

Druids: Towards an Archaeology

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This is, of course, pure speculation but it is not too much to expect that the graves of the religious leaders of the community may have been distinguished in some way, as were those of the aristocratic class

(Cunliffe 2005: 559)

A comparison of the first and fourth editions of the magisterial survey and synthesis of *Iron Age Communities in Britain* shows how much our understanding changed, and improved, between 1974 and 2005. Many of the changes are directly due to Barry Cunliffe's own work, published promptly and accessibly. Woven through many of those works have been the strands of the interplay between history and archaeology, and between civilization and barbarism. One area in which there has been little change, however, is in the study of religious authority, where our understanding is restricted almost entirely to literary evidence about Druids in Gaul (Cunliffe 2004: 109–11; 2005: 572–4). There are the merest of hints from the funerary data, from a consideration of which the quotation above is taken.

It will be argued here that there is rather more evidence for people with religious knowledge and skills in Iron Age Britain than has been thought

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previously, but that there is little evidence for a specialist priesthood and these roles were combined with others. The evidence is often elusive, but the history of the study of Iron Age religious authority has also militated against its recognition. In order to appreciate this, it is necessary to review briefly the sources of the modern caricature that is the white-robed Druid at Stonehenge.

DRUIDS AS IMAGINED

During the Renaissance it was gradually realized that some monuments in the landscape had been made by the ancient inhabitants of the British Isles. With the ‘discovery’ of what were thought to be ‘primitive’ peoples or ‘savages’ in the Americas, Renaissance thinkers were provided with the physical and intellectual materials to create an image of a barbarian antiquity. This antiquity was one where little changed; the past was essentially a time either before or after the biblical Deluge. It was related to the present by origin myths that related modern nations and their mythical founders to Noah and the Garden of Eden.

Within this intellectual milieu, the words of one of the most eminent British antiquarians, John Aubrey (1626–97), are exactly what might be anticipated:

Let us imagine what kind of cuntry this was in the time of the most ancient Britons... a shady dismal wood: and the inhabitants almost as savage as the beasts whose skins were their only raiment. Their language British... Their religion is at large described by Caesar. Their priests were Druids. Some of their temples I pretend to have restor'd as Avebury, Stonehenge &c... They were two or three degrees, I suppose, less savage than the Americans.

This association of savages, stone circles, and druids altered little until William Stukeley (1687–1765) elaborated upon the association of Druids and stone circles. He viewed the Druids in the context of current theological debate, seeing them as purveyors of natural religion, a form of pre-Christian Christianity. Stukeley, about whom it has been argued Stuart Piggott’s studies (Piggott 1985; 1989) were not entirely fair (Haycock 2002), set the scene for the fantasies of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Romantic imagination (Cunliffe 2003: 117). Here Druids were transformed from savages into philosophers and priests, they came to symbolize mysticism, and they were often shrouded in nationalism (Smiles 1994). Aubrey had attempted to understand the past as it might have been. Stukeley and others conjured up the origins of many of the modern images of Druids; as Stuart Piggott put it: ‘Druids as imagined’ (1968: 189).

This combination of romanticism and religion ensured that, despite the quality of many earlier contributions (e.g. Kendrick 1927; Piggott 1968), the study of Druids has often lacked credibility. It could also be thought that there was little evidence to study. The enduring romantic association of Druids and stone circles when combined with Pliny's account of the sacred grove, were interpreted as showing that Iron Age religion was practised in the open air, in natural places, allowing it to be famously dismissed as 'essentially aniconic and atectonic' as recently as 1966 (Lewis 1966: 4).

An Empirical Archaeology?

Yet some of the most outstanding recent work on the European Iron Age has been on religious sites in France, where a series of brilliant excavations such as at Gournay-sur-Aronde, revolutionized our understanding of ritual and religion (Brunaux 1988). Those discoveries have in turn led to a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of the evidence (e.g. Arcelin and Brunaux 2003). In Britain it was suggested that the distinction in contemporary western thought between ritual and daily practice may have little relevance for much of the Iron Age (e.g. Bradley 2005). A series of seminal studies (e.g. Cunliffe 1992) showed that many settlements in Britain have evidence for cosmology embedded in the architecture and practices of daily life. These studies have changed the study of the Iron Age;

Perhaps the most dramatic development in approaches to the Iron Age over the last thirty years has been the increasing willingness of some scholars to speculate about belief and behaviour. Much that is new and interesting has been revealed but there is always a danger that, in building on compossibilities, enthusiasm for the novel will run ahead of the supporting evidence.

(Cunliffe 2005: 21–2)

We also now recognize that the writings of the Greeks and Romans which the British antiquarians drew on in their attempts to understand the Druids and the Celtic world did not represent the views of the Druids or the societies to which they belonged, but the views of foreigners. As the classical world did not have a priesthood comparable to the Druids, they were often mentioned simply because they were different.

Although a small number of first-century AD writers, such as Pliny, describe the Druids as healers who worshipped in sacred groves and recount their suppression by the Roman emperors, a consistent picture is painted by the earlier second- to first-century BC writers. They portray the Druids as religious

specialists, effectively a priesthood. Julius Caesar described three main roles for the Druids as (i) being in charge of religion, (ii) as judges and arbitrators in disputes, and (iii) as teachers and keepers of knowledge. He also said that it was thought that the doctrine of the Druids was invented in Britain and was brought from there into Gaul (*BG* vi: 13).

Curiously, despite the emphasis on belief and behaviour in recent Iron Age studies, little attention has been paid to the archaeology of religious authorities and specialists. So little indeed, that it might be thought that an archaeology of Druids had been banished to the history of thought.

IRON AGE PRIESTS?

