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Re-approaching Celts: Origins, Society, and Social Change

by

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Aims of the article

Abstract – to look at regional burial archaeology alongside contemporary classical texts with a focus on the Hallstatt–La Tène transition

‘How the Early Iron Age ‘Celts’ became the early La Tène ‘Galatai’

Aim – REFINE knowledge of historical Celts between 700 and 300 BC

How – REASSESS data from thousands of Iron Age graves

Result – RESOLVE the ‘origin’ argument between archaeology and history

Introduction

Fresh approach – re-examining ALL new information alongside old

‘The move now is toward **reconstructing past societies** (plural) from the archaeological data by seeking to achieve **greater contextual resolution**...

...this will require new learning on **social networks and anthropologies of kinship**, as well as archaeological work on mobility to understand **the various scales and temporalities at which people interact across space.**’

Pope, ‘Re-approaching Celts’, 2022

Structure of the article

1. Iron Age Celts: Previous Study
2. Methodology
3. Encountering the Celts (Seventh-Sixth Centuries)
4. Power Politics: Hochdorf, Vix, and Galatai (550–450 BC)
5. Making Sense of a New Era
6. Resolving Celts, Galatai, and the Ha-LT Transition
7. Discussion: Lost in the Mists of Time?
8. Conclusions

Burial Findings

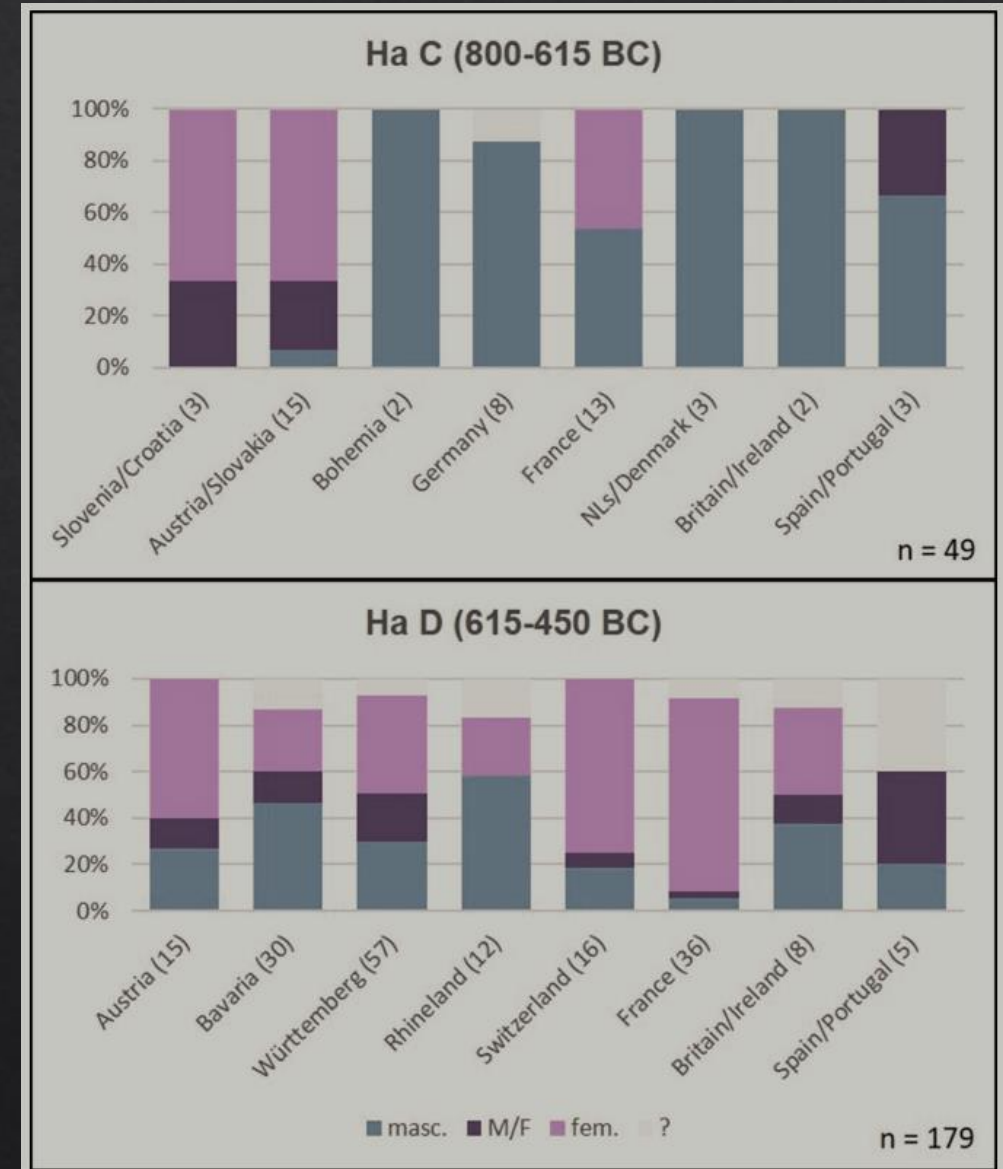
◇ Middle Bronze Age - female status

Late Bronze Age - masculine status

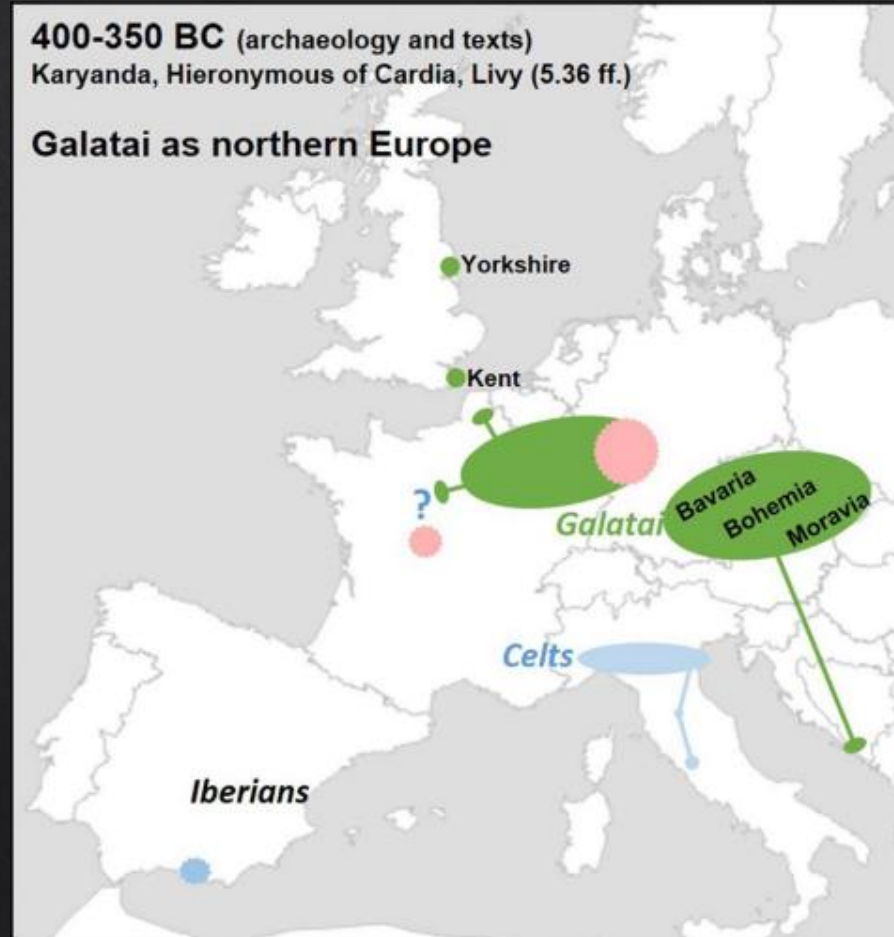
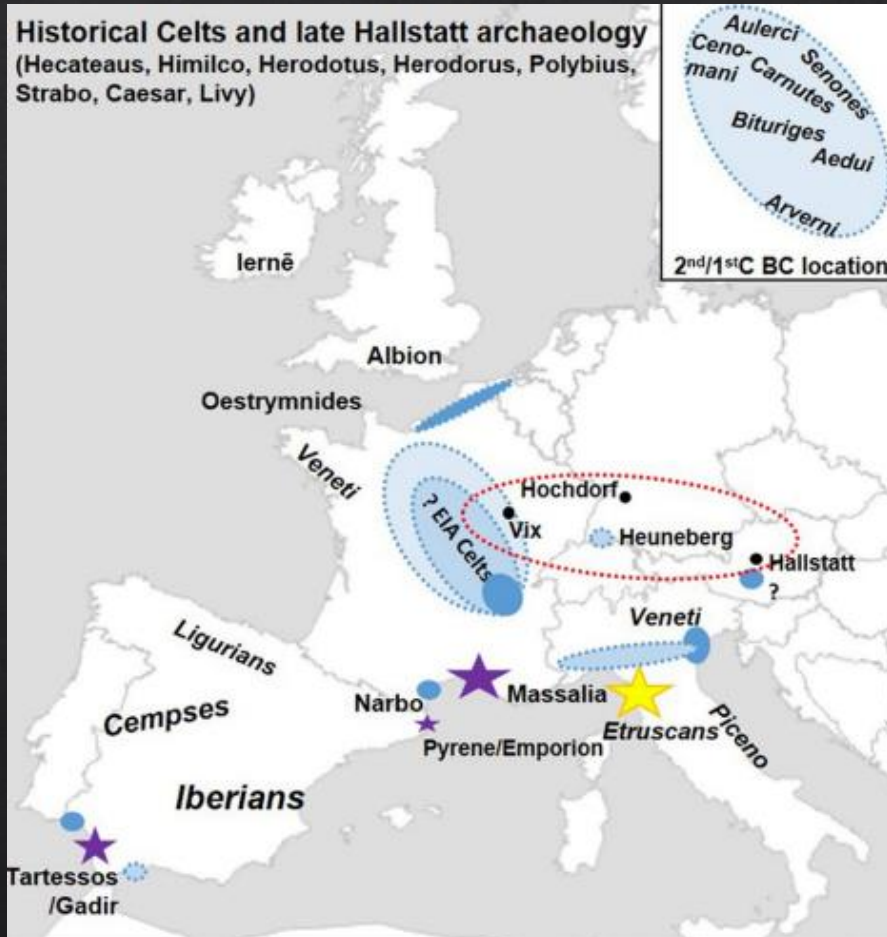
◇ 616 BC - Eastern European influence

