Complexity, Trade, and Death: Analysis of the shift in Burial Practices during the Late
La Tène Period

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Abstract

Beginning around the second century BC, the indigenous La Tène culture tradition of western and central Europe underwent a considerable transformation due to an increase in trade and contact with the Mediterranean (Roman) world. One result of this change was the breakdown of any sort of uniform burial tradition throughout the La Tène world, which had generally existed in one form or another in previous related cultural traditions. An anthropological analysis of available archaeological burial site data mostly in central France and southern Germany allows insight into what factors were primarily responsible for this shift. This analysis is investigated in conjunction with relevant anthropological theory, and identifies some potential patterns in the burial data. Evidence for the influences of social complexity, Roman expansion, and “cosmopolitanization” are compelling, but not conclusive.

Introduction

Throughout much of Roman and even early modern history, the general attitude toward the Celtic peoples who inhabited the vast territory of continental Europe in the centuries before the expansion of the Roman Empire was one of general contempt and disinterest. Common knowledge saw these peoples, as well as many other “uncivilized” peoples, simply as uncultured barbarians who were mere footnotes in the expansion of enlightened Mediterranean civilization. Archaeological evidence slowly gathered over the last century and a half, combined with literary evidence from relevant Classical texts, however, has painted a different picture to historians and anthropologists alike. Beginning around the middle of the second century BC, the La Tène “Celtic” culture that dominated temperate Europe throughout the late Iron Age began to undergo some dramatic shifts indicating the development of a more socio-politically and economically complex society than existed previously (see Figure 1).

Large, often fortified centers of production and distribution, dubbed oppida by Julius Caesar during his conquest of Gaul from 58 to 51 BC, were the hallmark of this era. These settlements, considered by many to be the first of a distinctly urban character to be found north of the Alps, oversaw an advanced system of trade and production throughout the La Tène world. As a result, typical La Tène goods such as pottery and brooches become more standardized in style from region to region, and items of La Tène style even began to appear with greater frequency in the archaeological record in areas of Europe outside the culture tradition’s sphere of influence. Even more notable, however, was the increase in Mediterranean (Roman) artifacts found at La Tène sites. With the expansion of Roman political control into southern Gaul circa 120 BC, roughly around the same time as the cultural shift in the La Tène world began to take shape, interaction between the two cultures increased dramatically. In addition to increased contact through trade, the Romans also
intensified military and political interests in the regions north of their new provinces in southern Gaul.

One particularly noteworthy change in the culture of the La Tène people during this time frame involved the burial practice. Although the burial tradition of the “Celts” had changed several times during the La Tène era and in earlier periods, generally such changes were adopted uniformly throughout the cultural region. Thus, at about any time in temperate central European prehistory a clearly dominant burial tradition could be identified archaeologically. During the late La Tène shift, however, this no longer remained the case. While in the area of what is now Belgium, northern France, and southeastern England a small tradition of cremation graves with some burial goods can be identified, elsewhere in the La Tène culture area, in particular central France, any semblance of a coherent tradition appears to be totally lacking. A wide variety of burial styles and treatment of the remains is seen with no apparent pattern at all. The only real consistency is the general lack of burial goods found in the graves in comparison to preceding periods.

Despite the profound change occurring in the late La Tène culture area, with the exception of scholars such as Peter Wells (1999) and Patrice Brun (1987), little anthropological analysis and investigation related to the time period exists in general. Anthropological analyses of the associated burial practices, however, are practically nonexistent. All immediately available archaeological information concerning burial practice in central France and southern Germany during the late La Tène period is investigated and analyzed in conjunction with anthropological theory on both the nature of culture change and mortuary variability.

Background

Although the vast majority of scholarly research, literature and information regarding the La Tène culture is primarily historical in its scope and nature, in the last few decades anthropological analysis has become increasingly more common. Many aspects of late La Tène culture, however, still have not yet been fully explored in an anthropological context.

Issues, Concerns and Clarifications

Before any sort of analysis of La Tène culture or society can begin, first and foremost it is important to acknowledge certain issues relevant to such an investigation. Debate exists among scholars over numerous points, primary among them the meaning of the word “Celt” in a scholarly context. Additionally, some important definitions and clarifications are necessary in order to fully understand most aspects of this research.

Use of the term “Celt.” Anyone involved with the research of La Tène culture or society is bound to encounter the controversy surrounding the terms “Celt” and “Celtic,” and what these they truly mean in a scholarly context. The “Celtic” question has been and continues to be the source of enormous debate amongst a wide variety of experts, and its ultimate implications extend into such volatile subjects as nationalism and modern ethnicity. Regarding the scope of pre-Roman Europe, historians, anthropologists, and members of other disciplines studying this time period disagree about who the “Celts” were and how this term relates to both the La Tène culture and other central European traditions preceding it, such as the Hallstatt culture. Some scholars see “Celtic” as an ethnic term, others as purely linguistic (Arnold and Gibson 1995:2). According to Bettina Arnold and D. Blair Gibson (1995:2),
different scholars from linguists to folklorists to cultural anthropologists, use the term in different manners, making the term itself “dangerously nonspecific”.

