
MORE CIRCE THAN CASSANDRA:¹ THE PRINCESS OF VIX IN RITUALIZED SOCIAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: Ritual and ritual specialists have often been dissociated from power in the writings of prehistorians and archaeologists. From ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts, however, ritual specialists often exert disproportionate control over the maintenance, manipulation, and elaboration of social codes and practices. Their roles in ritual practice (orthopraxy in non-literate societies) and its effect on decision-making accord them considerable social and political importance. Due to this involvement they become the targets of ritual sanctions that include punitive rites, ritualized deaths, and suppression during periods of rapid social change, both from within their own societies and from without. The present article derives from a re-analysis of the Vix (Côte-d'Or, Burgundy) human skeletal remains, specifically with reference to the age, sex and health status of the interred individual. An evaluation of the social roles of this so-called 'Princess' is then attempted, integrating this biological information with that derived from a consideration of the grave inclusions and their imagery in the context of competitive feasting and social change in the late Hallstatt period.

Keywords: Burgundy, Hallstatt period, power, ritualists, Vix

INTRODUCTION: THE DISSOCIATION OF RITUAL AND POWER

Interpretations of pre-state ritualists – those who perform ceremonial rites – have often relied on analogies drawn from shamanism, often stretching the term beyond its geographical and epistemological boundaries (cf. Ross 1967; Piggott 1975; Hutton 1991; Davidson 1993). This reliance is due to the increasingly robust literature on individuals identified as shamans and, more importantly, that these individuals come from groups without the hierarchies that characterize state religions. In addition, these shamanic traditions share, at least in part, an animistic orientation with pre-state belief systems known from northern and central European history and myth (Eliade 1964; Glosecki 1989; Hoppál 1992a; Siikala 1992a; Davidson 1993). The validity of drawing parallels from shamanism to identify ritual and ritualists in the past has been the subject of debate (see Beard 1996; Fleck 1971; Walsh 1989; Hoppál 1992b; Kehoe 2000; Siikala 1992b, 1992c).

Early ethnographic studies of shamanism concentrated so specifically on defining and summarizing the functions of ritualists that they were left without social context, as in Eliade (1964). The use of an ethnographic present also denies a sense of change through time. A lack of context has hindered the application of concepts drawn from shamanic traditions in the explication of archaeological contexts and the creation of a coherent past for ritual and ritualists in social action. Ritualists have been viewed as separate from those in positions of power,² power relations, and from the events that maintained these social constructs. This derives from a view that sees the ritualist as a passive entity, rather than having any influence over the process of social change. They are portrayed as only responsive to society-wide trends, or even as psycho-social deviants (Devereux 1961).

This sentiment affects interpretations of prehistory and protohistory. For example, although Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina (1998:323) have suggested that monument-building in the late Neolithic was orchestrated by 'charismatic spiritual leaders and ritual specialists', they separate these individuals from 'secular chiefs'. This perspective may relate more to the separation of Church from State in much of western society than it does to the archaeological remains of prehistory. There is an ahistorical aspect to this viewpoint. The powerful princely potentates of late medieval and early modern Europe clashed continually with the Papacy (Tierney and Painter 1978:207–214), the culmination of which only very recently led to the exclusion of the Church from mainstream temporal affairs in Europe. Far from being exclusive, the temporal and spiritual realms overlap and are, therefore, often much contested.

The lack of social context for ritualists has been redressed recently, especially with regard to their relationship to the elders (Humphrey 1996); social organization (Hugh-Jones 1996); subsistence shifts (Winkelman 1990; Siikala 1992a; Hamayon 1996); and the rise of states (Humphrey 1996). Humphrey (1996:45) sums up this more contextual approach when she reminds us that '...shamanism was not just a "system of thought", as depicted by some anthropologists, but a practice in the real world of misery, poverty, and violence.' Vitebsky (1995:116) adds: 'Shamanism is not timeless: all forms of shamanism that are known have changed constantly as they have been affected by contacts between peoples, struggles for territory, inter-tribal warfare, the growth and collapse of empires or the imposed worldviews of colonialism.' To divorce the ritualist from social, economic, and political circumstances reduces their importance in social change and its effect on their activities. In turn, it prevents us from observing their presence in the archaeological record and, furthermore, from moving beyond contentions about the identification of such individuals and towards an understanding of the origins and development of ritual and ritualists in the past.

Previously, shamanism was defined by the use of a trance-state to achieve access to helping spirits (Eliade 1964; Hoppál 1992b), and this practice has often been used to distinguish priests, who pray, from these Eurasian ritualists. Shamans, however, share common features with priests in that both claim to have direct access to the divine and represent and interpret events for others. More recent treatments of shamanism emphasize a definition based on the shaman serving in a

spiritual role involving 'the mastery or control of spirits' (Lewis cited in Hoppál 1992b:129). This definition is based less on the manner used to attain insight, and more on the ultimate goal of these practices. It provides a common ground that avoids undue concentration on the form of the practice and refocuses enquiry on the attempt to gain spiritual insight into worldly concerns.

Priests and shamans share other features. Both undergo an initiation that often involves mental and physical anguish, the aid of other practitioners (for example, the ecclesiastical 'Master of the Novices' and the masters of cathedral schools for training Christian cloistered and secular clergy, respectively), and leads eventually to mastery of the means by which to act as an intercessor or mediator between people and the divine ('the spirit world'). Priests and shamans invoke 'helping spirits', whether they be humans, animals, inanimate objects such as boats or lodges, as among shamans, or the Virgin Mary, Christ, and the saints, as in the case of a Christian prelate. Both act as story-tellers, singers, spiritual healers, and as guardians of tradition and ceremonial etiquette. These similarities make the arguments over the use of the term 'shamanism' to describe pre-state ritualists unjustified (see also Knüsel forthcoming). The ritualists that existed in the recent past and still exist in parts of Siberia today are those that survived in the interstices between emergent states and their more recent forms (Thomas and Humphrey 1996). The process of state formation in Siberia has greatly impacted upon the activities of these ritualists, at times making them not only targets of derision and social exclusion but also of pogroms (see Vitebsky 1995:136–137). Although the actors and entities in specific situations differ, the effects of state formation and culture contact on their activities share similarities with those in North America (see, for example, Callender and Kochems 1983; Fisher 1992) and Polynesia (Kirch 1991). The circumstances under which these transformations occurred add dynamism to models of social change in prehistory. Concepts from 'shamanism' have the potential to inform archaeological interpretation in a similar way that the 'gift' and the competitive feast have elucidated social relations in pre- and proto-historic societies (Gosden 1985; Hayden 1990; Bradley 1998; Kristiansen 1998).

The lack of contextual consideration of ritual has its greatest impact on the interpretation of the funerary record – perhaps the most structured of archaeological contexts. It obscures interpretations of mortuary objects, providing them with an unsatisfactory functional description based on loose formal analogies. This contribution argues that a dissociation of power and ritual has affected our view of social roles in the past. Specifically, it has profoundly affected our view of female involvement in ritual. It is a curiosity that males interred with ostentatious grave inclusions are generally accepted as being pre-eminent in their societies, while equally well appointed female interments are considered only in relation to those of males. The 'Princess of Vix' is a case in point.

PRINCESSES, CROSS-DRESSERS, AND WEALTHY LADIES

The Vix burial is one of a number of elaborate interments found within the West Hallstatt area, a zone that stretches from the Heuneburg hillfort in the southeast,

via the undisturbed Hochdorf barrow (Biel 1982; 1997; Olivier 1999), to a similar construction located at the foot of Mont Lassois in the west (Fig. 1). These chambered tumuli are distinguished not only by their proximity to hillforts and their similar dates (from c. 600 BC to c. 450 BC), but also by the earliest Greek and Etruscan imports into northern Europe. The Vix burial has attracted considerable attention because of its enormous, richly decorated *krater*, unique gold torc, and, perhaps most importantly, the much-debated sex assessment of the principal burial. Although tumuli from the early Iron Age have a long history of scholarly attention, many were excavated in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries and suffer from a lack of adequate recording, curation, and osteological analysis. It is against the backdrop of these incompletely recorded tumulus interments that researchers have interpreted the Vix tumulus. Since its excavation in the 1950s, this individual has been described variously as a 'princess' (Joffroy 1979; Brun 1987), a 'nomad princess' (Megaw 1966:41), a 'lady' or 'La Dame de Vix' (Sauter 1980:89), a 'man who did not mind wearing women's clothing' (this author's translation, see Spindler 1983:108 and Plate 82:330), a 'transvestite priest' (Arnold 1991), a 'woman' (Collis 1984:95), a 'rich woman and possibly a chief or tribal ruler' (Ehrenberg 1989:168–169), a 'barbarian aristocrat' (Cunliffe 1994:347), a 'member of a female high status elite' (Arnold 1991:372), an 'honorary male' (Arnold 1995), and is generally included within what are called *Fürstengräber* (Fischer 1995) or 'Tombes Princières' (Joffroy 1983 – the burial of a prince or lord). The repeated use of 'royal' terminology refers to this individual's presumed membership of a dominant ruling house associated with the hill-top residence and who controlled exchange along routes to the Mediterranean (Pauli 1994; Kristiansen 1998, although see Biel 1997:17 with regard to 'une maison de campagne princière' at Hochdorf). Most recently, while relying on similar late medieval terminology, Kristiansen describes these

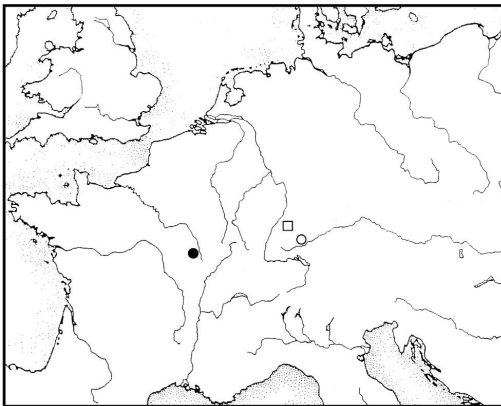


Figure 1. Location map of the Vix tumulus (Redrawn from Brun 1987: Fig. A, 48)
Key: Vix and Mont Lassois (●), Heuneburg (○), and Hochdorf (□).

remains as those of a 'Greek trader's or nobleman's daughter, married to the local king to strengthen their political alliance' (1998:273). In making this assessment he joins a prestige-goods model with Härke's (cited in Kristiansen 1998) observation that this individual's physical type is distinct from others found in the West Hallstatt area. Kristiansen's interpretation relies heavily on anecdotal use of the physical evidence of the remains and the unique elaborateness of the burial rather than on a biocultural analysis of the interment and its material and symbolic context.