In Britain, though, there is arguably evidence for religious specialists from burials, from shrines; and from some objects (figure 16.1). Among the most enigmatic of these objects are pairs of bronze ‘spoons’ or scoops which have puzzled archaeologists since the nineteenth century. A short section in *Iron Age Communities* considered burials with which these spoons had been placed. These, it was cautiously suggested, ‘might be considered sufficiently distinctive to be regarded as a separate ritual practice’ (Cunliffe 2005: 557).

Spoons

These enigmatic objects occur as pairs and are found mainly in Britain and Ireland, with only one pair from continental Europe. As we will see, the interpretation of these scoop-like objects is far from clear but they have been called spoons since their first publication by the Reverend Barnwell (Barnwell 1862). Shortly afterwards the first comprehensive study of them was introduced with the thought that ‘Amongst the perplexing anomalies of bronze... there are perhaps none that present so interesting and mysterious a subject of speculation as the little group of spoon-like objects’ (Way 1869: 52).

The spoons are shallow, oval-shaped, bowls that are the size of an adult’s hand, sitting comfortably in the palm, with one end being rather pointed and the other a short, horizontal, handle (figure 16.2). There is considerable variety from pair to pair; each pair always comprises two slightly different spoons (Way 1869; Craw 1923–4; MacGregor 1976: 14–6, 163–6, map 18).



Fig. 16.1 Location of selected sites and finds

In the insular pairs the bowl of one is always decorated with an incised cross that spans the entire bowl. The bowl of the matching spoon is not decorated but there is always a small hole in it, half way down the bowl and to the left of the handle. Only a pair from France differs. One of the spoons found at Pogy/La Chaussée-sur-Marne, Marne, is completely plain, while the other is decorated with an incised cross and has a hole at the intersection (Déchelette 1914: 783).

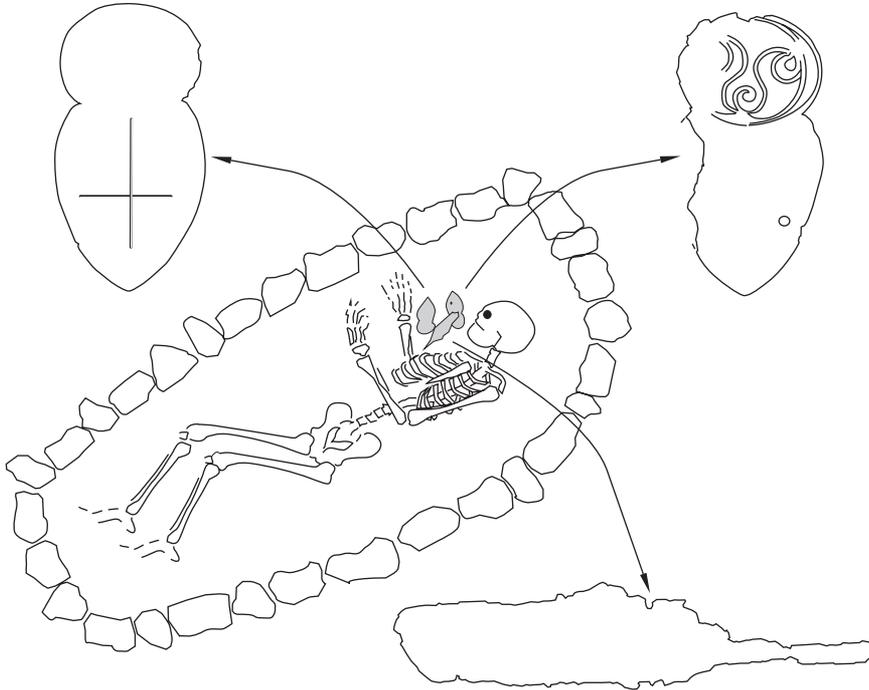


Fig. 16.2 Burial with spoons from Burnmouth, Borders

Source: burial after Craw 1923–4, spoons after MacGregor 1976

Context

Only fifteen certain finds of spoons are known, with a further possible example from the Stanwick, North Yorkshire hoard (Fitts *et al.* 1999: 44). Two of the British pairs come from inhumation burials, at Burnmouth, Borders, and Deal, Kent, and are described below. The pair from Crosby Ravensworth, Cumbria, was found in boggy ground close to a spring (Way 1869: 62–3), and one spoon comes from the River Thames (*op. cit.* 54). The contexts of many of the other finds, often old discoveries, are less clear. Two of the finds from England were recorded as singletons but another two finds, and also the two finds from Wales, have been found as pairs. However, the most recent find, from Kinton, Shropshire, appears to have been placed in a small pit (J. D. Hill pers. comm.). The differential corrosion on the spoons shows that they had been placed one inside the other, suggesting that at least some of the other finds could also be from small hoards. This pattern of deposition; in burials, watery places, and in small hoards is distinctive within

the wider pattern in Britain (Fitzpatrick 1992: 396). The Irish finds would appear to all come, characteristically, from watery contexts (Raftery 1984: 267). The find from France was placed in the grave of a woman (Stead 1995: 107) and as this pair is the only one of the fifteen finds to come from continental Europe, it is arguable that it is British.

As with much British Iron Age metalwork, these spoons are not particularly well dated. There are, however, enough indications from the decoration on the spoons which encompass most of the major British styles, to suggest that they were made over several centuries.

Dating

For present purposes, a few examples of the spoons may serve to illustrate their potential date range. The openwork and apparently compass-based decoration on the find from Andover, Hampshire (Anon 1933) may be compared with that on an openwork fitting, possibly from a piece of horse harness from nearby Danebury. The Danebury fitting may date to the fifth or early fourth century BC (Cunliffe and Poole 1991: 331–2, fig. 7.5.1.94; 7.8; Jope 2000: 16, 234, 31g; Megaw and Megaw 1991: 288, fig. 4a). The decoration on the Weston, North Somerset, pair has elements that derive from the Waldalgesheim style and so is likely to date to the late fourth or third centuries BC (Atkinson and Piggott 1955: 235; Fox 1958: 36–7; though see MacGregor 1976: 45). The handles on these two finds are circular.