On that note, opinion on the scope of what peoples were “Celts” or “Celtic” is extremely varied. Some scholars, such as Colin McEvedy (1967), suggest an early Celtic flavor existing in central Europe as early as the Bell-beaker tradition beginning roughly around 2,000 BC. As far as historical documentation is concerned, the earliest reference to an existing people known as “Celts” (Keltoi) was made by a Greek historian, either Hecataeus or Herodotus, around 500 BC (Arnold and Gibson 1995:2; Haywood 2002; Jiménez 1996:27). Both references were written at least a century after Greek peoples and the cultures of interior Europe had begun extensive contact through trade. This, however, may have only been a collective ethnic term for local tribes in and around the area of the Greek colony of Massilia in along the Mediterranean coast of present day France (Arnold and Gibson 1995:2).

Regardless, it seems to be generally accepted that by the end of the La Tène period various Celtic languages were being spoken over a wide geographic distribution. Some see a continuous Celtic linguistic region extending from the Iberian Peninsula to the west, throughout the La Tène regions of central and parts of eastern Europe, and even to the east in Anatolia (the Galatians) (Cunliffe 1997; Davies 2000; Haywood 2002). Unfortunately, such linguistic continuity does not necessarily correlate with a specific ethnic identity. It does not even conclusively suggest that the advent and spread of the La Tène tradition, or any other tradition such as the Hallstatt that preceded it in time, had anything to do with this widespread geographic range of Celtic languages during the final centuries BC.

Archaeologically speaking, the term “Celtic” generally refers to peoples sharing a similar material culture and artistic style unified geographically as inhabitants of central Europe and the British Isles and temporally as having lived between the late Hallstatt period until the expansion of Rome (Arnold and Gibson 1995:2). It is this archaeological premise of the term “Celt” that will be used for the context of this paper.

Chronology. The question of chronology of the Celtic world is not so much a heated issue or controversy as much as it is something that requires some degree of clarification. Beginning with Otto Tischler (1885), who divided the Celts up temporally based on changes in brooch/fibula styles (Crumley 1974:33; Collis 1984:39), several scholars since have proposed various chronological systems, based on such diverse criterion as minute shifts in art style burial practice (Crumley 1974:33-34). The system proposed by Paul Reinecke (1965[1909]), based on funerary goods found in southern Germany and initially developed to explain only the chronology of that particular region, has become widely used throughout Celtic Europe (Collis 1984:39; Crumley 1974:33-34) (see Table 1). Unless otherwise indicated, the chronological system referred to in this paper (Hallstatt A through D, La Tène A through D) are in the Reinecke system (Reinecke 1965[1909]). The references “early” La Tène (A period), “middle” (B and C periods), and “late” (La Tène D), roughly correlates with Tischler’s chronology. The only difference, an important one, is that to Tischler the La Tène B period is considered part of the early phase (Tischler 1885; Collis 1984:39). For the sake of clarifying basic trends in burial practice, however, the La Tène B and C are together referred to as “middle” in this paper.
Table 1. Reinecke’s chronological system, with corresponding dates (adapted from Collis 1984)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reinecke</th>
<th>date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hallstatt C</td>
<td>700 – 600 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallstatt D</td>
<td>600 – 475 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Tène A</td>
<td>475 – 400 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Tène B</td>
<td>400 – 250 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Tène C</td>
<td>250 – 100 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Tène D</td>
<td>100 – 20 BC</td>
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“Complexification” and “cosmopolitanization.” Two key terms discussed in this paper are “complexification” and “cosmopolitanization.” Social “complexification,” as explained by Patrice Brun, is: “…the process by which the number of different and interdependent elements constituting the social system increases…[occurring] through specialization and the establishment of a hierarchy of functions (1995:121)” This model, adapted from biology, suggests that societies, in the process of becoming more complex, develop from having relatively undifferentiated social functions and gradually adopt more specialized and distinct cultural and social institutions. In its biological parallel, organisms develop from having largely undifferentiated tissue and gradually develop forms with increasingly specified physiological functions (internal organs) (Brun 1995:121).

“Cosmopolitanization,” on the other hand, requires a bit more clarification. This is a term coined specifically for this paper in order to offer a possible explanation for the actual nature of the burial patterns found during the La Tène D period. Being “cosmopolitan” is generally understood as meaning to be worldly or under the influence of many ideas or cultures, and largely free from local or colloquial prejudices. The key in this circumstance is the notion of being open and susceptible to external and/or new ideas, and “cosmopolitanization” can thus be defined loosely as the development of a cultural attitude more susceptible to varying ideas, both internally and externally.

Important Terms. In order to fully comprehend much of the information provided in this paper, it is important to define and/or explain some key terms that will be mentioned and discussed throughout. These terms are “tumulus” (pl. “tumuli”), “inhumation,” “cremation,” and “cist grave.” Both “inhumation” and “cremation” are terms used to describe the treatment of the body for a burial; the former describing a normally interred and intact body, and the latter describing a body that has been reduced or partially reduced to ash due to incineration. A “tumulus” is described as a “mound of earth and stones, usually on top of a burial or burials” (Bahn 1993:518). Tumulus burials are fairly common at certain times during the La Tène and in earlier periods. A “cist grave” is described as “a grave, the sides of which are typically forms of stone slabs set on edge, but may be constructed of rubble or brick, and which is covered by stone slabs” (Bahn 1993:104). In other words, the remains are placed in a stone or brick box grave.