The present treatment draws

on Piggott's (1975:186–187) suggestion that this individual, as a member of an 'heroic' social order stretching back to the second millennium BC, could be a representative of a priestly class in existence by the late Hallstatt period. Piggott sees these individuals as the forerunners of the Druids of the later Iron Age. Others, though, have been much less convinced of the existence of such individuals. With reference to the Vix burial, Ehrenberg (1989:168) writes: 'If the person was indeed female, what was her status or position? Most debate has either avoided the issue, or argued that she was the wife of the tribal chief, or a priestess. The latter seems least likely in view of the lack of other evidence for Hallstatt religious practices involving priestesses, and no suggestion has been made that rich male burials were of a religious nature.' This assessment conflates and confuses a number of issues, even denying that the act of burial has 'religious' significance. When viewed from a perspective that associates the performance of ritual with power, the Vix burial fits what one might expect from a ritualist of the sixth to fifth centuries BC. Evidence from the site and its surroundings, the grave and its inclusions, a re-assessment of the human remains, and ethnohistorical and ethnographic texts will be used in support of this assessment.

THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The Vix tumulus (identified as Tumulus 1 today) lies between an Iron Age hillfort located on the natural hill known as Mont Lassois to the west and the river Seine to the east (Fig. 2). Archaeological material from the hillfort includes ornamental metalwork, handmade and wheel-thrown pottery, and raw materials drawn from a geographically wide range of sources (Joffroy 1960; Pauli 1994; Kristiansen 1998). This material demonstrates that the hillfort was occupied at the same time that the tumulus was constructed. Cited dates vary from the end of the Hallstatt period – fifth and sixth centuries BC (Joffroy 1979) or, more specifically, to Ha D3, c. 480 BC to the middle of the fifth century BC (Spindler 1983:108). The hillfort was located at an important node connecting areas to the south with the Seine and its tributaries to the north.

Tumulus 1 measured 42 m in diameter and was a visible feature in the pre-Roman period because an ancient trackway follows the alignment of the mound (Joffroy 1979). Recent aerial survey demonstrates that the tumulus was accompanied by at least four others in the vicinity. Tumulus 2 dates to the late Bronze Age, Tumulus 3 appears to date to the late Hallstatt period, while two others, Tumuli 4 and 5, remain to be dated (Chaume 1997; Goguy 1997). Recent research has revealed the presence of a 'cult structure' or sanctuary, 'Les Herbues', located to the southwest of Tumulus 1, with its entrance oriented towards Mont Lassois. This structure has an internal pit at its centre. The remains of two statues were found outside it to the east. One statue is of a kneeling warrior ('hero') with his hands resting on a shield in front of him and wearing a sword down the left side of his body. The second is considered to be a female figure, wearing a long cloak that disguises her bodily features. This figure wears a torc around her neck. The placement and stratigraphic relationships indicate that the sanctuary was

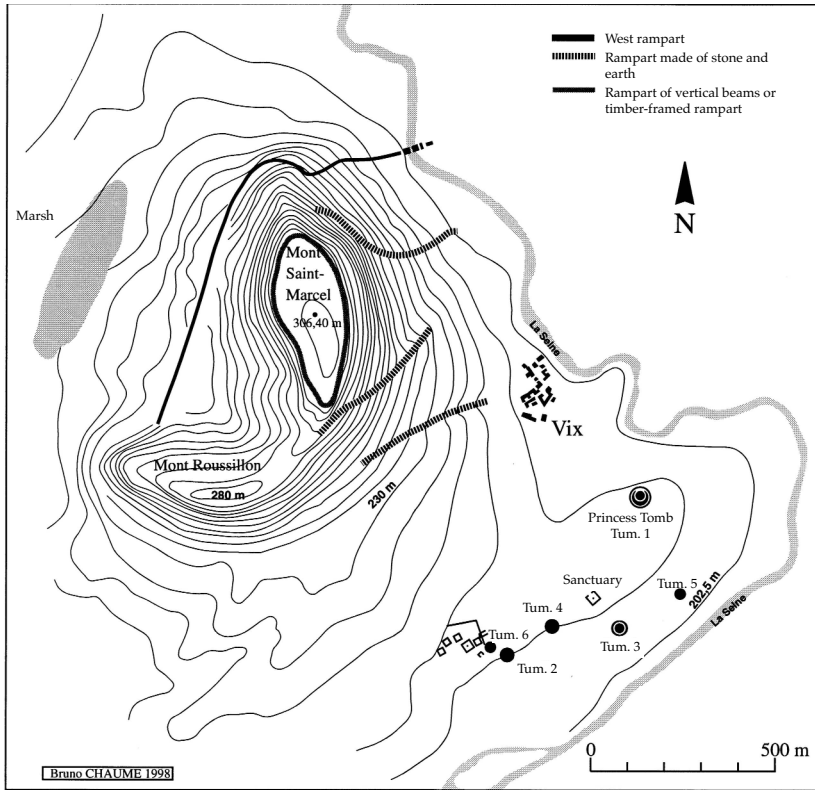


Figure 2. The area around Mont Lassois, showing the position of Tumulus 1 and the cult centre or sanctuary in relation to the Seine and Mont Lassois (Mont Saint-Marcel) (Source: Chaume 1998: Fig. 4, 188).

destroyed during the late Hallstatt period (Ha D3) (Chaume 1997). Emphasizing the close proximity and contemporaneity of the sanctuary and funerary monuments at Vix, Chaume (1997:194) notes 'l'étroite frontière qui semble exister entre les dimensions funéraire et culturelle du site.'

The river Seine has its source at 'La Douix', a spring located in nearby Châtillon-sur-Seine, Côte d'Or, where there is a cult centre dating from the same period as that at Vix. It is at Vix that the river becomes navigable. Votive deposits, found along the Seine and its tributaries and mostly of pre-Roman Iron Age date, are numerous (Deyts 1994:5). These offerings consist of a number exhibiting identifiable pathological conditions, including tumours, blindness, Down's syndrome and what appear to be intersex individuals with breasts (gynecomastia), narrow shoulders, broad hips, and male genitalia. Representations of *Dea Sequana*, a river goddess and healing deity of the Gallo-Roman period, are also found, and these votive objects are thought to have been deposited in deference to her. Thus the Vix tumuli and sanctuary are located in an area of ritual significance perhaps

focused on the river Seine and a wider ritual context that included both the living and the dead and the worship of a female divinity.

THE GRAVE AND ITS DEPOSITS

A chamber grave, c. 9 m², constructed of stones and lined with wood, lay beneath the tumulus (Joffroy 1983:7 and see Fig. 3). The body was placed on a north-south axis with the head to the north, opposite the draught-pole end of a dismantled wagon (Egg and France-Lanord 1987:7). The separated wheels of the wagon were placed against the eastern wall and a *krater* and vessels along the western wall. Most items of personal adornment were found in the vicinity of the reconstructed bed of the wagon and, in some cases, in direct association with skeletal remains. Amber beads found at the foot of the *krater* were most distant from the human remains. Many of the decorative parts of the wagon, along with some skeletal elements, were displaced towards the eastern end of the chamber when the grave chamber collapsed (Egg and France-Lanord 1987:6). Due to difficult excavation conditions in the winter of 1953, the disposition of some of the grave inclusions, including two sheet bronze ornaments that probably belonged to the wagon, can no longer be established with certainty (Egg and France-Lanord 1987:57).

Items found with the bronze *krater* and its cover include an Attic 'Droop' cup (a *kylix*), a silver bowl (a *phiale*), an imported black burnished bowl, and a bronze pitcher (*oenochoe*). Two bronze bowls – one, with handles, measuring 36 cm in diameter, and the other, without handles, but with interlace decoration around its rim, measuring 57 cm in diameter – were found to the south of the *krater*, against the western wall. A 480 g gold diadem or torc was found in association with the cranium. Other artefacts found amongst the human remains and wagon parts include a 27 cm diameter rolled bronze ring, which had originally been wrapped with leather. Two bronze rings are interpreted as anklets. Three schist rings and a fourth of amber beads threaded on a thin bronze polygonal band are thought to have adorned each wrist and forearm. Seven fibulae, two of iron and five of bronze with coral and amber inlays, probably adorned garments. Five amber beads, just mentioned, and ranging in size from 1.7 to 4.6 cm in diameter, probably formed a necklace.