The decoration on the Crosby Ravensworth spoons is typologically later and here the handle has become a large flange that is almost the same size as the bowl. The decoration is contained within circular fields that echo the shape of the earlier circular handles. A difference in handle shape, or more precisely size, was the basis of Raftery's distinction between a Type 1, with smaller circular handles, and Type 2 with larger disc-like handles and with larger and more shallow bowls. As most of the Type 2 finds come from Ireland, with one from Scotland, these characteristics may be geographical as much as chronological (Raftery 1984: 264–5).

The burials provide further information. At Mill Hill, Deal, the two spoons were placed either side of the head of an extended inhumation that was destroyed in quarrying early in the 1900s (Woodruff 1904; Parfitt 1995: 29–34). Excavations adjacent to the site of it in 1984–9 showed that the grave, grave x2, must have lain in a cemetery; Parfitt's 'southwest cemetery', one of three discrete groups of burials (Parfitt 1995). Most of the burials excavated between 1984 and 1989 were inhumations dating to the second and first centuries BC. Cremation burials dating from the later first century BC onwards were found in the earlier quarrying, suggesting that

there was a change in burial rite around this time (Stead 1995: 104). On this basis grave x2 should be dated to the second century or the first half of the first century BC.

The Burnmouth burial was a flexed inhumation (figure 16.2). Placed close to the face of the man were 'within a small area, an iron knife, two bronze spoons, the jaws and other bones of a young pig, several fragments of coal, and a small piece of wood, probably part of the handle of a knife' (Craw 1923–4: 143). A radiocarbon date of 200–1 cal. BC was obtained recently (GrA-27301, 2095±35 BP; Sheridan 2004: 175) and this is consistent with the metallurgical analysis of the spoons where the absence of zinc suggests a pre-Roman date (F. Hunter pers. comm.; cf. Dungworth 1996). The Pogy/La Chaussée-sur-Marne spoons were found with an extended inhumation though the location of the cemetery itself is not clear (Baray 2003: no. 420; J.-J. Charpy pers. comm.). The spoons were placed on the right forearm of a forty to fifty-year-old woman with a bronze bowl inverted over them, and with a bronze ring nearby. The spoons would fit within the bowl. Although there are some fifth-century graves from the cemetery, most date to the third century BC, c. 280–220 BC, and this date seems likely for the burial of the woman.

Although this evidence should not be pressed, the spoons may be seen to appear in the Middle Iron Age, perhaps in the fourth or third century BC or slightly earlier, and continued into the Late Iron Age. Although it has been suggested that the decoration on the Burnmouth and Irish finds date them to the second half of the first century AD (MacGregor 1976: 145–6; Raftery 1984: 267), the Burnmouth radiocarbon date shows that there is no reason why they should not be earlier. There are no Romano-British associations.

Functions

Early interpretations as to the purpose of the spoons revolved around the thought that the incised cross on the bowls indicated that they were Christian, used perhaps in administering the Eucharist or in Baptism (e.g. Barnwell 1864). This idea was discounted when Way's systematic study was able to endorse Kemble's 'Late Celtic' dating (Way 1869: 78–80; Kemble 1863: 184). Way did not advance any alternative interpretations as to function but was most reluctant to accept a 'purpose associated with sacred rites or religious observances' through argument based on *ignotum pro sacro* (Way 1869: 52).

Subsequent discoveries prompted new suggestions. In publishing the Deal find, Woodruff (1904: 12) observed that the bowls of the spoons were too shallow to have held much liquid and wondered whether they were intended for some powdered or finely granulated substance that was poured through

the hole in the plain spoon. Following this, Craw noted that while water would not flow through such a small hole, oil would (1924: 146). In his unpublished doctoral thesis, Spratling made explicit what Woodruff had implied, that something was poured from the perforated spoon into the one incised with a cross (1972: 247). By 1976 MacGregor could state 'There have been many wild guesses as to purpose—ranging from castanets to christening. Certainly, some ritual function seems indicated . . .' (1976: 145).

The Penbryn Spoons

As is often the way, it is the oldest find that sheds new light on the use of the spoons. The pair from Penbryn was found 'under a heap of stones' within the multivallate hillfort at Castell Nadolig (or Castle Christmas), Dyfed, in about 1829. It has been suggested that the objects were from a grave (Murphy 1992: 32, no. 5; Lynch *et al.* 2000: 213) but there is no evidence for this. The spoons were first published in 1862 where it was recorded that Augustus Wollaston Franks had 'accidentally discovered another pair of these spoon-shaped articles in the Ashmolean Museum, where they had been lying unnoticed since the year 1836.' (Barnwell 1862: 214). Barnwell and subsequent writers described the spoon with a cross having two small 'perforations'; one each in the two quadrants nearest to the handle. The top left-hand hole was filled with what was described as a 'plug' of another metal. Thought by Barnwell to be of brass, the plug was identified by Way as being of gold (Way 1869: 53, 59) and this was repeated by Craw (1923–4: 148, no. 1). Since then the circular inlay has either been thought to be a modern repair (Spratling 1972) or gone unmentioned (e.g. MacGregor 1976) or unnoticed (Jope 2000: 288, no. 232, b, c, see pl. 232, b). The illustration in the *Guide Catalogue of the Early Iron Age Collections* of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales (Savory 1976: 61, fig. 36, 4) does not show the inlay, perhaps due to the pieces in the museum being electrotype copies made in 1922 of the originals, which are in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Few types of gold objects are known from Iron Age Britain, mainly torques and coins (Jope 1995: 115–16; Fitzpatrick 1997: 97–8; 2005: 167–8), to which may be added the exceptional Winchester chain torques and brooches, whose inspiration lies in the Mediterranean world (Hill *et al.* 2004).