General Historical and Archaeological Background
Finding a concrete place to begin the discussion of the historical and prehistorical background for the La Tène D period is rather difficult. The generally accepted archaeological notion for the beginnings of a Celtic tradition, as mentioned above, suggests the late Hallstatt culture. Archaeologically, however, that dividing line is not so necessarily distinct. The chronological semantics of the Hallstatt culture is problematic, (see below). Additionally, some archaeologists see the Celts in a much broader archaeological time frame
from the Neolithic to the early medieval period in parts of the British Isles (Arnold and Gibson 1995: 2)

For simplicity sake, however, and because of the relative correlation with the general archaeologically recognized “beginning” of Celtic culture noted previously, the rise of the Iron Age seems a reasonable starting point. Iron technology reached central and western Europe around the eighth to seventh centuries BC, beginning with the Hallstatt C period (Collis 1984:40; Collis 1997[1984]:73-74; Haywood 2002). Despite the extremely important technological advancement iron is often portrayed to be, this adoption was gradual in nature (Collis 1997[1984]:73-74), and merely intersected the Hallstatt Period (roughly 1200-450 BC) (Haywood 2002). Although in most aspects the periods immediately following the advent of iron show simple cultural continuation of the preceding Urnfield (Hallstatt A and B) Bronze Age period, some shifts in technology, social structure, and burial rites were occurring (Collis 1997[1984]:73-74).

The expansion of ancient Greek trading colonies throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions beginning around 700 BC were to have a major impact on the newly iron-working Hallstatt peoples of insular Europe. Of special importance was the founding of Massilia (modern day Marseilles) along the southern coast of France around 600 BC, which coincides with the beginning of the Hallstatt D period (600 – 450 BC). Contact with the Mediterranean world increased quickly during this time period, primarily through trade. This trade system seems to have largely been focused around both the Rhine River area and Austria-Bohemia (Milisauskas:271). Some scholars such as Frankenstein and Rowlands (1978) and Wells (1980) have suggested that this trade contact, which seem to have moved up along the Rhone River valley, was a direct catalyst for the development of an elite class that came into existence at this time around northeastern France, the Middle Rhine region, and adjacent Alpine regions (Collis 1984:41).

What is clear is that evidence of the gradual acquisition of wealth by certain individuals, witnessed mostly in the form of richer burials, had become increasingly more common starting in the Bronze Age. Additionally, evidence of a general increase in social complexity, as seen in the growth in size, number, and degree of elaboration of bronze and gold artifacts, can be observed throughout the Bronze Age (Arnold and Gibson 1995:5). The acquisition of wealth, however, become more prevalent with the advent of the Iron Age, with the Hallstatt C period having some relatively elite burials (Collis 1984:40-41), but not yet showing any real contact with classical civilizations (the Greeks or Etruscans) (Collis 1997[1984]:79). The Hallstatt D period, however, coinciding with the founding of Massilia, was one of unprecedented wealth in comparison to previous periods. During this time the concentration of the richer burials moved from the east in places such as Bohemia and southern Germany in the Hallstatt C period (Davies 2000:20) further west into the Alps and eastern France as mentioned previously. Although a much richer time period compared with previous periods in the archaeological record, truly wealthy burials in the Hallstatt D period were not excessively common. Some sites, however, such as Hochdorf and Vix were extensively opulent and produced incredibly lavish graves containing Greek or Greek-inspired artifacts (Collis 1997:99; Davies 2000:21-26; Wells 1999:38-39). This is evidence suggesting that the wealth from trading with the Greek world during the last centuries of the early Iron Age was being concentrated in the hands of a select few (Collis 1984:41).

One important outcome of the particular trends of increasing social complexity and, for a select few, social status was the appearance of highly stratified settlements throughout
western and central Europe between 600-400 BC (Hallstatt C and D, and La Tène A) (Arnold and Gibson 1995:5). These settlements, larger and more complex than simple farming villages, had generally denser populations than any previous settlement types in Europe, with a major portion of that population involved in manufacturing and commerce (Wells 1999:38). These sites were generally located on hilltops or other easily defended sites, and contained a fortified inner area with open outer settlements (Wells 1999:38-39). Both the advent of increased social stratification (sometimes expressed in the form of rich burials for the elite, but only in certain areas) and the appearance of large and complex hill-forts, hallmarks of this era, would again become common features of the Celtic cultural landscape. This second flourishing would come into play shortly before the conquest of Gaul by Rome.

Around 475 to 450 BC, a new Iron Age cultural tradition, the La Tène, appeared and gradually overshadowed the previous Hallstatt culture. The La Tène culture is distinguished archaeologically as a shift in artistic and ornamental style to a more curvilinear form based on plant and mythical monster motifs, replacing the generally geometric designs on objects from earlier periods (Collis 1984:43-44, Wells 1999:42). These new motif styles were directly inspired from similar styles that had long been present in Greek and Etruscan artwork, and came into vogue around the time many such Greco-Etruscan objects were finding their way into temperate Europe (Wells 1999:43). The fifth century BC, however, was the beginning of a gradual diminishment of trade contacts between the Greek and Celtic world (Collis 1997:113). This may most likely have been result of Massilia being cut off from the rest of the Greek world as the competing Etruscan and Carthaginian civilizations’ power, influence, and mutual cooperation grew (McEvedy 1967:48-50).

