal and zoomorphic motifs, figure widely. Interestingly, examples of the human form are relatively rare. Although displaying influences from Etruscan, Greek and Scythian art, La Tène fused these into its own very distinctive brand. Some examples follow on the following slides.

Image courtesy of the British Museum.

The description below comes from the British Museum website:

These two bronze flagons were found in 1927 with two Etruscan bronze stamnoi (vessels used for mixing wine by the classical Greeks and the Etruscans in Italy). (Flagons: 1929,0511.1 and 2; Stamnoi: 1929,0510.1 and 1929,0511.3). The flagons are two of the finest examples of Early Celtic or Early La Tène Art from anywhere in Europe. They were made in eastern France, but they copy the shape of bronze flagons made and used by the Etruscans in Italy at this time. The flagons were used for pouring wine, beer or mead at feasts.

The grave where the objects were found was probably that of a very important person. Unfortunately it was dug up illegally, and not by archaeologists. Because of this little information survives about the grave or the other objects it contained.

The flagons are inlaid with precious coral (now faded to white) from the Mediterranean coast, and red enamel (opaque red glass, probably from Asia Minor). They show a mixture of styles: the 'oriental' handles in the form of a dog or wolf was an idea from Greek or Etruscan art, but made in a local style; the palmette decorations under the spouts are a popular Celtic motif, though originally from Egypt, via Greece; the duck at the end of the spout is a purely native element of the decoration.

This object featured in the BM/BBC Radio 4 Series A History of the World in an 100 Objects where it was called 'Basse Yutz Flagons'.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=827612&partId=1

The flagons date from the mid 5th century BCE.

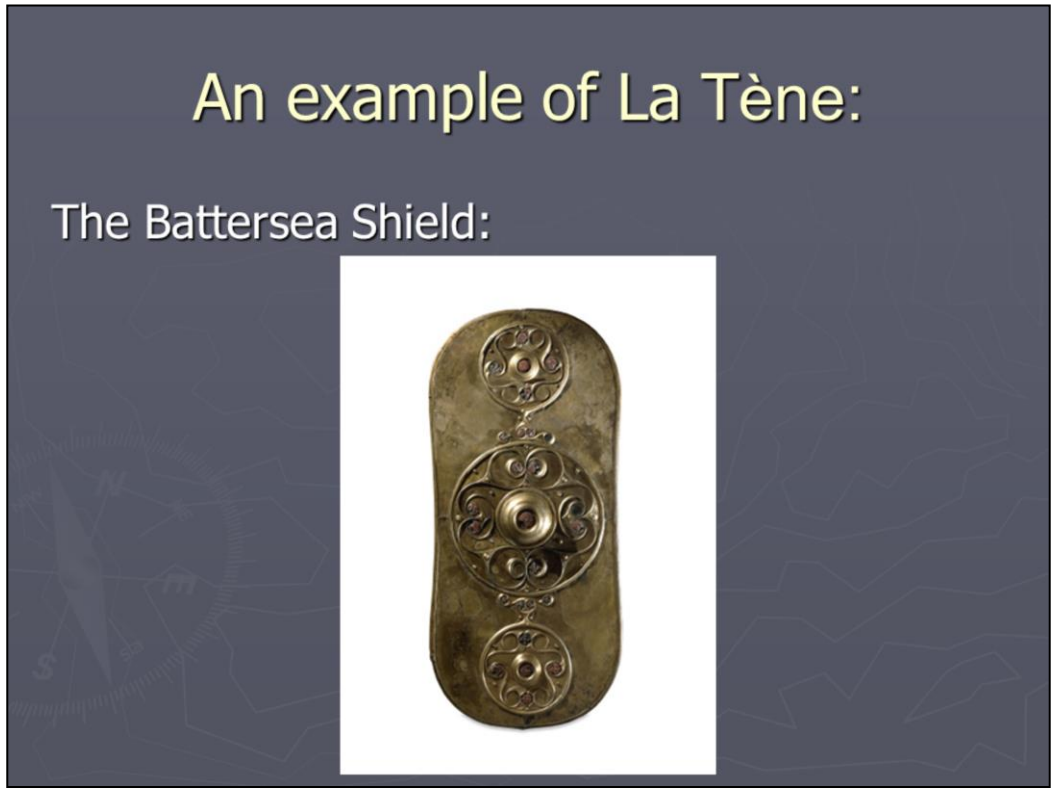


Image courtesy of the British Museum.

The description below once again comes from the British Museum website:
The Battersea Shield, Iron Age, 350-50 BC. Found in the River Thames at Battersea Bridge.

The Battersea shield is not in fact a complete shield, but only the facing, a metal cover that was attached to the front of a wooden shield. It is made from different parts of sheet bronze (4 sheets and 3 decorated panels), held together with bronze rivets and enclosed in a binding strip. All the rivets are hidden by overlaps between different components where the panels and roundels were originally attached to the organic backing.

The decoration is concentrated in the three roundels. A high domed boss in the middle of the central roundel is over where the handle was located. The La Tène-style decoration is made using the repoussé technique, emphasized with engraving and stippling. The overall design is highlighted with twenty-seven framed studs of red glass 'enamel' (opaque red glass) in four different sizes, the largest set at the centre of the boss. The dominant repoussé forms on the shield are the palmette and interlocking S-motifs.

Stylistically, the La Tène-style decoration is not closely related to any other object. Because of this, closely dating this object is difficult. The shield was almost certainly made in Britain because of the use of a specifically British form of central circular shield boss.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=831341&partId=1

To conclude this unit, it is worth comparing the doubts expressed by the 'Celtosceptic' John Collis on the first slide of this presentation with the following quote by Barry Cunliffe, usually considered to lean more towards the 'Celtomania' side of the argument:

"There is still, lingering in the work of some writers the belief that La Tène culture = Celts. It is true that many late Celtic speakers adopted La Tène material culture but that is an entirely different matter." (CFTW 17)