Gold inlay is, however, very rare in Britain; if not unparalleled. It is reported to have occurred on a short sword, now lost, from the River Witham at Barlings Eau, Lincolnshire (Stead 2006: 48–9, 199, no. 232). What had been thought to be gold inlay in the armourer's stamps on a third- or second-century BC sword from the River Thames at Isleworth is now known to be the

earliest brass north of the Alps, presumably having been used in imitation of gold (Craddock *et al.* 2004; Stead 2006: 48–9, 123–5, 168, no. 76, pl. 25, fig. 11, 76; 62, 76).

A re-examination of the Penbryn spoons shows that the two circular perforations in the upper quadrants were not the only ones (figure 16.3). Rather than being perforations, they represent the sites of inlays, one in each of the four quadrants; at some point that in the top right hand corner (no. 2) has fallen out. Although the site of the lower right inlay (no. 3) was not immediately obvious due to corrosion, the inlay in the lower left quadrant (no. 4) is clearly of a different, lighter, colour. Perhaps due to earlier conservation and lacquering, this latter inlay is today seen more clearly on the base of the spoon. Analysis by Dr Peter Northover using particle-induced X-ray emission was hampered by the conservation history but confirmed that inlay no. 1 is of gold. The composition of inlay no. 2 could not be analysed, while the site of inlay no. 3 is filled with corrosion products that could have come from the bronze of the spoons. Inlay no. 4 was shown to be bronze but with a different composition from that of the spoons, ‘having higher lead and arsenic contents, an identifiable antimony impurity and, more importantly, a much higher tin content.’ (Northover, in Fitzpatrick in preparation). The composition of the gold; 61.67 per cent pure gold, 26.22 per cent silver and 12.02 per cent copper is comparable of that used for early British gold coinage, notably Gallo-Belgic A which are primarily of second century BC date (Northover 1992; Haselgrove 1993; Sills 2003). If a coin was the source of the gold, this would suggest a *terminus ante quem* no later than the early first

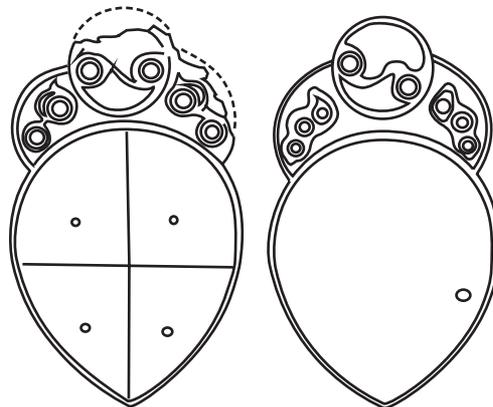


Fig. 16.3 Spoons from Penbryn, Dyfed

Source: author

century BC, but the find, close to the west coast of Wales, is far from the recorded distribution of Iron Age coinage.

It seems probable, therefore, that the Penbryn spoon had different coloured inlays in each quadrant. Only the pairs of spoons from Burnmouth and Weston, both in the National Museums of Scotland, have been X-rayed and analysed by energy-dispersive surface X-ray fluorescence; neither yielded any evidence for inlays (F. Hunter pers.comm.)

Lunar Symbolism

The patterning on the Penbryn spoons recalls the symbols found on some anthropomorphic hilted short swords in continental Europe. These swords are so small that they are really symbolic swords, and the blades of some of them carried symbols that were inlaid with a variety of metals; gold, silver or a base metal. The symbols occur in two main varieties, the first being where a vertical line separates a circle to the left and a crescent to the right. These were thought to represent the sun and moon until further inlays were recognized on the reverse of one of the swords, from Munich, Untermerzing, Bavaria figure 16.4 (Dannheimer 1975). The additional inlays, which represent the second variety, suggested that the symbols should be interpreted instead as representing the moon, an interpretation borne out by the subsequent discovery of four symbols on the short sword from Saint-André-de-Lidon (Duval *et al.* 1986). On both these swords some of the inlays were of gold, others of base metal. The most recently recognized example, from Prosnès, Marne, has in addition to astral symbols, representations of animals, perhaps of sheep (Rapin 2002).

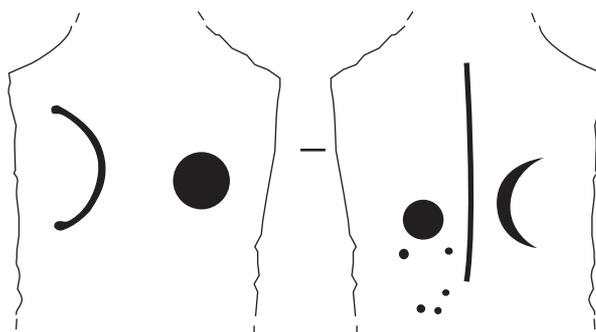


Fig. 16.4 Astral symbols on the blade of the anthropomorphic hilted short sword from Munich-Untermerzing

Source: after Dannheimer 1975

These observations were elaborated on (Fitzpatrick 1996) with the suggestion that the vertical line symbolised the division of the lunar month in two halves, lucky and unlucky, as seen in the third-century AD Coligny calendar. This calendar was written in Gaulish, which was by then an ancient language, and not Latin, and probably came from a temple. It shows that time was counted in months which were regarded as lucky or unlucky and that each month was divided in two by the word 'Atenovx'; when the waxing moon wanes.

The counting of time in nights is also evidenced by the earlier commentaries of Pliny and Julius Caesar. About the Gauls Caesar said 'they reckon periods of time not in days but in nights; in celebrating birthdays, the first of the month, and the beginning of a year, they go on the principle that night comes first and is followed by day' (*BG* 6: 18).

Other literary evidence points to the association of this type of temporal knowledge with a specialist religious class; the Druids. It was suggested that the short swords were used in practices or ceremonies associated with making and keeping the time by counting nights, and determining what was a propitious day (Fitzpatrick 1996; see Green 1998a: 194–5; Stead 2006: 49).