It is at the peak of the early Iron Age trade boom that the La Tène A period (475-400 BC) appears in the archaeological record. Although the end of this period saw the nearly complete collapse of the settlement, economic and social patterns that dominated the thriving late Hallstatt period, in most ways the La Tène A period itself was a continuation of Hallstatt C and D. Hill-forts continued to be in use, although a trend of population decentralization can be generally seen (Collis 1984:43-46), and it appears that the vast majority of these early Iron Age settlements did not last into the middle La Tène Period (B/C). The burial practice of interring the dead under tumuli, a common feature of the later Hallstatt period, continued to predominate during this period, although inhumations had replaced cremations as the dominant form of treatment for the body since the end of the Hallstatt (Wells 1981:117-118) (see Figure 2).

With the advent of the middle La Tène period (B and C, roughly 400 – 100 BC), the last remnants of the late Hallstatt trade “boom” came to an end. Very few of the hilltop fortifications, which had flourished with the trade routes, were still being occupied. As a result, the demographics of the population shifted from the highland areas into the lowland agriculturally productive areas, with no settlements larger in size than simple farming villages (Collis 1984). Another result of the trade collapse can be seen in the fact that evidence of marked social stratification, particularly the presence of elite burials, is practically nonexistent during this middle period (Collis 1984). Throughout the La Tène B and C periods, a strongly uniform tradition of flat inhumation burials, generally found in small cemeteries, thrived from Belgium and northern France in the west through southern Germany and east into the Czech Republic, Hungary, and parts of the former Yugoslavia (Collis 1984:46-48) (see Figure 3). Grave goods found during this period were generally La Tène style brooches, torcs, bracelets, and anklets for females, and a “warrior-style” ensemble of sword, spear, and shield for the
men (Collis 1984: 46-48). It is also worth mentioning that this time frame was also an
important period of expansion for the Celtic peoples, who invaded Italy during the fourth
century BC, and Greece and Anatolia (the advent of the Galatians) during the third century
BC.

The La Tène D period, the period of greatest social development and economic growth
in pre-Roman Europe and of primary importance for the subject of this paper, officially began
around 100 BC according to the Reinecke chronological system. In fact, social development
during this period was so marked for much of the La Tène world that many scholars have
argued that in the regions of central France immediately beyond the borders of the expanding
Roman Empire state-level societies may have developed (Haywood 2002). What is clear is
that this period was another economic and commercial “boom” time like that of the late
Hallstatt/early La Tène period. The La Tène D period, however, largely surpassed the earlier
Iron Age peak in both nature and scope.

Trade with the Mediterranean region, lagging since the end of the La Tène A period,
became not only prominent again, largely surpassed the early Iron Age trade system in the
variety and frequency of such Classical goods found in La Tène D settlement areas. This
time, the goods were Roman, as the Roman Empire was in the process of slowly but surely
growing and developing into the dominant political and economic juggernaut it would be
throughout the Mediterranean/Middle East region for centuries to come. These Roman goods,
such as wine-filled amphorae, metal vessels, feasting equipment, and the like are all well
represented in the archaeological record at this time, demonstrating that Mediterranean
imported goods were a more common feature of the lifestyles of the late La Tène peoples than
in previous periods. It is also worth mentioning that the overall distribution of these Roman
imported goods shared a lot of similarities with the distribution of Greek and Etruscan goods
found during the earlier Iron Age flourishing of trade, especially along the Rhone River valley

Trade, however, was not the only force determining contact between the Celtic and
Classical worlds. The intensity of political and social interactions between these two realms
was also more marked than ever before. During their heyday, the Greeks had mainly kept to
the coastal regions and remained somewhat aloof towards their Celtic customers. The
Romans, however, had serious military and political interests as well as economic ones in the
regions north of the Alps. Additionally, documentation exists suggesting that Roman and
other foreign traders traveled to Celtic lands for the purpose of trade (Gallic Wars: IV 2-3;
Fulford 1985:94).