ICONOGRAPHY

The torc

The great gold torc has no known parallel in Greek, Etruscan, or Gaulish material (Joffroy 1979), but its imagery has links with that on the *krater*. These links suggest that these items were selected intentionally, rather than being associated by chance (*contra* Kristiansen 1998). The terminals of the torc bear images of Pegasus, the winged horse, and a lion's paws. Picard (1955; see also Joffroy 1979:84) suggests that the rounded terminal ends resemble the seed-heads of poppies (*Papaver somniferum* L.), similar to the ones depicted with the Cretan goddess, Gazi, a symbol he identifies with pre-Mycenean beliefs. In classical Greek art Demeter, goddess of the harvest, is often depicted holding poppy seed-heads. The

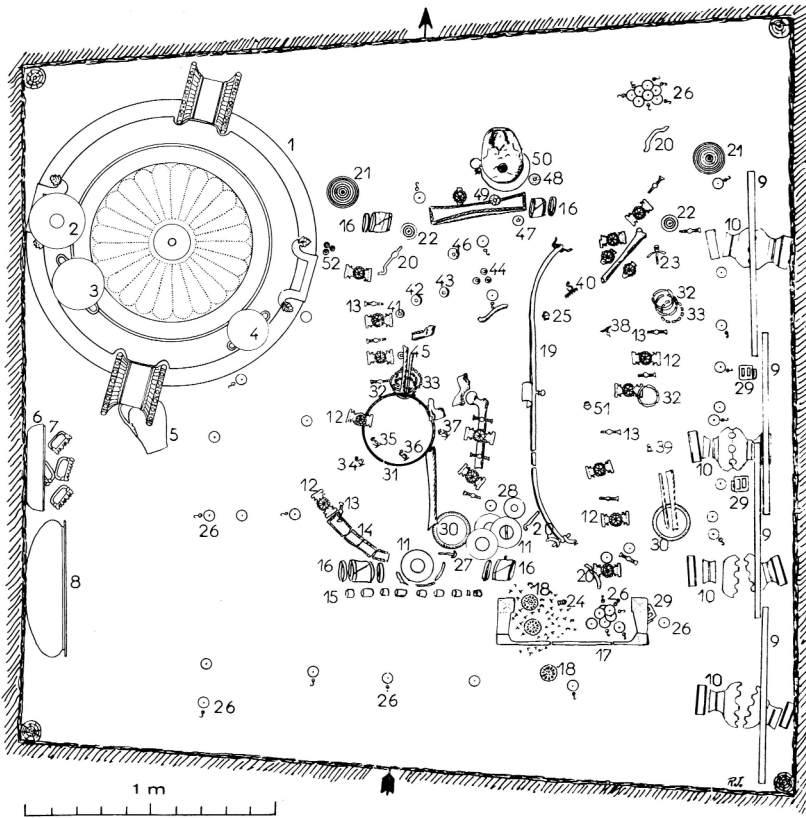


Figure 3. Plan of the Vix burial (Source: Egg and France-Lanord 1987: Fig. 2B, 3). Vix, 1958 plan: 1 bronze krater; 2 silver phiale with gilded omphalos; 3 Attic black-figured 'Droop Cup' or kylix; 4 Attic black cup; 5 bronze oenochoe; 6-7 two-handed bronze basins; 8 bronze basin without handles; 9 four iron wheel rims; 10 wheel bosses; 11 axle caps; 12 bronze openwork decorative plaques; 13 small bronze balusters (decoration of the sides of the wagon); 14 embossed bronze sheet; 15 cylindrical bronze fittings for axles; 16 cylindrical bronze sheet wagon fittings (position uncertain); 17 sheet bronze components of the wagon box; 18 bronze rosettes from the wagon box; 19 long iron object (associated with the wagon parts); 20 bent iron rods; 21 large bronze fluted discs (phalerae); 22 small bronze fluted discs (phalerae); 23-24 bronze profiled knobs, one (23) with a curved piece of bronze sheet and an iron nail with remains of wood attached; 24 decorative nails with bronze sleeves; 25 bronze button (beads?); 26 small bronze knobs with hooks; 27 linchpin; 28 bronze axle caps from the pole axle; 29 bronze felloe clamps; 30 hollow bronze anklets; 31 'belt'; 32 pair of schist bracelets; 33 pair of bronze sheet bracelets with amber beads; 34-40 fibulae; 41-45 amber beads; 46-49 diorite stone beads; 50 gold torc (Joffroy's 'diadem'); 51 spherical bronze terminal fitting; 52 bronze rings. This translation has been made with the aid of Pare's (1992:231-233) description of the contents of the Vix tumulus. However, it should be made clear that many of these are not identifications but interpretations of the objects' functions based on analogies drawn from the Greek and Etruscan regions or from unstated sources. The 'belt' or 'ceinture', for example, is likely not an object that would have been worn at the waist (see text).

association of the poppy with Pegasus, the symbol of transport to the hereafter, suggests to Picard that these are funerary symbols linked to transport to the other world. Wherever the winged horse's hooves left a print a fountain would form, draughts from which conferred poetic abilities on those that drank the liquid (Saunders 1995). The ability to create songs and poetry and the importance of oratory are admired features worldwide and are well-attested attributes of Eurasian ritualists, who are often the keepers and transmitters of oral tradition (Hoppál 1992a:128). Joffroy (1979) notes that this representation of the winged horse owes its inspiration to the wild Przewalski's horses of the steppe, which once lived throughout the vast plains of western and central Asia (Bökönyi 1980). Pauli (1981:205) notes that objects from exotic or faraway places may often have been attributed magical and amuletic properties in Iron Age contexts. Exotic symbols that combine images of distant places, the harvest and the hereafter, and are suggestive of the potential social roles of the deceased.

Arnold (1995) believes that in the late Hallstatt and early La Tène period, torcs indicated high status and power. Torcs are associated with both males and females from the early Bronze Age in nearby areas, as in the Haguenau Forest, Alsace (Schaeffer 1926:229). Torcs also adorn statues in sanctuaries, as in the sanctuary at Vix itself and at Entremont in Provence (Benôit 1975:251). Bergquist and Taylor (1987) note that both males and females are depicted wearing torcs on the Gundestrup cauldron, which they date to around the fourth century BC. This seems ample evidence to associate the wearing of torcs with both males and females and a ritual significance rather than one that is exclusively related to the gender of the individual.

The krater and vessels

The bronze *krater* from Vix is the largest yet discovered, measuring 1.64 m in height and 1.27 m at its maximum diameter. The cover measures 1.02 m in diameter. Other *kraters* average between 65 and 70 cm in height and include examples from as far east as Yekatrinnburg, Russia. Most, however, have been found in Italy, the former Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey (Joffroy 1979). The Vix *krater* was made from a single piece of bronze by the 'lost wax method' of casting from single generation moulds, with walls between 1 and 1.5 mm in thickness. Its gorgon-adorned handles differ in weight by a little more than half a kilogram, weighing 45.6 and 46.15 kg, respectively, each being 55.5 cm in height. The capacity of the *krater*, some 1150 l if filled to the brim, is the equivalent of c. 1500 modern bottles of wine. The Vix burial is unique among those accompanied by a *krater* in that it contains this object but no warrior accoutrements. Others, such as those from tombs I and II at Trebeniste, contain helmets and gold masks (Palavestra 1994), while that from the village of Mostanoch, near Yekatrinnburg, Russia, contained four iron lances and 28 bronze projectile points, as well as horse gear (Joffroy 1979). Megaw (1966) believes that the *krater* was already old when deposited and notes that *kraters* and pitchers northwest of the Alps during the Hallstatt period were deposited in ritual contexts. Thus the *krater* may have performed ceremonial

functions for some time before it was deposited at Vix, and the apparent avoidance of weapon deposition places the Vix interment in contrast to others that include *kraters*.

Within the centre of the *krater* cover stands a 19 cm high statuette that is unique among Iron Age finds. Joffroy (1979) argues that it may represent a *kore*, or a divinity, perhaps Artemis, the protector and provider of nourishment for war and racehorses. In appearance it bears a resemblance to the Kore of Greek or Etruscan statuary (e.g. Richardson 1966: Plate 14). A close parallel for the figurine comes from the Boccanera Plaques (Fig. 4), which depict the Judgement of Paris (McNamara 1990:34). These panels were found in the Cerveteri cemetery in Etruria and date from c. 650–550 BC, making these images contemporary with the figurine from Vix. The goddess Athena is portrayed in one of these panels with her hands



Figure 4. Detail from the Boccanera Plaques, which depict the Judgement of Paris (Source: McNamara 1990:34). The figure holding a spear and a gold ring is interpreted as the goddess Athena. These panels were found in the Cerveteri cemetery in Etruria and date from c. 650–550 BC and are thus considered contemporary with the figure from the cover of the Vix krater. © The British Museum, British Museum Press.

positioned as a mirror image to those of the figurine. In her lowered left hand the goddess holds a gold-coloured ring, while her right hand is raised and holds a spear. Athena appears as part of a ceremonial event in which Paris is depicted in the garb of a priest (McNamara 1990).

Another similar depiction of females comes from a tin bronze bucket or *situla* from the Slovenian site of Vače, again in a sixth to fifth century BC context (Fig. 5). Pauli (1981:188–190, Plate 101) interprets these scenes as related to a ‘great festival’ involving shows of masculine physical and sporting prowess. The females in these scenes wear long veils over their heads, attire similar to the statuette on the cover of the Vix *krater*. They carry small bowls in their left hands, possibly *phiales*, like that found amongst the objects in the Vix tumulus. Their right hands are raised, in one case holding what appears to be a ladle to the seated figure. This attitude is similar (one hand raised, one hand lowered) to the pose of the statuette on the *krater* cover. Pauli identifies these females as servants (*Dienerinnen*). An alternative interpretation would be that these female figures participate in a ceremony in which a liquid held in bowls, ladles, and buckets played a part. These females may be servants in the same sense as a Christian priest when performing a mass, who becomes a figurative servant of God.

The imported objects in the Vix tumulus have elaborate images, many of which are known to us through classical writings. Kristiansen (1998:252) accepts that the objects like the *krater*, *phiale* and *kylix* found in the Vix tumulus formed sets that functioned together, but denies a similar relationship for the images. Although these images may not have been understood in a classical sense, it is possible that the figures did have meaning within an indigenous context, especially among peoples who had become accustomed to objects and comestibles from the Mediterranean world. Moreover, a unique torc, one from a class of objects that apparently formed a hallmark of indigenous central European peoples – whether made by an indigenous hand or not – bears an image of a winged horse known from Greek myth. That the torc occurs in the same context as imported Mediterranean objects, which themselves derive from the same mythological cycle, suggests that this relationship was not entirely lost on those that used and eventually interred them. These images were not selected for aesthetic value or ‘lifestyle’ reasons alone, but because those people who selected the objects for burial probably understood a story behind the images and the epic victory they foretold – at its least elaborated form, a victory over evil.