The dozen or so short swords with these inlays are scattered across continental Europe, from Moravia to the Atlantic coast (Fitzpatrick 1996; Rapin 2002). None are certainly known from Britain. There is just the tantalizing record of the dagger or short sword from the River Witham at Barlings Eau with what was described as a crescentic stamp inlaid with gold (Banks 1893). The piece cannot now be traced and despite the richness of the Iron Age finds from the Witham (Fitzpatrick 1984: 179–81; Field and Parker Pearson 2003: 162–4), it has to be remembered that there are also medieval finds from the river, and medieval weapons also had inlaid stamps (Stead 2006: 49).

Even though there are no certain finds of inlaid anthropomorphic hilted short swords from Britain, the four-fold division and the use of different coloured inlays on the Penbryn spoon strongly recalls the astral symbols on the short swords. On this basis it may be suggested that the inlays on the spoon also signified quarters of the lunar month or year. If Spratling's suggestion that a substance was poured through the hole in one spoon into the one incised with a cross (1972: 247) is followed, the quadrant in which the substance landed might indicate which quarter of the lunar month or year was auspicious. In this interpretation it is possible that the Penbryn spoons, and perhaps all the others, were used in divination, the act or practice of divining which seeks to know the future or hidden things by magical means (Green 1998a: 200). The ability to predict events is a powerful knowledge.

The possible sacrificial role of some knives in Late Iron Age Europe has been touched on by Metzler Zens (Metzler *et al.* 1991: 147), and the presence

of one in the Burnmouth burial is rare among Iron Age burials in Britain. The Mill Hill, Deal cemetery provides further evidence for religious equipment, this time from the burial of a warrior, who was buried wearing a headdress.

Headdresses

Mill Hill, Deal

The prone burial of a small, gracile, male who died between the ages of thirty and thirty-five, lay apart from the other cemeteries at Mill Hill, Deal, Kent, figure 16.5 (Parfitt 1995). Excavated in 1988, burial 112 was sited near the highest point of the site and close to a Bronze Age barrow. By the man's right side and buried face down was a sword in its scabbard, its handle by his shoulder, and a hide-shaped shield had been placed on its side on his left-hand side. A brooch was found, also face down, by his left shin, suggesting that the either the item of clothing that it pinned was not worn and had been placed in the grave, perhaps folded; or that the clothing was quite different from those placed in other Iron Age burials. On the man's head was a headdress. The decoration on the weaponry, costume fittings and headdress form one of the earliest well-dated groups of Celtic art in Britain, from the later third or early second century BC. The scabbard and costume fittings were adorned with red coral from the Mediterranean.

The headdress was a thin headband with a cross band that went over the top of the head. Traces of human hair inside the headband show that it rested directly on the head suggesting that it did not decorate the exterior of a leather or wooden helmet. The headdress finds no parallels among the many types of Iron Age helmet currently known from continental Europe (e.g. Schaff 1988; Cunliffe 1997 *passim*) but in a typically thorough review of the evidence, Ian Stead showed its close similarities to the headdresses of Romano-British priests found at temple sites such as Hockwold, Norfolk, and Wanborough, Surrey, and in hoards of religious materials such as at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire (Stead 1995: 72–86, fig. 31). In doing so he maintained a distinction between the sacred and the profane; between military and religious leaders, suggesting that if the headdress was a symbol of religious office, it would not have been consigned to the grave but kept among the living for the next incumbent. He concluded that the headdresses were 'symbols of status worn by military or religious leaders in the Iron Age, while in Roman times their significance became wholly religious' (Stead 1995: 86).

The other headdresses of Iron Age date identified by Stead are no less unusual. Three come from burials; Newnham Croft, Cambridgeshire, Old

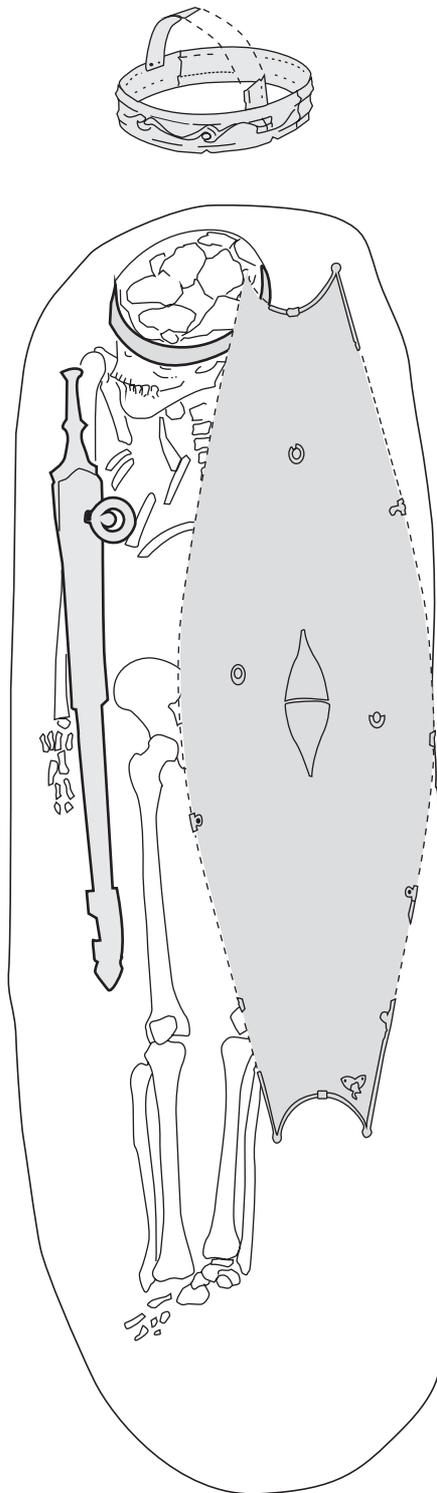


Fig. 16.5 Burial with headdress from Mill Hill Deal, Kent
Source: after Parfitt 1995

Castle Down (Ogmore Down), Glamorganshire, and Cerrig-y-Drudion, Clwyd, while the fourth forms part of a hoard from Hounslow, Middlesex.