During the final century BC, the dynamics of a new economic “boom” were no longer
simply limited to the central European Celtic and Mediterranean Classical realms. Cultural
and commercial interactions mostly centered on trade were intensifying throughout other parts
of Europe as well. Many late La Tène style artifacts, such as the Nauheim style fibula, were
being found more regularly outside the Celtic realm (see figure 4 for an example). In northern
Germany, native peoples were placing La Tène style artifacts into their burials (Wells
1978:10), much like the Celts themselves may have been doing with Greek and Etruscan
goods centuries earlier. Additionally, general trends of increased social stratification and
social complexity are seen in this region during this time frame as well, such as rich burials
and the establishment of larger settlements (Wells 1978). Thus, the economic, social, and
cultural developments taking place in the La Tène world were part of a much larger process of
change, one that was encompassing much of Europe at this time.
Perhaps the most striking feature of the La Tène D period of central Europe, however, was the development of semi-urban centers of production and distribution, the oppida. These settlements were not considered fully urban due to the varying degree of settlement nucleation (often several small settlements around a central production area) and population size (some had populations in the thousand, while others were actually quite sparsely inhabited) (Wells 1999:51). Some oppida were not even occupied by a permanent population (Wells 1999:51). Regardless, these settlements were generally of a much grander scale than the hillforts of the late Hallstatt/early La Tène period, and were the first settlements of their scope north of the Alps. In addition to being local centers of the production of goods and their distribution, oppida were the vital links in the flourishing of trade occurring in central Europe. Locally made goods were traded from oppidum to oppidum, as well as with goods from outside the La Tène culture zone (northern Germany and the Roman world). Most intriguing, many of these oppida also minted their own currency, which was inspired off the Greek currency and often fully interchangeable with the currency of other oppida and with the Roman dinar (Brun 1995:122).

It is worth noting that many of the social and cultural aspects and processes that defined this period were actually coming into play well before the beginning of the final century BC. Intensification of much of these characteristics, however, largely came into being in between the time of the Roman conquest of southern Gaul (120 BC) and the beginning of the La Tène D period.

The Burial Evidence

What follows in this section is a comprehensive overview of available data on burial practices found at certain sites and regions throughout the La Tène D realm. This data section is by no means comprehensive. Other data exists that is difficult to procure, and information available is often incomplete. Additionally, burial sites from the late La Tène period are notoriously poor. Such, information, incomplete or otherwise, is presented below.

Identified Late La Tène Burials

For simplicity sake, Collis’ North Gallic burial tradition is a good place to begin. Located in what is today northern France and parts of Belgium, west-central Germany, and even southeast England. Collis himself (1977:3-6) presents a solid overview of the characteristics of this tradition. The burials found in this region all typically share several traits in common. Primarily, bodies were mostly cremated, though inhumations are found. These remains were typically placed in a pottery vessel, with pedestal urns being more common in the west and open bowls in the east, although other containers were sometimes used, and a couple of bodies were buried without a container. Graves were generally found in mixed cemeteries, with men, women, and children all represented, though some isolated burials are known. Almost all burials contain pottery vessels, although no regular combination of vessel types occurs, and brooches were also common as grave goods. Also prevalent in this region were rich burials, distinguished from other burials by their larger size, and a wealthier variety of objects, typically large numbers of local pottery vessels, local bronze vessels, wine amphorae and bronze and silver vessels both of Italian origin, domestic equipment made of iron, weapons, and often other miscellaneous objects. Generally, imported Italian goods in graves were more common after the Roman conquest (50 BC), but
the burial rite in the region is essentially the same in the decades before and after, with no real change in the burial practice occurring until around 20 BC (Collis 1977:10-11).

Outside of the area of northern France and Belgium, burial sites found in central France, Switzerland, and southern Germany are noteworthy mostly by the seeming lack of continuity in burial style from one site to the next. In southern Germany, where the larger oppida are found, there is only one potential cremation at the site of Manching and perhaps a couple more at Kelheim, which contained an imported bronze jug, a shield, sword, and a graphite-ware vessel (Collis 1977:8). Overall, at both Manching and Kelheim, most burials found were associated with pre-oppida settlements, with very few representing the actual oppidum inhabitants (Wells 1999:81).

Scattered human bones and fragments of skeletons were frequently found in rubbish pits and strewn about at the site of Manching (Collis 1977:8). This is also true at several sites further west in southwestern Germany and Switzerland, such as Breisach-Hochstetten, Altenburg-Rheinau, Basel-Gasfabrik (Basel), and Steinacker bei Marthalen (Collis 1977:8; Wiedmer 1963). These remains were usually disarticulated and male, although female and juvenile remains are also often found together as if mother and child (Wiedmer 1963). Debate on these finds focus on whether or not these were the remains of individuals killed during some sort of conflict, the alleged adversary potentially Roman (see Wiedmer 1963). At Manching, the disarticulated remains, often showing evidence of wounds, have been found in association with broken and strewn weapons, but the time frame suggests something pre-Roman (Wells 1999: 30). Curiously, no such haphazard treatments of remains have been found at Kelheim, which is very close geographically to Manching, although a piece of a skull buried near the inner wall was discovered, interpreted as an offering to its construction (Wells 1999:81).

Nearby, a small number of mostly cremation burials have been found on the periphery of the oppidum near the Engehalbinsen, around the modern city of Berne (Collis 1977:8). Müller-Beck and Ettlinger (1963) provide the most comprehensive information on this site. The Engehalbinsen oppidum itself was inhabited in two stages, with the transition period around 50 BC, with an outer wall around the settlement dating to the earlier period, and an inner wall dating to the later. Buried behind the base of the inner wall, but stratigraphically more recent than and therefore not associated with that wall, was a child’s inhumation grave, which contained only a Nauheim style fibula for a grave good. Another burial found under the inner wall, however, can be associated with the wall stratigraphically. This burial was a cremation with four different painted vessels; two of which had been presumably burned with the body, while the other two actually contained the cremated remains. Also found scattered near the inner wall were five or six human limb bones (Wiedmer 1963). Additionally, several small cemeteries, generally resembling the La Tène C in their characteristics, were situated in a semi-circular pattern around the settlement (Müller-Beck and Ettlinger 1963). Whether or not these cemeteries contained inhumations, cremations, or a combination is unclear.