A series of male Greek warriors decorates the neck of the *krater* and the Attic bowl. The only female images are gorgons on the *krater* and Amazons on the Attic bowl – both categories comprising females of formidable magical ability, physical prowess, and potential for harm. According to legend, Medusa, whose gaze turned onlookers to stone, was one of three gorgons who were symbols of punishment. After Perseus slew the Medusa, the warrior Chrysaor and the winged horse Pegasus sprang from her lifeless body (Graves 1981:69). In recognition of the aid received from the goddess Athena in this endeavour, Perseus presented the Medusa’s head to her, and the goddess attached it to her shield (Graves 1981:71). The image of the Medusa’s head appeared on Greek shields to frighten enemies

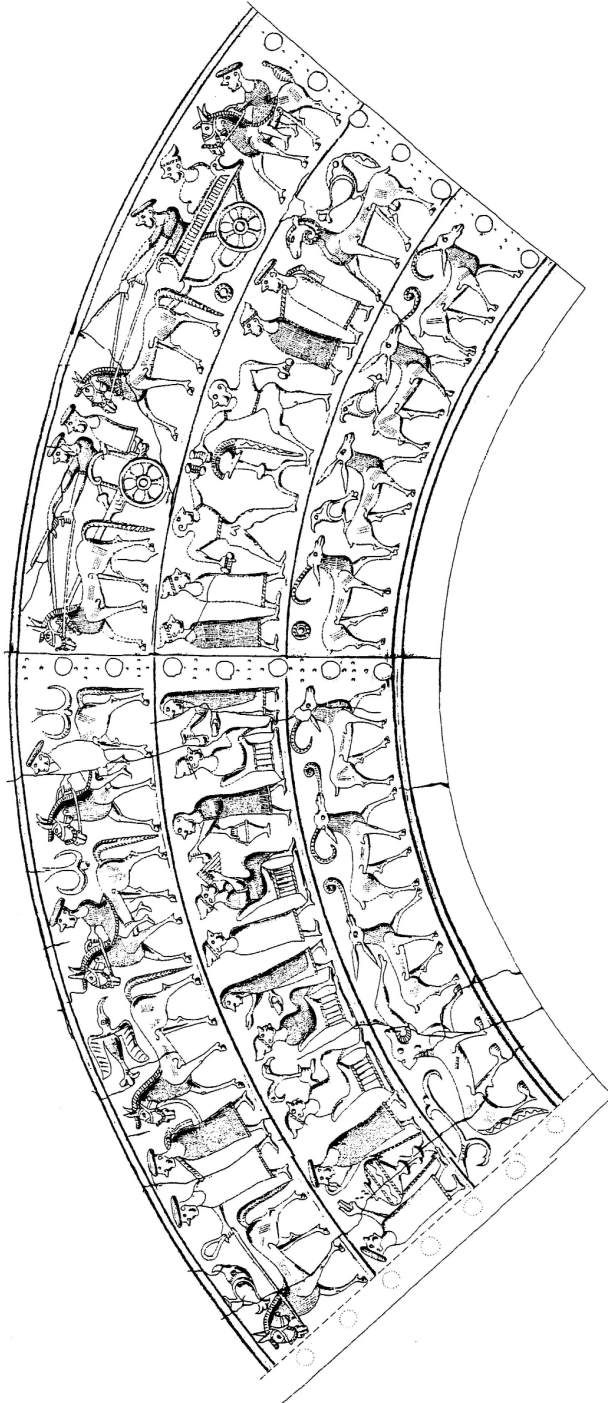


Figure 5. Detail from the bucket or situla from Vače, Slovenia, found in a sixth century BC context. The female figures depicted bear a strong resemblance to the figurine atop the cover of the Vix krater. (Source: Lucke and Frey 1962: Plate 72).

and ward off evil spirits (Grant 1989:396–397). This image's placement on the *krater*, then, may have had a similar intent – to protect the objects and those using them from harm and to frighten onlookers. The association of warriors, like Chrysaor, with Pegasus and the Medusa may not, then, be an accidental one.

The amber beads associated with the burial can be interpreted to have had amuletic properties that could have similarly protected the wearer from evil (Pauli 1975, see also 1981; Meaney 1981, for interpretation of later occurrences). Amber is most often found as a grave inclusion in the graves of women and children as at Dürrnberg bei Hallein (Pauli 1975:16–17). The snakes wrapped around the handles of the *krater* could symbolize healing, fecundity, regeneration, and death, which are common attributes of central and southern European female divinities (Green 1995:169–171). The *krater* combines this female snake imagery with that of lions, associates of heroes such as Herakles, and symbolic of strength and power (Graves 1981:150–154).

The metal ring

Recent writers have displayed the metal ring of rolled bronze as worn at the waist (see Spindler 1983:330; Arnold 1991). The small diameter of the ring (27 cm external diameter), however, would have made it difficult to pass over the shoulders and hips, thus preventing it being worn at the waist. Moreover, it does not appear to have been found around the *ossa coxae* (see Fig. 3). It is possible that, rather than being a part of personal attire, this object was held in the hand as in the representation of Athena discussed above. In addition to this enigmatic object, Joffroy (1979:86) notes another object with an uncertain identification. He describes a small bronze hollow sphere mounted on a chain, decorated with thin lines ('filets') and billows ('tores'), possibly attached to a wooden handle by a small nail that was still in place upon discovery. He identifies this as a pommel from a sceptre or a 'fouet', a 'whip' or 'whisk'. The combination of this object with the metal ring suggests affinities with the drum and drumstick, also called a 'whip', of more recent Eurasian ritual specialists (Djakonova 1978). Even if one eschews this interpretation, it seems likely that these objects had significance beyond that of personal ornamentation.

The wagon

The body was placed in the bed of a four-wheeled wagon. No harness fittings, yoke, draught-pole or beam were found, which Egg and France-Lanord (1987:5) concede may have been removed with a draught animal after the wagon had been taken to the site. According to Joffroy (1983), this was a hand-pulled wagon, although Pare (1989:81) believes that similar wagons were generally horse-drawn. It is likely that these wagons were intended for ceremonial use due to their small size and ground-hugging construction that gave the bed only 50 cm of clearance (see Pare 1989). Ceremonial functions could have included their use as a conveyance in a ritual procession for a deity as part of a festive re-enactment of a myth or legend, as a bier in funerary processions, or as a sign of elevated status, or

a combination of all of these (Pare 1989). Ultimately, Pare interprets them as objects of display and as a status symbol of a dominant, warlike social group. In the case of Vix and other wagon graves from the period, the wagons are oriented such that the beam points south, which Pare believes played an important part in funerary imagery. These wagons were used over a period of several hundred years from the beginning of Hallstatt CI (Pare 1991), so that if they were used for processing, individuals may have recognized their association with death, death imagery and travel. At Vix, as in other instances, the last use of this wagon was as a bier. Dismantled wheels are the rule in Burgundian wagon burials (Joffroy 1958:77); this procedure essentially disables the wagon and would prevent its further use as a conveyance.

Tacitus (*Germania* 40) records a ceremony current in the first century AD among the Langobardi and neighbouring tribes, which involves a cart-borne priestess, an officiating priest, and the worship of Nerthus or 'Mother Earth'. Apparently, a representation of Nerthus partook in rituals and human affairs while riding in a chariot that required ritual cleansing in a sacred grove after use. Tacitus (*Germania* 10) also relates that chiefs walked beside a sacred chariot pulled by horses, monitoring the animals' neighs and snorts. Horses, he tells us, were believed to be innately endowed with knowledge of the counsels of the gods. In these instances, the priest and chief appear to have shared the duties of an intermediary between the populace and the divine.

Archaeological evidence for similar processional carts exists in the form of models from contemporary contexts. A wheeled cart from a cremation grave at Strettweg, near Judenburg in Styria, is of Hallstatt date, although attributed to an earlier time (seventh century BC) than the Vix burial. The central figure on the cart is a slender female (identified by her breasts and vulva), wearing only earrings and a belt, who carries a bowl on her head. This image is often described as that of a 'goddess' (Schutz 1983:223). The cart also includes males carrying arms, mounted males bearing shields and weapons, and two female figures each leading a stag by the antlers. Males here are identified with weapons while females are not, although the central female figure dwarfs the smaller male and female figures. If these are indeed representational, then females played prominent roles in this ceremony.

THE ANATOMY OF THE VIX BURIAL

The good preservation of the grave goods stands in contrast to that of the human remains. The axial remains include a nearly complete, but fragmentary, cranium; a nearly full dentition; and the atlas and lumbar vertebrae 4 and 5, along with a partially complete sacrum. The pectoral girdle and upper limbs are represented by a fragmentary right clavicle, the proximal portions of the left humerus, and portions of the ulna from the same side. The pelvic girdle and lower limbs consist of large portions of both *ossa coxae*, although they lack the *ossa pubes*, and the diaphysis of the right femur and a fragmentary tibia from the same side. The left lower limb is nearly complete, though it is abraded and fragmentary, including the femur, tibia and fibula and the left talus, in addition to a few other smaller

fragments. Joffroy (1983) describes the human remains as having suffered damage from the collapse of the grave, as well as from water seeping into it over time, the grave being located in marshy ground beside the river.

The rather incomplete and fragmentary nature of the human remains has contributed to varying and ambiguous assessments of them since their discovery. Joffroy identifies the relatively complete cranium as that of a female, aged about 30 years of age at death. Dastugue (in Joffroy 1979:95–96) identifies the remains of those of a young woman. This female assessment also accords with that of Langlois (1987).