Matrifocal social structure rising

◇ Female focused interpretations of data



Late Hallstatt era into unrest and migrations



Key: ● Celts ● Late Hallstatt archaeological traditions (various) ★ Etruscans ★ eastern Mediterranean influence

Conclusions

- KELTOI = Celtic name + Greek writing but GALATAI ('galos') = brave fighters
- Peaked under Vix
- Early splits to North Italy and to Spain
- Later splits to La Tène warriors of Northern Europe and to Northern Italy
- La Tène group split - men to Rome and women to West
- Celts only marginally overlapped with Hallstatt and were only a quarter of Gaul
- The transition is late Hallstatt/Celts to La Tène/Galatai
- Migrations were small scale - long periods of time
- Social transitions took three to four generations

Citation

‘These shifts **invite a reevaluation of female status and kinship in Iron Age European societies**, such as the potentially matrifocal groups of the Early European Iron Age and the Celtic Vix burial.’

R. Alexander Bentley, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2022

Iron Age archaeology has **often prioritized patriarchal narratives**, mostly built on accounts of coercion rather than cohesion practices ... **weapons and warfare** ... archaeologists have primarily conceptualized gender as binary and divided into rigid gender roles, assigning to men qualities such as agency, strength, or leadership, while understanding **women as passive, weak, and dependent**.

Raquel Liceras-Garrido, *European Journal of Archaeology*, 2022

Citation

‘should perhaps have concentrated on delivering **a more focused and authoritative regional study** ...

‘Our quest to understand past people, scientifically, requires a local/regional focus from which we can provide broader synthesis.’ (RP)

Al Oswald, *Landscapes*, 2022

‘... illustrates that **it has not been easy to accept that a female** was afforded such riches.’

Uros Matic and Katharina Rebay-Salisbury

Beautiful Bodies: Gender and Corporeal Aesthetics in the Past, 2022

Final comments

- ◆ Useful – History of previous study
- ◆ Useful - Chronological layout of historical sources
- ◆ Useful - Lesson in challenging ‘traditional’ thinking or re-evaluation of facts
- ◆ Minor criticism – References
- ◆ Minor criticism – Missing visual representation of archaeology with history
- ◆ Important topic - refining timeline and study of women
- ◆ Further challenges the widespread use of ‘Celtic’
- ◆ The article is well constructed, concentrated on aims, and is suitably pitched

Bibliography

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