The Basel-Gasfabrik site, in addition to strewn remains within, similar to the Engehalbinsen had a cemetery exterior to the settlement area. Roughly 80 inhumation graves are found here, mostly facing east to west, and generally the bodies were placed with little care (Collis 1977:8). Despite the fact that the graves often overlapped and intersected, making it difficult to identify which grave goods went with which grave, it was determined that roughly 40% of the graves had any objects, which were generally the occasional brooch, pot, glass bracelet, or wheel-pendent (Collis 1977:8).
Further west, into central France, the picture begins to get even more complicated. In the French Alpine regions, flat inhumations buried only with jewelry and clothing articles are found (Déchelette 1927[1914]). To the northwest, on the other side of the Rhine River, at the site of Luzech cremated bodies were placed into disused ramparts (Collis 1977:8). A similar practice occurs at nearby Mont Beuvray (Bibracte), although at that site cremations were sometimes placed within the household as well (Collis 1977:8). Further information on burial practices at this site is provided by Déchelette (1927[1914]). Although cremations only represented one third of all graves found at Mont Beuvray, those that were cremated tended to be placed in vases of Italian origin. This particular burial practice seems to have originated from Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy) during the late Republic period in Rome. Interestingly, one cremation burial at Mont Beuvray is noteworthy for having the burnt remains placed in two separate funerary vases, much like the one found in the Engehainbinsen, although it is associated with iron weapons and jewelry. These particular funerary practices mostly seem to have occurred after the Roman conquest (Collis 1977:8). Since true “Romanization” of Gaul did not begin until the policies of Augustus Caesar (30 BC – 14 AD), at which time some sites such as Mont Beuvray were abandoned (Crumley 1974:35), it would be reasonable to view this as a pre-Roman practice of sorts.

Further south, the pre-conquest site of Aulnat has produced several burials (Collis1975; Perrot and Périchon 1969a; Perrot and Périchon 1969b). For adults, the rite generally appears to be inhumation with four pots placed around the head, and with the occasional brooch, knife, or bead (Collis 1977:9). Cremation graves are also found, but this rite was practiced predominantly on children (Perrot and Périchon 1969b). One child burial in particular consisted of only the charred remains of a skull with about two drinking vases, one above and below the body, and two large plates containing bovid bones in front of the skull (Collis 1977:9; Perrot and Périchon 1969a). To the southwest of Aulnat, the sites of Celles and Murcens have both produced at least one tumulus burial. At Celles the grave-goods found with the body included painted pottery and a large amount of carpenter’s tools (Collis 1977:9). In Normandy cist graves with very few funerary goods are found, while in Brittany burials consisted of cremated remains placed in pots or urns (Déchelette 1927[1914]).

Neighboring Burial Traditions

It would be fitting to briefly describe the nature of the burial traditions in two neighboring regions that had the most extensive contact with the late Iron Age Celts: northern Germany and the Roman Empire. As far as the Roman Empire’s cultural landscape contemporary to the La Tène D period is concerned, the gradual spread of a cremation burial practice was in effect. This practice, originating from Rome itself, consisted of washing and anointing of the clothed body, which was then carried on a funeral couch (for the rich) or simple bier (for the poor) in a procession outside the city to the grave sight (Scarre 1995:36; Wells 1999:159-160). After cremation the remains were placed in an urn, and accompanying grave goods generally only consisted of a ceramic lamp to guide the dead to the afterlife and a coin for paying the ferryman to cross the River Styx (Scarre 1995:36; Wells 1999:159-160). Unlike the Celts, no weapons were ever found in graves, and there was no sex distinction in the types of grave goods found, and abundant grave goods like jewelry and pottery were exceedingly rare (Wells 1999:159-160). Social status was reflected not in the burial custom itself, but on the presence of varying elaborate carved stone monuments and memorials. Burials of several individuals in a family grave were common (Scarre 1995:36).
In northern Germany, the burial practice throughout the Iron Age was cremation (De Laet 1958; Collis 1977:9). During the time period of the La Tène D further south, local hand-made pottery was the typical grave good found in a burial in the north (Collis 1977:9). Other grave goods were generally rare, although bronze vessels from southern Germany are occasionally found, and in some parts in the north burials with weapons, either made in southern Germany or closely modeled on such prototypes, were common (Wells 1978). No rich burials are found in this region (Collis 1977:9), which is not surprising considering that there is little evidence of social differentiation found here until after the expansion of the Roman Empire up to the Rhine frontier (Todd 1977:39). Although cremation was the dominant funerary rite in both northern Germany and northern Gaul, northern German burials generally had the burnt remains buried along with the funeral pyre remains, which was not the case in Gaul (Collis 1977:5). Collis states that it is generally clear that two different rites and traditions were practiced in both regions (1977:9).