Sauter's (1980) rigorous re-analysis of the remains produced an indeterminate sex assessment, which seems to have influenced some more recent interpretations of the remains (see Spindler 1983, for example). Sauter (1980) noted that the cranium was most like that of the Bronze and Neolithic populations of Germany and northern Italy (Savoy and High Savoy), in other words 'hyperdolichocranic' or very long-headed, the opposite of Joffroy's assessment which suggested a 'Celtic' origin (usually considered to be brachycranial). Sauter noted, however, that the morphology of the Vix cranium deviated from the morphology of the small number of cranial remains surviving from the Hallstatt period. The cranial vault is low – that is, plagiocephalic, narrow in its breadth, and noticeably asymmetrical when viewed in *norma verticalis* (i.e. from above) – with a twisting to the left side (Fig. 6). The presence of this asymmetry and a patent metopic suture suggest that anomalous growth has affected the morphology of the vault. The metopic or interfrontal suture normally fuses sometime in the first two years of life (Krogman and Iscan 1986:119). When it remains open it allows appositional growth of the two halves of the frontal, which can contribute to a broadening of the forehead.

Sauter's (1980) analysis of the sexually dimorphic features reveals indeterminate features in both the cranium and pelvis. His male indicators are associated with robusticity of the nuchal musculature and the *linea aspera* of the femora, and rugosity of the malars and supra-orbital border. In general, however, the remains are very gracile (pers. obs.), a feature that would suggest a female. Other features that suggest a female assignation include small mastoid processes and the rounded curvature of the occipital. The complete left orbit has a rectangular shape with a drooping lateral margin like that found in males, however. The greater sciatic notches of the pelvis are oddly shaped, falling between the wide U-shape of females and the narrower V-shape of males, but they are also asymmetrical, with the left being wider than the right. The asymmetries noted in both the cranium and pelvis suggest anomalous development.

The cranium has a number of other features that suggest a female assessment, in addition to those noted by Sauter (1980). These include a relatively high frontal and frontal bossing, a triangular mental tubercle, a relatively narrow breadth of the ascending ramus, and a reduced height of the mandibular symphysis. The cranium also possesses a small and parabolic palate, shallow digastric fossae, supra-orbital ridges that are placed centrally, well-developed parietal bossing, and a supra-meatal crest that does not extend beyond the external auditory meatus. These features suggest that these remains are those of a female. Anomalous

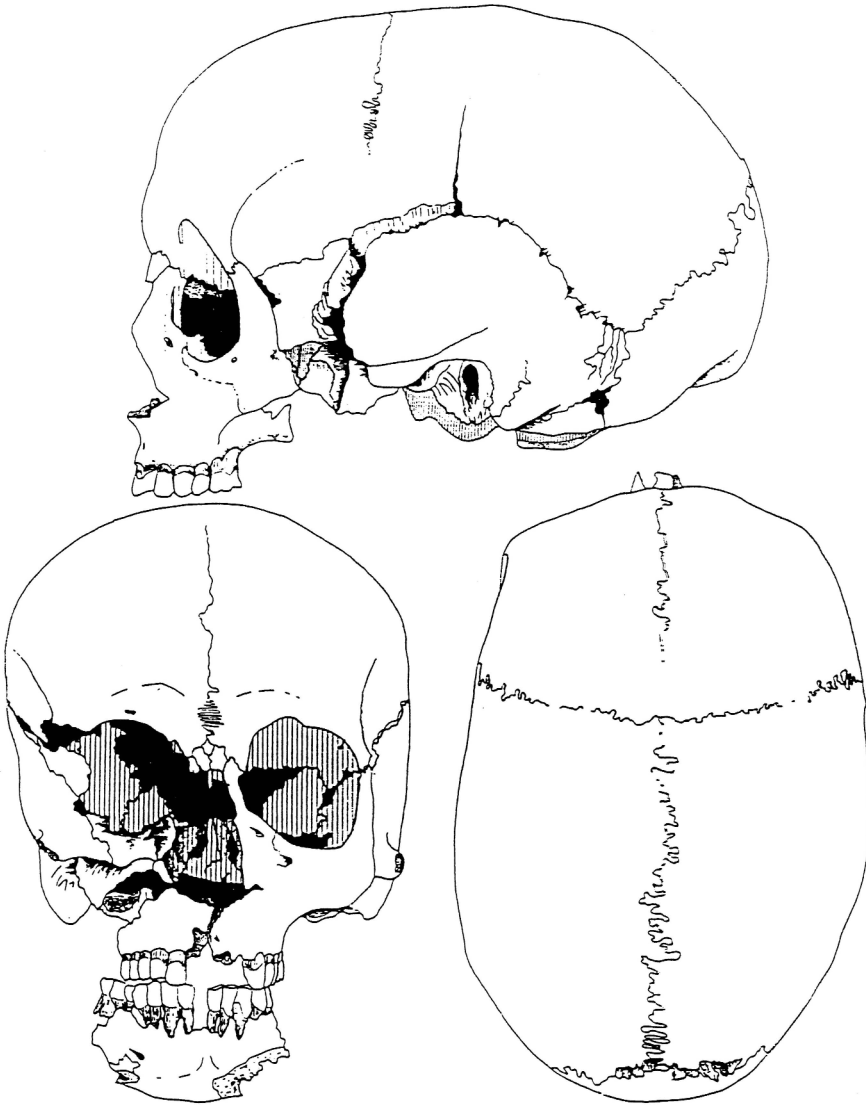


Figure 6. Norma lateralis (uppermost), Norma facialis (lower left), and Norma verticalis (lower right) views of the reconstructed Vix cranial remains (Source: Sauter 1980: Fig. 1, p. 91). © Masson Editeur.

developmental processes can account for many of the features that are male in appearance (see later).

Using a variety of methods, Langlois (n.d.) estimated the stature of the individual at 160 ± 6.5 cm. The partial left femoral diaphysis measures 43.5 cm (this analysis). Using the regression equations of Trotter and Gleser (in Krogman and

Iscan 1986) for white females, a stature of 161.545 cm is obtained. Using Tellka's (cited in Krogman and Iscan 1986:153) proportional relations between femoral length and stature, a height of 160 cm is achieved. Those provided by formulae from several published sources (Krogman and Iscan 1986:314) produce a figure of 159.86 cm. Therefore, a stature in the vicinity of 160 cm seems well substantiated.

Sauter (1980) estimated an age at death of roughly 40 ± 5 years, based largely on unpublished methods developed by Castro e Almeida and Masset and studies of the cranial suture closure and trabecular structure of the long bones by Acsadi and Nemeskeri (1970, cited in Sauter 1980). Langlois (1987) believes the remains are those of a female of 35 years with a range from 33 to 37 years at death. He based this estimate on Gustafson's dental root transparency method, which as Langlois' figure 276 indicates, places the age at death at 37 years plus. A pooled mean estimate of Langlois' results made using the Gustafson method on the transparency scores provides a mean estimate of 29.56 ± 5.62 years of age at death with a range of between 18.32 and 40.8 years (D. Lucy pers. comm.). As the basal synchondrosis is fused and this change normally occurs between the ages of 20 and 25 years with a central tendency of 23 years (Krogman and Iscan 1986: 107–108), the lower estimate can be dismissed. Ectocranial suture closure provides a mean of 39.4 ± 9.1 , while the anterior suture sites give a figure of 36.2 ± 6.2 (this study). The auricular surfaces provide estimates of phase 5 (left side) and phase 6 (right side). This age estimation technique was not available when Langlois and Sauter prepared their reports, and it provides for an estimate in the forties – that is, at the upper end of the range provided by the other methods. The right auricular area is very unusual. The margins surrounding the surface are extremely rounded and the usual plateau upon which the surface sits is reduced such that the plane of the surface is nearly equal to that of the inferior portion of the ilium below the arcuate line. This is probably the result of dysplastic changes that affected the acetabulo-femoral joint (see later).

Taken together, these techniques suggest an age at death assessment in excess of 35 years but not much greater than 40 years. The presence of an abscess of the lower right second premolar (P4) and evidence of periodontal disease would seem to support an older age at death. Hillson (1996:263) notes that periodontal disease usually commences after the age of 30 years. In support of this assessment Langlois' radiographic examination of the trabecular structure of the long bones demonstrated that they are not very dense, which again would indicate an older individual. He notes 'Le transparence osseuse est exagéré, phenomene plus marqué chez la femme' (1987:215), perhaps in reference to osteoporotic bone tissue. The lack of dental wear in this individual is anomalous and would support a younger age at death, but this notable lack of wear may relate to the ingestion of a highly refined diet (cf. Langlois 1987).

In summary, the remains appear to be those of a female with certain androgynous skeletal traits that are especially prominent in the region of the orbits. Any craniometric assessment would be greatly affected by the growth anomalies noted. In osteological terms she is considered a middle-aged adult. Sauter (1980:Fig. 4) noted a round lesion in the vicinity of the attachment for the

ligamentum nuchae, which indicates trauma to this enthesis. Dastugue (Joffroy 1979:95–96) noted two anomalies within the remains, asymmetrical development of the cranium and atlas and bilateral subluxation (partial dislocation) of the hips, producing osteoarthritis of the sacro-iliac joint and of the preserved segments of the lumbar vertebral column. The presence of bilateral subluxation would account for the joint surface changes noted in the sacro-iliac joint (mentioned earlier).