Newnham Croft

The burial at Newnham Croft, Cambridgeshire, was found in 1903 and the records are poor (Fox 1923: 81, pl. xv, 5; xviii, 2x; Clark 1938: 293, fig. 26; Cra'ster 1973; Stead 1995: 82–3). On the chest of a crouched burial of a middle-aged person, whose sex is unknown, were two pennanular brooches and a bow brooch, on their lower right arm was an armring, and near the feet was what was initially thought to be a lamp. Three small copper alloy rings had been removed from the grave before the burial was recorded. The 'lamp' was considered to be a harness mounting by Fox (1923: 81), and reinterpreted again as the top of a priest's headdress analogous to the Romano-British example from Felmingham Hall, Norfolk, from which chains were suspended by Gilbert (1978: 172–4; Stead 1995: 81–3).

The dating of the Newnham Croft burial is not precise, but the brooch (Hull and Hawkes 1987: 147–8, no. 4283) can be compared with that from Burial 112 at Deal (Stead 1995: 86). The bracelet is decorated with Waldalgesheim style decoration which is typologically earlier than that in the Deal burial, but which is very worn (Stead 1995: 90, fig. 33–5). The burial dates to the third or early second century BC and, as with the Mill Deal burial, the grave goods comprise one of the earliest well-dated groups of Celtic art in Britain.

Old Castle Down (Ogmore Down)

The history of between two and four helmets or headdresses from Old Castle Down, vale of Glamorgan is less clear. The provenance of the find has recently been corrected from Ogmore Down to Old Castle Down (Toft 1998; 1999). Found in 1818 with skeletons and iron spear heads, the pieces were lost shortly after. Described as bronze helmets, at least one of the headdresses had cheek pieces apparently decorated with gold, red glass or enamel, and silver wire. It is less certain whether the bottom of one helmet was decorated with blue glass or enamel. Most recent commentators have favoured an Iron Age date for the 'helmets' (Stead 1995: 83–4; Macdonald and Davis 2002).

Cerrig-y-Drudion

On the basis of the above finds, the famous Cerrig-y-Drudion, Clwyd, 'hanging bowl' (Stead 1982) was reinterpreted by Stead as a headdress with a decorated rim, from which chains were suspended (Stead 1995: 84).

The object was found in 1924 in a cist and so presumably had been placed with a burial. Once again, the art is among the earliest from Britain, in this case the style of the decoration, the 'Early style', pre-dates the Waldalgesheim style on the Deal and Newnham Croft headdresses.

Hounslow Hoard

The last of the certainly or probably Iron Age finds comes from Hounslow, Middlesex. This hoard was found in 1864 and was initially described as a single collection of Bronze and Iron Age objects although this account was later altered, suggesting that the Bronze and Iron Age objects came from different parts of the field and these groups were later identified as hoards A and B (Stead 1995: 80; 1998, 119). As recorded, what is now known as hoard B, includes fragments of a headdress whose shape is very similar to that from Deal but which has suspension loops for chains of the sort envisaged at Newnham Croft and Cerrig-y-Drudion. The band had previously been thought to be metal binding for a wooden bucket (Spratling 1972).

The other finds are five miniature animals and a miniature wheel (Stead 1995: 80–2, fig. 29–30; 1998: 119, pl. 18). The animals comprise three boars (Foster 1977: 1–13, 29–30), and what may be a dog and a deer (Jope 2000: 264, pl. 160–1, a–h, m, n; 164, i–j, k). One of the boars (Foster's A) seems to have had a stand but the other two (B and C) may have had suspension loops in the perforated representation of the boar's spine. The miniature spoked wheel is of a type well known from temple sites in Iron Age France (Piette 1987), and from Romano-British religious contexts where it is usually thought to symbolise the sun and the god Jupiter (Green 1984). Some Romano-British priestly headdresses are surmounted by such wheels (Stead 1995: 81; O'Connell and Bird 1996: 93–4).

Other headdresses such as that from Leckhampton, Gloucestershire, might also be Iron Age in date, but what Stead's research clearly showed was that a number of Iron Age finds whose interpretation was previously uncertain, variously seen as chariot fittings, bowls and bucket binding, could certainly or very probably be interpreted as religious headdresses. A number of them, Cerrig-y-Drudion, Deal and Newnham Croft also carry some of the earliest relatively well-dated Celtic art in Britain (Fitzpatrick 2007). It may also be noted that, as yet, the few burials across Britain with headdresses do not contain spoons.

Other Finds

The recognition of these religious headdresses draws attention to other items of headdress or representations of them from Britain and Ireland; the helmet

from the River Thames at Waterloo and the bucket escutcheons from Aylesford and Alkham, Kent, and Baldock, Hertfordshire. These too are remarkable finds.

The horned Waterloo helmet is such an icon of the British Iron Age that it is necessary to remember that its shape and horns have no parallels in Iron Age defensive weaponry (Brailsford 1956; 1975: 32–9; Schaff 1988). Made from wafer-thin bronze, the helmet could not have seen practical combat. It was either a parade item, or perhaps adorned a representation of a deity (Ritchie 1968: 146). Two finds from Ireland can be seen in this light. The Cork Horns are three joining pointed metal horns that recall those on the Waterloo helmet which may well have been attached to a leather cap or lining. The circular discs attached to the head band of the Petrie Crown are variations, albeit not necessarily contemporaneous, on this theme (Raftery 1984: 268–75, fig. 132–3).