Anthropological Theory and the La Tène

Social Theory, Social and Cultural Change, and the La Tène

When analyzing or discussing any shift or transformation in cultural tradition for any society, it is vitally important to appreciate the complexity of the nature of change itself. All things in nature inevitably “change,” and human cultures and societies, although perhaps not as randomly as the natural world, most certainly are not exempt from this inevitability. In other words, changes in burial practices among the La Tène (and any other culture, for that matter) were going to occur in some capacity at some point, regardless. A shift of any variable magnitude could easily have occurred at other times and under different circumstances than what did occur as documented by the archaeological record. How would Celtic society have been different in 100 BC if the Roman Empire never occupied southern Gaul in 120 BC, or if the Greeks never founded the colony of Massalia in southern France in 600 BC? How would this have affected shifts in burial practice, not to mention a myriad of other cultural elements amongst the Celtic peoples? One important difference between change in the natural world and change in human culture and society, however, is the fact that humans are not automatons that react mindlessly to external forces. Instead, human societies (and individuals within) actively participate in determining their lifestyle by adopting, rejecting, or developing new ideas and technologies based on how they alter or fit into the established cultural paradigm. Although the actual process of change in society and culture may be expected, “how” and “why” a specific kind of change occurs (ex. increasing social complexity, adopting a new ritual, using more advanced pottery-making techniques, etc.) varies considerably from scenario to scenario.

Understanding the inevitability of the process of change is a fairly simple concept to grasp. Finding the appropriate theoretic explanation within anthropology about “how” and “why” change occurs the way it does in a specific socio-cultural scenario, however, is rather difficult and complex. The appropriate sources of knowledge within the discipline necessary to explore the issues of social and cultural change fall under social theory, defined as “bodies of general knowledge about sociocultural phenomena expressed in postulates, premises, assumptions, principles, and models” (Schiffer 2000:1; see also Schiffer 1988). Within the realm of cultural anthropology, a variety of theoretical models explaining social and cultural change (ex. Marxism) are widely utilized depending on a wide variety of criterion, and often
many of these theoretical models are at odds with one another. A similar scenario can be
discerned within the realm of archaeology as well. One particularly strong point of contention
within anthropology and archaeology since the beginning has been whether or not to view
social and cultural change in terms of endogenous (internal) or exogenous (external) processes
(Chapman 1990:6). Overall, anthropologically speaking there is no single universal “catch-
all” model, theory, or explanation for “change” that can be applied to all human sociocultural
scenarios.

Because the investigation of the society and culture of the Iron Age Celtic peoples of
continental Europe is primarily an archaeological one, it is important to better understand
issues within the realm of archaeology on the nature of social and cultural change. Because
“no single social theory can serve all explanatory needs in archaeology” (Schiffer 2000:1),
understandably there is a wide variety of such theories within the subdiscipline to choose
from. In recent decades, the sheer volume of information on social theory in archaeology has
ballooned to the point where it is next to impossible to keep up with much of the information
available (Schiffer 2000:2). To make this situation more complicated, within the last decade
factionalism has ruled the archaeological landscape, with such “camps” as processualism,
postprocessualism, and behavioral to name but a few (Schiffer 2000:3). Additionally, large
segments of social theory are delegated as being generally applicable only to either hunter-
gatherer, intermediate, or complex societies, largely due to the fact that most archaeologists
only deal with societies at one particular complexity level and rarely overlap (Schiffer
2000:4). Needless to say, pinpointing an “appropriate” social model to be used to solve the
puzzle of the La Tène D burial patterns is no mean feat.

Within the realm of European archaeology, up until the 1960’s one of the standard
synthesis on sociocultural development was V. Gordon Childe’s modified diffusionism, which
saw prehistoric European cultural development in terms of “the irradiation of European
barbarism by Oriental civilisation” (Chapman 1990:6, Childe 1958:70). More specifically, as
explained by Chapman (1990:7), the Near Eastern “core” civilizations were the source of
cultural development in “peripheral” Europe. Based on the correlation of major shifts in
Celtic social development (the economic successes of the Late Hallstatt/Early La Tène and the
La Tène D periods) with dramatic increases in the amount of Mediterranean goods found in
the archaeological record at the same time as one example, it is easy to see how such a view as
Childe’s would be compelling.

In the decades following Binford’s New Archaeology, new social theories and models
have been applied to the La Tène culture area. One of the most prevalent in recent years has
been the world systems theory. Initially proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) as an
explanation for the overall state of the modern world (economic, political, etc.), he saw the
sixteenth century A.D. as the great divide in human history between the pre-modern and fully
modern world (Kohl 1989:218). Subsequent revisions and reapplications of this theory have
been developed, such as the concept of a regional economic system as has been applied to
early eastern Mediterranean states (Hittites, Minoans, etc.) and Greece, Etruria and the early
World systems theory has even been applied to analyzing the severe shortcomings of the
concept of the “pristine” (closed society, completely endogamous) development of West
Asian state civilizations (Mesopotamia, Egypt, etc.) (Kohl 1989).