The cranium is noticeably asymmetrical with the right mastoid process much more robustly constructed than the left. Therefore, *M. sternomastoid*, which draws its attachment from the mastoid process, was not as active on the left side as it was on the right side (Fig. 7). A smaller mandibular fossa on the left side also suggests that the masticatory muscles were less well-developed on this side. Growth of the mandibular condyle, which transmits forces through the mandibular fossa, is directly affected by functional alterations in the masticatory musculature (Kiliaridis 1995). Abnormal growth is also attested by an abnormally deviated left mandibular condyle and ascending ramus (Fig. 8). This asymmetry and the twisting of the cranial vault towards the left is consistent with a case of muscular torticollis ('wry neck') as the head is pulled to one side by the normally developed muscles that contract in an unopposed fashion. As Lane (1886:391) notes: 'In torticollis occurring at an early period of life, we see what appears to be an atrophic or a less developed condition of the head and face on the affected side.' This condition could also account for the unusual appearance of the left orbit. Skinner et al. (1989: Table 1) reviewed a variety of cranial changes associated with muscular torticollis, some of which can also be discerned in the Vix remains, including plagiocephaly (Fig. 6), an enlarged mastoid process (Fig. 7), facial asymmetry, especially noted in the supra-orbital region (Fig. 6), a dropped orbit (Fig. 6), and a bulge on the occipital of the affected side (Figs 6 and 8), in addition to twisting of the cranial base (Figs 7 and 8). Since muscular dysfunction influences morphology, it is probable that the unusual appearance of the cranium is the result. Linear hypoplastic defects in the dental enamel of the teeth support the notion that the early years of this individual were ones characterized by health insults that affected growth and development.

Muscular torticollis frequently occurs in conjunction with hip dysplasia and both can relate to a breech birth (Aufderheide and Rodríguez-Martin 1998). Hip dysplasia is produced when the femoral head is displaced from an abnormally or incompletely formed acetabulum. A bilateral condition would have produced a waddling type of gait due to the instability produced by a constant slipping of the femoral heads from the acetabula (Aston 1976). This type of disorder is eight times more common in females with frequencies fluctuating between 1 and 15–20 per 1000 live births today (Aufderheide and Rodríguez-Martin 1998). One-third of those who have an abnormality in one hip possess an abnormality of the opposite hip as well (Dandy 1993). Dandy (1993:346) notes that only those individuals with a bilateral condition can lead an ordinary life, although their waddling walk is not efficient from a biomechanical perspective.

To summarize the palaeopathological analysis of the remains, this individual would have had a waddling gait and held her head tilted to the right side. These

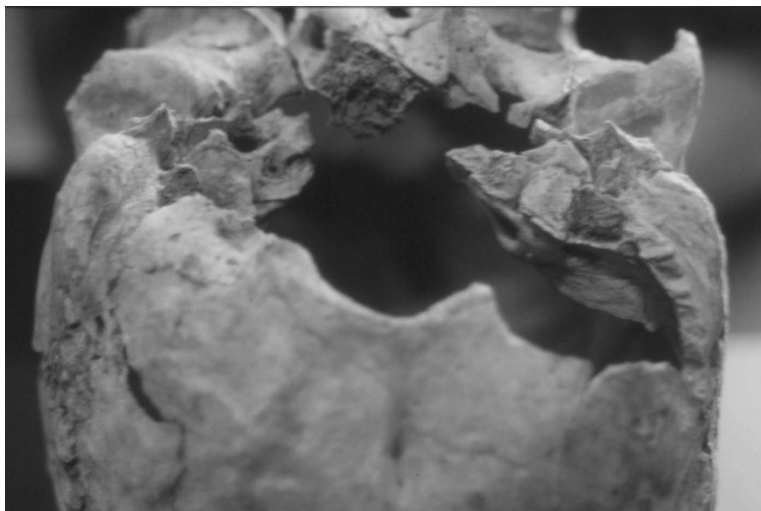


Figure 7. Basilar view of the Vix cranium. Note the disparity in the size of the mastoid processes and twisting of the cranial base (Source: author).

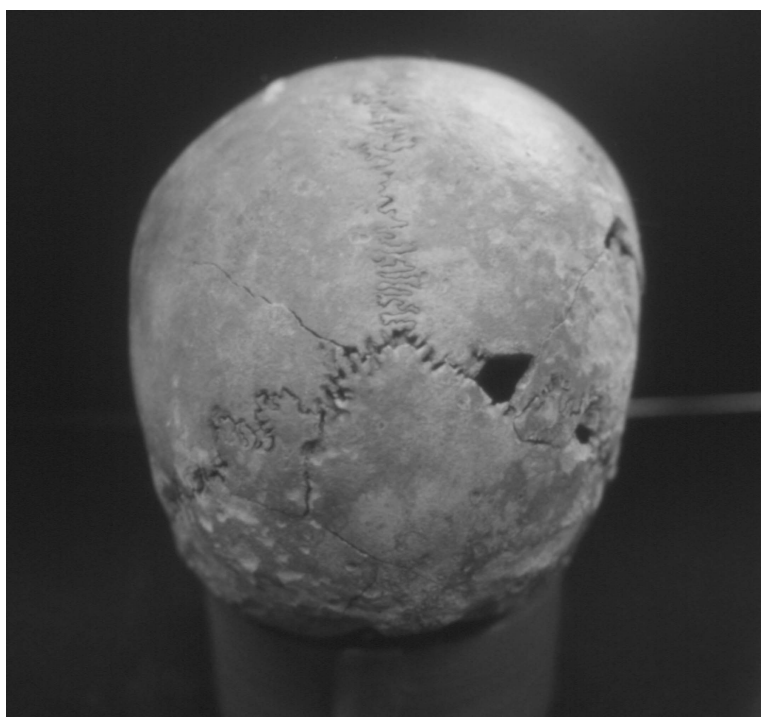


Figure 8. Norma occipitalis view of the Vix cranium. Note the bulging of the left side when compared with the right side. Twisting of the nuchal area is also apparent in this view by noting the 'off centre' appearance of the external occipital protuberance (Source: author).

congenital conditions, coupled with episodes of childhood stress, would have made her unusual. There is no indication of cause or manner of death, which probably means that she died of natural causes.

SOCIAL ACTORS AND SOCIAL OBJECTS – THE ‘PRINCESS’ AS A RITUALIST

The association of powerful objects with interred individuals in later European prehistory allows us to address the question of what sort of individual may have wielded power in the past and how these individuals changed through time. It also promises to provide insights into the means by which such individuals achieved and maintained their pre-eminence within their societies. Often these burials are demonstrably those of males interred with weapons and ritual drinking or feasting equipment (e.g. Hochdorf: Biel 1982). Only the ‘atypical’ Vix burial contains both an elaborate set of drinking equipment and a unique gold torc, a symbol of a pre-eminent status. This combination leads Arnold (1995) to associate the Vix burial with the drinking and competitive feasting complex that appears to have been at the heart of the Iron Age political economy (Dietler 1990).

Objects and their symbolic associations are viewed as the instruments of knowledge and communication that support and reaffirm the social order and may disguise personal interests and present them as those of the group as a whole (Bourdieu 1977). Symbols can thus be viewed to have a predominantly social function when used in the course of ceremonies. Ritual practice is a process by which relations are renewed among individuals who occupy positions in the social structure (Turner 1995). Objects can be used to represent and reinforce these social relations within societies and with neighbouring ones. Herodotus reports, for example, that a *krater* was presented as a gift by Lacedemonians to King Croesus of Lydia as a gift to seal an alliance between them (*Histories*, Book I, 70).

The uniqueness of the interred objects at Vix is matched by the uniqueness of the interred individual. Her diminutive size, unusual gait and twisted face, reminders of a difficult birth, may have complemented the symbolism of the objects and their use in ritual. A recurrent theme in the literature on ritual specialists is that they often undergo self-healing of a disability, eventually overcoming it, and thus acquiring the ability to cure others (Eliade 1964:215ff.). Illness is considered to be necessary for initiation and, importantly, an index of powers, ritualists often curing themselves or being cured by other ritualists before doing so for others (Hugh-Jones 1996:51). Rather than being seen as disabilities, it may be that the physical appearance of the ‘Princess’ played a part in her unique status and pre-eminence.

Ritualists perform public ceremonies that involve the wearing of distinctive costumes and the use of a variety of objects. Possession of these objects by some is more compelling than it is for others. Objects become important in the hands of someone who not only possesses them but also knows how, when, and under what circumstances to use them. Personal qualities provide for the importance of objects, sometimes even contributing an animating significance to them far greater than their physical presence might otherwise hold. In the hands of the ritualist some

objects of apparently more mundane function become powerful or take on added significance. Thus the 'qullaq', a wooden spoon or latchlifter, becomes the Siberian shaman's 'whip' because of its role in spurring the 'horse', the drum or tambourine (Djakonova 1978). Lvova (1978) notes the spoon's function in the healing séance. It is used to stir food from which evil spirits are fed, and also plays a part in a divination rite in which the spoon was thrown over the shaman's shoulder and, if landing bottom up, indicated that the patient would be cured. In another context the same or similar objects would be employed in everyday tasks. The same could be said of the Christian prelate's crosier, which is inspired by the simple shepherd's crook or walking staff of the Apostles, but became a symbol of authority and jurisdiction in the hands of high ecclesiastics (Ferguson 1961:164). These symbolic uses are not so much indicated by the things themselves as by the person who wields them in the context of a particular event.

The inclusion of a woman with depictions of warriors, the exploits of heroes, virtue, wisdom, death, and the world of the dead may provide a clue to her social role. Given the capacity of the *krater* and the attested relationship between alcohol and warfare, part of her role may have involved the mobilization of people to undertake large-scale projects – like the building and maintenance of hillforts – and the preparations for warfare when death for some was imminent. Prior to the widespread cultivation of the vine, wine formed the focus of exchange for nearly two centuries in Gaul (Dietler 1990; 1995). Wine became the drink of warriors, perhaps replacing or complementing other such beverages. The procession on the *krater* may be symbolic of the connection between this intoxicant and the manipulation of warriors. That the symbols include animals, such as lions, thought to represent aspects of warrior prowess, adds further support to this argument. The imagery of the objects, in combination with drunkenness, may have incited the warriors to forego a desire for personal preservation in order to attain social prestige connected with the exploits and spoils of battle. The representation of Pegasus, which also occurs on the torc with that of the poppy, the source of a powerful hallucinogen, could also embody a notion of celestial or soul flight. Throughout much of Eurasia, there are traditions of horses providing the means by which to travel to the spirit realm (Piggott 1962; Eliade 1964; Anthony et al. 1991).