In Britain, the first-century BC handle escutcheons of the wooden buckets in the well-furnished burials at Alkham, Aylesford, and Baldock (figure 16.6), (Stead 1971; Philp 1991; Stead 1996: 67, fig. 75; Stead and Rigby 1986: 51–61), take the form of human heads which are wearing horned helmets or headdresses. As with the full size headdresses, these representations have no resemblance to Iron Age helmets save than the one from the River Thames at Waterloo. On the escutcheons from burial 'Y' at Aylesford a milled band represents either the border of the headdress cap or human hair (Stead 1971:

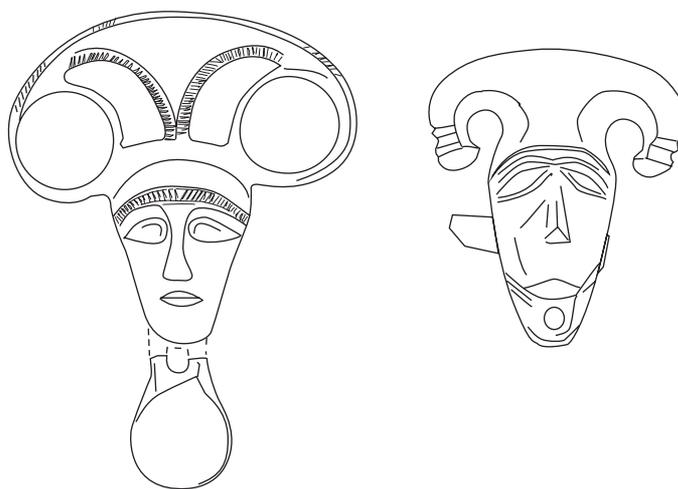


Fig. 16.6 Bucket escutcheons from burials at Aylesford, Kent and Baldock, Hertfordshire

Source: after Stead 1971

261, fig. 4). Stead thought that this might be a fringe of hair escaping from the cap, but it is quite possible that it represents a particular hair style or coiffure, a band of hair on an otherwise shaven head. This form of tonsure has been identified on a small number of earlier statues from continental Europe where it has been suggested to signify that the individual was a religious specialist or Druid (Venclová 2002; Aldhouse Green 2004). The shape of the Aylesford headdress clearly recalls that of early La Tène headdresses in continental Europe; the so-called *Blattkrone* or 'leaf crown', and which are associated with religious authority (e.g. Frey 2002).

The uppermost bronze band that encircles the Aylesford bucket is decorated with fantastic animals. At first sight they appear to be horses (e.g. Brailsford 1975: 84), but closer examination shows that they have what may be antlers, curling lips, and two tails: and the legs of humans. These could be men dressed as horses engaged in mummery as Jope suggested (1983: 156), or more speculatively they might be seen as men in an altered state of consciousness or in an ecstatic trance taking on the shape of an animal in order to make contact with the spirits (Fitzpatrick 2000; Creighton 1995; 2000: 43–53; Carr 2002). The contents of the buckets are unknown.

To these finds might be added the horned helmet represented on a coin of Tasciovanus (Henig 1974) and a unique silver coin said to be from near Petersfield, Hampshire that shows a face with a headdress that has antlers and is surmounted by a spoked wheel (Boon 1982; van Arsdell 1989: 128).

The *Blattkrone* is sometimes suggested, perhaps fancifully, to resemble mistletoe leaves and is frequently shown in miniature in many pieces of Celtic art in continental Europe. Sometimes the small images are difficult to discern, though sometimes and especially on statuary, they are quite clear (Polenz 1974: 396, Abb. 4). This type of headdress is shown on sculptures in western Germany from Pfalzfeld (Rhein-Hunsrück-Kreis) and Heidelberg, and on the Janus-like two faced sculpture from Holzgerlingen (Kr. Böblingen) (Cunliffe 1997: 125–8, fig. 97–9; Kimmig 1987: 274–81, Abb. 23–7). These have been thought to be representations of deities but it now seems likely that at least some of them represent mortals. The statue that surmounted the Glauberg, Hessen, tumulus is adorned by a *Blattkrone* (Frey and Hermann 1997; Frey 2002). Many of the objects shown on that statue are matched precisely by the metal grave goods that survive in the burial, leaving little doubt about either the accuracy of the portrayal of the headdress, which must have been made from cloth or leather, or the mortality of its wearer.

The Glauberg is one of the most well-furnished Early La Tène burials yet found. It suggests that the deceased had the status of a warrior, but maybe also some religious authority, perhaps even being thought of as a hero (Frey 2002; cf. Venclová 1998). Many of these parallels are far removed from Aylesford,

both in time and place, and a direct link between them is problematic. What can be suggested though, is that the intertwining of the sacred and the secular that they demonstrate is also seen in burial 112 at Deal.

Other types of religious object might tentatively be added to the spoons and headdresses. The possible sacrificial role of some knives in Late Iron Age Europe has been mentioned earlier (p. 298), and the presence of one in the Burnmouth burial is rare in Iron Age Britain.

Pieces of binding from the votive deposit of Lynn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey (Fox 1947: 45–6, 86, 90, pl. xvi, 67, 91; see also Macdonald and Young 1995; *pace* Roberts 2002) have, as Fox noted, similarities with objects from Roman religious contexts that are now thought to be sceptre binding, such as those from Wanborough, Surrey (O’Connell and Bird 1994: 107–21, fig. 26–32, pl. 20–8). It should be noted that other, more mundane interpretations of the Llyn Cerrig Bach bindings, such as animal goads, have also been suggested recently (Schönfelder 2002: 271–3, Abb. 171).

SPECIALISM

Druids were described by Julius Caesar as being in charge of religion, judges, and arbitrators in disputes, and teachers and keepers of knowledge. What that knowledge was is not stated, but the widespread association of priests and healers suggest it is possible that medicine was one form of knowledge.