An alternative suggestion for the contents of the *krater* is provided by Strabo in his *Geography* when he describes priestesses of the Cimbri, who were seers that accompanied men and their wives on expeditions. He writes:

these were grey-haired, clad in white, with flaxen cloaks fastened with girdles of bronze, and bare-footed; now sword in hand, these priestesses would meet with the prisoners of war throughout the camp, and having first crowned them with wreaths would lead them to a brazen vessel of about twenty amphorae; and they had a raised platform which the priestess would mount, and then, bending over the kettle, would cut the throat of each prisoner after he had been lifted up; and from the blood that poured forth into the vessel some of the priestesses would draw a prophecy. (Book 7:2.3)

Green (1998) argues that some of the Iron Age cauldrons may have been used in this fashion. Thus an object associated with consumption of wine may have had a more gruesome function when transported to northern and central Europe. The image of an individual apparently being thrust under water on the Gundestrup cauldron may be an example of the occurrence of such a rite. The absence of a sword in the Vix tumulus with what is interpreted as a drinking set does not appear to endorse the scene described by Strabo, although residue analysis might reveal the nature of the *krater's* contents.

The absence of weapons in the burial at Vix is undoubtedly significant, however. Ritualists rarely employ weapons and are actively discouraged from doing so in a number of European societies. Medieval prelates were discouraged from bearing arms such as swords and knives (Heath 1969:108), and Bede's Anglo-Saxon 'Chief Priest' (*primus pontificum*), Coifi, was apparently not allowed to carry weapons (Book II.13:126–127). Among the objects associated with Siberian shamans are none that are identifiable as weapons, although shamans are considered to have control of and to use magic in the form of unseen projectiles that cause illness (see Eliade 1964:364; Vitebsky 1995:50, 110–111). During the cart ceremony, mentioned previously, Tacitus emphasizes that weapons were put aside, no one went to war, and even iron objects were put away. During this observance, a prominent female celebrant, herself without weapons, may have been able to control warriors and their weapons.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERMENTS AND GENDER

The assumption that grave assemblages are tightly associated with gender in the absence of a sex assessment of the associated human remains is to engage in an unfortunate tautology that may be responsible for disguising social roles in past societies. Both males and females can be expected to have served in ritual roles, as they have in more recent societies. Moreover, some of these individuals could have achieved pre-eminence among others performing similar roles on a household, village, or regional scale. The relative importance of these individuals would be reflected in the number and grandeur of objects available to them in the performance of their roles, although they would share features that make them an identifiable group within society. It is unlikely that all objects interred with the deceased are sex-linked; some may relate to another aspect of the dead (see also Knüsel and Ripley 2000). Although the interment lacks weapons, there is little unambiguously feminine equipment with the Vix individual. Brooches, bracelets, and pins are found with both males and females during the period. Arnold (1991) argues that a pair of anklets is the most compelling evidence to suggest that the burial is that of a woman. One of these was found in the vicinity of the more complete left tibia, while the other occurred distal to the displaced right femur (Fig. 3).

As Roscoe (1994) notes, gender categories not only provide models of difference but also models for difference. 'They convey gender-specific social expectations for behaviour and temperament, sexuality, kinship and interpersonal roles,

occupations, religious roles and other social patterns' (Roscoe 1994:342). Women who adopt trappings of authority, wealth, and power become anomalies that are explained by reference to men in societies that emphasize masculine dominance. Women become wives, mothers, concubines, 'honorary males', princesses, objects of ritual suttee or, at best, a benign 'priestess' – more Cassandra than Circe. Their social importance is often viewed as an aspect of dominant male aspirations, and their social influence covert rather than overt. This tendency is, no doubt, due to the generally patristic nature of state-level societies – of both yesterday and today – that emphasize male associations with power, authority, and pre-eminent wealth. In other societies, though, these equations may not hold.

Since our view of Iron Age society is greatly influenced by the earliest written descriptions, we are left with reports of only what these non-indigenous writers considered important. There are, apparently, few women or children in them. The descriptions can, at best, be seen as caricatures and, at worst, as the product of a desire to demonize and dehumanize Gallic society in a contact situation that was replete with hostilities and atrocities. Despite the lack of detailed descriptions of females in Gallic society, they and children no doubt numbered among the dead after Caesar's onslaughts. Classical descriptions of male warriors (e.g. Diodorus Siculus Book 28: lines 1–4) do not anticipate the evidence provided by the Vix interment. At 160 cm tall, the Princess is shorter than the *krater* (see also Spindler 1983:330 Plate 82). The reconstructed length of the bed of the wagon is 1.59 m (Egg and France-Lanord 1987:73), almost the same as the reconstructed stature of the occupant. Her physical appearance would have only accentuated the fact that she was as unique in her own society as she is, in fact, today.

BURIAL AS COMMEMORATION AND DESTRUCTION

The burial of ritualists includes ritually symbolic objects, some of which may be shared with other high status individuals because they, too, were perceived to have links to the spiritual realm. Pre-eminent among these grave inclusions are those that represent the ritualist's ability to communicate with the divine and recall the activities and appearance of predecessors and ancestors.

Hoppál (1992b:127) notes the importance of such objects to the shaman, writing:

He has special symbols which give him power, and in all shaman ceremonies symbolize the process of eliminating ordinary reality in order to gain access to another state of consciousness, or, to put it even more briefly: symbols make the shaman.

In some cases the objects become so linked with an individual, due to their longevity or pre-eminence, that they become inseparable even in death and are interred with their 'user'. In the context of a mortuary rite of passage, it may be the intention of pretenders to power to remove such objects from circulation in order to enhance their own ascendancy as much as to commemorate the importance of the deceased. Pretenders, as well as their supporters, may see objects used in these

rites as dangerous and thus worthy of removal and targets of destruction. Interment of such objects may be interpreted as equivalent in its effect to the ritual destruction of objects during competitive feasts (cf. Bradley 1982, 1987). Objects that are not destroyed are often considered dangerous and great care of them is necessary after the ritualist dies (see Humphrey 1996:210–211). In the action of interring ritualists and their implements there is an implicit statement of independence from these individuals, objects, and associated events.

WHAT IS A FEMALE RITUALIST IN THE CONTEXT OF SIXTH-CENTURY IRON AGE SOCIETY?

The term *Princeps*, often used now to denote a single inhumation with abundant grave goods, descends from Caesar's use of the term in reference to the oldest and most prestigious leader of the *consulares*, those who held consular rank in the Roman Senate, a council of elders, who were considered 'older men who had some degree of wisdom and distinction' (Caesar *Gallic War* iii 16; see Dunham 1995). Drawing upon this origin, the term 'princess' could apply to an older woman of wisdom and distinction. This meaning may better represent the social role of the individual interred at Vix.

In proto-historic accounts of Iron Age peoples, ritualists appear infrequently, and we are left with comparatively little appreciation of them. Immediately prior to and during Caesar's contact with Gallic peoples, it appears that Iron Age society was decentralized with fluid hierarchies and a lack of specialized political offices (see also Wells 1995). However, there are descriptions of women in the late Iron Age that allude to their role in spiritual concerns. Tacitus relates that:

. . . they [the Germani] believe that there resides in women an element of holiness and a gift of prophesy; and so they do not scorn to ask their advice, or lightly disregard their replies . . . a reverence untainted by servile flattery or any pretence of turning women into goddesses. (*Germania* 8)

In the *Histories* (IV, 61), the same writer contradicts this last statement when he relates the events surrounding a certain Veleda, an unmarried woman, who 'enjoyed wide influence over the tribe of the Bructeri.' Here he notes that 'The Germans traditionally regard many of the female sex as prophetic, and indeed, by an excess of superstition, as divine.' Veleda was celebrated because she had predicted the destruction of Roman legions. Tacitus (*Annals* XIV, 26) also describes the suppression of Mona, the island of Anglesey, by the consul Suetonius, the defence of which was aided by Druids 'screaming dreadful curses' and 'black-robed women with dishevelled hair like Furies', who brandished torches. In these last two cases, these women act to encourage or urge on warriors. Although one could argue that Tacitus is employing a literary trope in his descriptions of women urging on warriors, he identifies Veleda as a seeress who, acting singly, had the same ability.

The Princess of Vix could be seen as a precursor to these later female ritualists.

Through the manipulation of symbols on prestigious objects and the use of intoxicants, she encouraged ritually protected warriors into battle and predicted success in their encounters with seen enemies and their unseen magical helpers. Use of the term 'princess', then, may be apt but only with its original political connotations.

CONCLUSION: THE BURIAL OF THE 'PRINCESS' OF VIX IN SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Based on the observations of classical authors, we might expect the most powerful individuals in Gallic society to have always been males of a physical appearance more like that described by Diodorus of Sicily rather than that which emerges from an analysis of the tomb at Vix. Either Caesar suppressed information about the roles of women among the peoples he encountered, or those societies had changed considerably prior to his expedition. Any consideration of change is lost in Caesar's 'ethnographic present', his apparent lack of interest in the development of what he saw. Caesar's account appears to provide a time depth of, at most, a generation. It is clear, however, that we are receiving selected information from these sources, akin to that documented by some anthropologists in the not-so-distant past. Rogers (1980:33) notes: 'Judgements by anthropologists and sociologists about the "status of women" in other societies may tell us more about those who are making these judgements than about their subjects. It is rare to find Westerners attributing a higher "status" to women of other cultures, even older women, than they do to women in their own.' It seems that these classical authors would be equally, if not inherently more, prone to suppress, caricature or parody information of powerful women or memories of them in north-west European Iron Age societies.

The 'Princess' was not a physically distinguished person in the same vein as Gallic warriors, but through ritual power, she perhaps became pre-eminent. Despite a waddling gait and a wry-neck deformity, she was accompanied in death with extravagant grave inclusions imbued with portentous symbols of power that connected the living with the dead. It is suggested here that she possessed knowledge of social etiquette espoused through ritual wine-drinking that harnessed the physical prowess of the warrior. In her burial, though, is also a portent of a more all-embracing finality.

Mont Lassois ceases to be an important place about the time of the interment in the tumulus at Vix. There is a well-attested hiatus of activity at the site after the late Hallstatt period, one that lasted until the late La Tène period when a timber-framed rampart was constructed on the very top of Mont Lassois, where the Romanesque church of St Marcel stands today. By the time of abandonment the tumulus interments had given way to flat burial grounds in the vicinity of Châtillon-sur-Seine (Chaume 1997). By analogy with more recent contact situations, the presence of Mediterranean *emporia* and traders in Gaul had greatly altered indigenous social structure. Pare (1991:199) argues that the violent destruction of the Heuneburg and Mont Lassois hillforts at the end of the Hallstatt period ushered in a dominant

warrior class, 'which previously had been dominated by an élite of even higher social class'. Perhaps those who made up this displaced 'class' became marginalized, feminized, and excluded during the enculturative process, similar to those in more recent contact situations. Ritual practitioners are prominent among these (Hugh-Jones 1996).

The late Hallstatt and early La Tène period is one dominated by change, although there are differing opinions as to the relative contribution made by internal as opposed to external sources (see Kristiansen 1998:247, *passim*). Arnold (1995) notes the burial at Vix was created during this tumultuous period, one which saw a 'barbarian diaspora' consisting of warrior males invading and acting as mercenaries in the emerging Mediterranean states. In the absence of men, she argues, some women assumed social leadership roles normally associated with men. She characterizes this sudden pre-eminence of women as a short-lived response during a time of social flux, akin to that which produced 'Rosie the Riveter' during the Second World War. In this view women gain prominent roles in the absence of men. This female interment, though, ante-dates by generations the historical sacking of Rome in 387 BC and Delphi in 279 BC. Apparently, then, this burial anticipates these later forays into the Mediterranean rather than being a response to them.

Importantly, though, despite Rosie the Riveter's occupation, depictions of her still emphasize her glamour and femininity with long hair tied back, heavy lipstick, eye make-up, and long finger nails (see Fig. 2 in Arnold 1995). Although recent artistic representations tend to ascribe a youthful, virginal quality to the interment at Vix (see Brun 1987:108 and the dust jacket of that volume), this is not the image one receives from an analysis of the human remains of the burial, nor from the imagery of the votive inclusions.

In Turner's (1995:10) analysis of the social context of ritual he observes that 'very often decisions to perform ritual were connected with crises in the social life of villages'. During state formation the stress of social change increases ceremonial display (DeMarrais et al. 1996). This is also true when expanding states encounter ethnohistoric developed chiefdoms, what Kristiansen (1998) refers to as 'archaic states'. In the context of later European prehistoric societies, Pare (1991) and Dietler (1995, 1997) argue that the interaction between expanding Mediterranean polities and northern and central Europeans was a gradual process, starting with an increased desire for feasting equipment and only later developing into the mass exchange of ceramics and weaponry from Italic sources in the late La Tène. This process of trade and culture contact produced an 'inflationary' trend of ever-greater competition among paramounts (Dietler 1990). In this climate ritual activities became more frequent and grander occurrences due to the competitive nature of the gift exchange system (see Mauss 1990).

The effect of goods acquired through long distance exchange has been implicated in the rise and maintenance of élites in Iron Age Europe (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Pare 1991; Dietler 1997). The association of the burial of the 'Princess' with exotic items suggests that part of her social role or that of the organizer(s) of the interment was bound up with controlled access to these sources

of material. The person or persons who interred her removed from view not only items and the person who may have played a role in their acquisition and use, but also their symbolic associations that included an exotic origin and technological and symbolic sophistication. Power and prestige resided in the understanding of such symbols and their manipulation. At the very least, the interment meant the loss of this material and its symbolic association with such links. After the interment, these items and their possessor were locked away, rendered useless and unable to be used in the repeated ceremonial cycles tied to the maintenance and extension of control and authority so fundamental in pre-state societies.

In societies without codified religious/ritual practices, those who control ritual practice are able to take advantage of the uncertainty to establish norms within a fluid orthopraxy, especially at times of social strife. They possess disproportionate control over the course of social and political events. The ritualist is responsible for the creation of new rites, as well as for the performance and maintenance of practices relating to older traditions. Sokolova (1989) notes that, among the cult objects of the shamans of the Khanty-Mansi peoples of western Siberia, are objects that are not shared by other practitioners. She comments that 'the shamanistic beliefs and ceremonies are in large measure a result of the creativity of shamans and not of the people as a whole' (p. 161). Moreover, Humphrey (1996:272) notes that:

Shamans used the discursive form of the song to reproduce their own idiosyncratic histories that were quite different from the genealogies of ancestry and imperial power, shamans suffused these ideas with subversive content, thus creating a sense of identity for the people.

Thus we are not dealing with a codified system of beliefs and practices but with a much more fluid worldview created and maintained by the ritualists themselves through their unique ways of 'seeing'. It is these idiosyncratic histories that also place such ritualists in opposition to emergent or expanding states, and to those wishing to aid this process from within indigenous societies.

The removal of symbols associated with an older tradition or a predecessor enables aspiring leaders to establish a new order, so thoroughly that, within even a generation or two, the old order, its objects, its leaders, and their social roles and the significance of their place of burial are forgotten or reinvented and manipulated anew. Herein may lie the significance of the Vix burial. By the time Caesar wrote his account the role of women in ritual had been altered, their functions being assumed by males, who pitted temporal against ritual power, the chief against the ritualist, the emergent socioeconomic realm against the realms of the spirits. The warrior chief and his followers, once controlled through the agency of the *krater* and its contents, were victorious and the ritual world of the Vix 'Princess' and women like her was marginalized, suppressed, and forgotten.

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NOTES

1. Circe, a witch, is the enchantress and seductress of Odysseus. She turned half of Odysseus' men into pigs (*Odyssey*). She purified Jason and Medea with sow's blood after the murder of Apsyrtus (Graves 1981:205–208). After refusing his advances, Cassandra was given prophetic vision by the god Apollo but was simultaneously cursed in that no one would believe her prophesies (*Iliad*).

2. In this article 'power' is taken to mean the ability to influence behaviour.

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ABSTRACTS

Plutôt Circé que Cassandra: La princesse de Vix dans un contexte rituel et social

Christopher J. Knüsel

Les préhistoriens de même que les archéologues dissocient fréquemment du pouvoir le domaine du rituel et ses spécialistes. D'un point de vue ethnographique et ethnohistorique par contre, les spécialistes du rituel exercent souvent un contrôle disproportionné sur le maintien, la manipulation et l'élaboration de codes et pratiques sociaux. Leur rôle dans la pratique rituelle (Orthopraxie dans les sociétés illettrées) et son effet sur la prise de décisions leur accordent une

grande importance sociale et politique. Par cette implication, ils deviennent la cible de sanctions rituelles qui incluent rites punitifs, morts ritualisées et oppression durant les périodes de rapides changements sociaux, aussi bien au sein de leur société que de l'extérieur. Cet article traite d'une nouvelle analyse des restes du squelette humain de Vix (Côte d'Or, Bourgogne), plus précisément en ce qui concerne l'âge, le sexe et l'état de santé de l'individu enterré. On essaie ensuite d'évaluer le rôle social de cette soi-disant «princesse», ajoutant ces informations biologiques à celles obtenues à partir des objets funéraires et de leur imagerie, ceci dans le contexte du changement social survenu à la fin de l'époque de Hallstatt.

Mot-clés: Bourgogne, époque de Hallstatt, pouvoir, ritualiste, Vix

Mehr Circe als Kassandra: Die 'Prinzessin von Vix' im ritualisierten sozialen Kontext

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Rituale und Ritual-Spezialisten sind in den Schriften von Prähistorikern und Archäologen oft von der Macht getrennt worden. Nach ethnographischen und ethnohistorischen Gesichtspunkten zeigen die Praktizierenden der Rituale aber oft überproportionale Kontrolle über die Aufrechterhaltung, Beeinflussung und Ausarbeitung sozialer Codes und Praktiken. Ihre Rolle in der rituellen Praxis ('Orthopraxis' in den schriftlosen Gesellschaften) und deren Effekt auf die Entscheidungsfindung weisen ihnen beträchtliche soziale und politische Bedeutung zu. Wegen dieser Beteiligung werden sie – innerhalb als auch ausserhalb ihrer Gesellschaften – während Perioden rapider sozialer Veränderungen zum Ziel ritueller Sanktionen, die Bestrafungsriten, ritualisierte Tode oder andere Formen der Unterdrückung einschliessen.

Die vorliegende Studie geht aus der erneuten Analyse der menschlichen Skelettreste von Vix (Côte-d'Or, Burgund, Frankreich) unter besonderer Beachtung der Informationen zu Alter, Geschlecht und Gesundheitsstatus des beigesetzten Individuums hervor. Eine Überprüfung der sozialen Rolle der sogenannten 'Prinzessin' unter Einbeziehung der biologischen Daten und der Grabbeigaben sowie deren Erscheinungsbild im Kontext wettstreitender Feiern und sozialen Wandels in der späten Hallstatt-Periode kann so unternommen werden.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Burgund, Hallstatt-Periode, Macht, Ritualisten, Vix