A small number of burials with surgical instruments is known from continental Europe (de Navarro 1955; Künzl 1991) and they, along with skeletal evidence, suggest an emphasis on trephination. However, medicine covers a much wider range of practices than just surgery. The early Romano-British burial from Stanway, Colchester, Essex has a set of surgical instruments similar to Greco-Roman ones and as this ‘doctors grave’ lies in a cemetery that contained the graves of people who either had been the client kings of Rome or were related to them, Roman knowledge and skills might be expected. However, there is also a set of what might be divination rods that suggest the role of magic as well as medicine (Crummy 1996–7; 1998; 2002). There is also a board game in the grave which is similar to that from the Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, burial (Stead 1967), recalling the dice found at some sites in south-western England (Clarke 1970: 217) which may have been used, among other things, for throwing lots.

There is less evidence for other skills that might be associated with a priesthood. The Druids famously did not commit their knowledge to writing and it may be no coincidence that in the Late Iron Age the specialist skill of

literacy had strong associations with the Roman world. Apart from occasional earlier graffiti (Krämer 1982) and inscriptions (Wyss 1954), most evidence from continental Europe comes from *oppida* (Woolf 1994). The same pattern is true in Iron Age Britain with graffiti from Braughing and Colchester, *styli* from Silchester, and an inkpot from another early Romano-British burial in the Stanway cemetery (Crummy 1993; 2003; Williams 2001: 5; 2002: 148). These British sites all have strong associations with the elite who used their inscribed coinages to proclaim their connections with the Roman world as they consciously created a new social order (Creighton 2000). The cemetery at Stanway was set apart as a royal cemetery and the mortuary rituals, which often involved deliberate breakage, are also distinct to the burials of that elite (Fitzpatrick in press). In Britain, at least, the knowledge of writing appeared as the character of kingship changed.

DISCUSSION

It is possible to recognize some objects that were used for ritual purposes and the burials of some people who wore a costume that identified them as having some religious status (Cunliffe 2004: 111). The links between the Druids of Britain and Gaul mentioned by Caesar might be mused upon in relation to the spoons from Pogny/La Chaussée-sur-Marne (Smith 1925: 149). The idea of specialists and of a specialist priesthood may, however, be as much a hindrance as a help and, as with the study of Iron Age settlements, supports a modern distinction between the secular and sacred that should not be pressed.

The evidence from shrines and temples in Britain suggest that it was only in the Late Iron Age that temples inscribed special sacred spaces in the landscape. Before then shrines, which would seem on the evidence currently available to appear in the Middle Iron Age, stood within settlements, such as the earlier shrines at Danebury (Cunliffe 1984: 8–7, fig. 4.31–5, pl. 53–6), and at Heathrow, Middlesex (Grimes and Close-Brookes 1993). This continued into the Late Iron Age, for example at Stansted, Essex (Havis and Brooks 2004: 104–8, 533, figs. 74–5, 346, pl. vi). The square shape and trench built method of construction of these buildings contrasted with the circular dwelling houses (though see Smith 2001: 63). The Late Iron Age temples at Hayling Island, Hampshire, and Harlow, Essex, are round, suggesting that they were houses for the gods that were eventually superseded by Roman temples. At Hayling Island the temple might even be associated with the establishment of a new political dynasty (Creighton 2000: 192–6). Here the

repeated deposition of votive offerings (Haselgrove 2005; Bartlett 1988; King and Soffe 2001) might suggest that specialist priests could have overseen ceremonies. The idea that specialists undertook blood sacrifice in the Iron Age, whether of animals or humans, is however, hard to demonstrate archaeologically (cf. Green 1998b; Aldhouse Green 2001).

There is, however, little evidence to suggest that the few burials that contain spoons and headdresses were very different from those of the others. The cist burial at Burnmouth, for example, belongs to an increasingly well understood pattern in lowland Scotland, one in which more cist burials, some of which contained weapons, and also chariot burials, are now being recognized (e.g. Crone 1992; Mills 2004; Roy 2006; Carter and Hunter 2003).

Although Burial 112 at Deal with its headdress and weapons was set apart from the smaller groups of burials, it is typical of them, and it is increasingly clear that inhumation burial was practiced regularly in some parts of Iron Age Britain. Burials with weapons are found in all the regional burial traditions of Iron Age Britain (Collis 1973; Hunter 2005: 50–6, fig. 4) but the presence of a full panoply of arms, i.e. spear, shield and sword, is still rare.

Weapons were placed in some Welwyn-type cremation burials, of which the Baldock grave (Stead and Rigby 1986: 51–61) is an example, but they were always almost defensive weapons in the form of shields. In these burials there is instead an emphasis on feasting and perhaps of sacrifice. Key elements of the feast that are present in the Baldock burial are the iron firedogs, a cauldron and a side of pork, pottery vessels for feasting and drinking, and a Roman wine amphora. The overall impression of Iron Age mortuary rituals is of a myriad of local variation on common themes.

CONCLUSION

There is little evidence that hints at the existence of specialist priests in Britain until late in the Iron Age. Instead the burials with spoons at Burnmouth and Mill Hill, Deal might be those of people with skills in divination. Those skills, if that is what they were, were not restricted to one gender; the Burnmouth burial was of a male, but that from Pogny/La Chaussée-sur-Marne was of a female. The contexts of, and the finds associated with, Romano-British chain headdresses also suggest that these items were not exclusive to any one deity (Bird 1996: 87).

In view of the evidence from Iron Age Britain for ritual and religion forming part of daily life in which ritual was an aspect of custom (Cunliffe 1992; 1993), the presence of people with skills such as divination and an elite

who provided sacred leadership or kingship before the appearance of specialist priests or Druids, might indeed, as Barry Cunliffe wondered (2005: 559), not be too much to expect.

In this most ritual of academic contexts, the *Festschrift*, the high priest of Iron Age studies can divine whether, here, enthusiasm for the novel has run ahead of the supporting evidence, and become pure speculation.

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