As far as the La Tène D period of temperate Europe is concerned, Patrice Brun has
demonstrated the adaptability of the world systems model to this scenario as well (1995).
Having already identified a world-system centered on Greek and Etruscan cities (Brun 1987), he has also divided the world of Gaul into three concentric rings based on a world-economy model (Brun 1995:122), although other scholars have noted this concentric “zoning” trend as well (Nash 1981; Cunliffe 1988). To the south, stretching from the Atlantic to Lake Geneva and closest to the Roman imperial frontier, lay a broad ring of large centralized states that were the ones that produced their own currencies, which were interchangeable with other Celtic state currencies and the Roman dinar. Further north, stretching from Armorica to Champagne were smaller states where coins were also produced and a fair number of Roman goods were imported (Brun 1995:122). This area is also noted for the presence of Roman vessels found in elite burials as status symbols, occasionally associated with chariot parts removed from funeral pyres (Brun 1995:122; Metzler et al. 1991). A third zone, in Britain and northernmost Gaul, can be identified with even less developed states and limited access to Roman products (Brun 1995:122). These zones were also somewhat distorted around areas where intensity of trade traffic was greater, specifically around the Rhone-Saone River region and the adjacent Seine, Meuse-Aisne-Some, and Moselle-Rhine River areas, which fostered greater social interaction and reaction in those places (Brun 1995:122) (for a modified map roughly outlining 2 of the 3 concentric zones, see Figure 5).

Somewhat connected to the world systems model was Frankenstein and Rowlands’ (1978) theory about the cultural significance of Mediterranean goods as status symbols in elite burials during the flourishing economy of the late Hallstatt/early La Tène period. According to their model, the political power held by the elites was connected with their control over the procurement and distribution of exotic, high-valued goods, like what would have been imported from the Mediterranean (Diepeveen-Jansen 2001:7; Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978). These prestige goods, functioning as symbols of power, would have been used by the elites in ritual contexts (i.e. burials) as a legitimizing basis of power (Diepeveen-Jansen 2001:7; Frankenstein and Rowland 1878). This theory may provide a key insight into certain late La Tene burial practices as well, as will be discussed later.

Anthropological Theory on Mortuary Practice

Like change, death is also an inevitably. Any living organism will inevitably experience it. Once again, humans, as living organisms, are no exception to this basic fact. Yet, despite its universality, within the human sociocultural realm a wide variety of responses to this phenomenon exist, from the treatment of the body to the ambiance of funerals (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:1). Although this variety demonstrates the more or less universal impact that death brings about, such reactions are never random but instead always meaningful and expressive (Huntington and Metcalf 1979).

Two important early and original works about the nature of the human reaction to death came to light with English publications of Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Robert Hertz (1907) (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:8). Van Gennep argued that all rituals, particular rights of passage (which funerary practices seem to be), have beginnings, middles, and ends, with the concept of the middle being a liminal (transitional) stage bridging the transformation from one stage to the next (Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Van Gennep 1907). Strongly similar to Van Gennep’s perspective, Hertz recognized the prevalence of secondary burials and the liminal phase between them and primary burials (Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Hertz 1909).

In the early 1970’s, Louis Binford (1971) and Arthur Saxe (1970) both presented influential pieces of research focused on identifying social factors involved in variations in the
nature of funerary practices (Brown 1995:3). Saxe’s goal was to investigate how mortuary practices interacted with other elements within a particular sociocultural system for the purpose of locating universal cross-cultural regularities of such interactions, and succeeded in generating some possible hypotheses (Saxe 1970). Binford’s goal, on the other hand, was twofold. For one, he criticized idealistic assumptions about the nature of cultural change and the diffusionist interpretation that all superficially similar elements of burial practices (e.g., the practice of cremating a body in many cultures) ultimately all had the same origin (Binford 1971; O’Shea 1984:4). Second, and most important for the subject of this paper, he argued that there existed relatively universal regularities in the relationship between community organization, in particular degree of social complexity, and amount of differentiation practiced in mortuary traditions (Binford 1971; O’Shea 1984:4-5).

Analysis

Much of the archaeological evidence available on the peoples of the late Hallstatt and La Tène periods of temperate Europe gives an extensive number of examples of a long-standing trend of Mediterranean influences on the culture over time. Since the advent of the Iron Age, Greek, Etruscan, and, at a later date, Roman goods, such as ceramic and metal vessels, pots, and amphorae were a fairly constant part of the archaeological record of the Celtic realm. This was particularly the case amongst the graves of the elite members of Celtic society. In fact, much of what was considered part of the trappings of elitism, seems to have had its origin in the Mediterranean world.

In addition, the economic fortunes and misfortunes of the insular Celtic peoples, along with the subsequent effects on their social infrastructure, ultimately seem to have paralleled events and circumstances along the Mediterranean, such as the isolation of Massilia from its eastern Greek compatriots during the fifth century BC. Important technological and economic innovations including the potter’s wheel and the adoption of currency modeled on Greek styles (Woolf 1995:340-343) in central Europe were also inspired by Mediterranean civilization. Even the advent of the La Tène culture itself is a result of Mediterranean influence, since the appearance of Greek and Etruscan design styles on local objects is the major identifying marker of this period in the archaeological record.

The point being made here is that there is an extremely large historical precedent for Mediterranean civilization being some sort of an influence on a large variety of cultural behaviors and institutions. In conjunction with the intensification of Roman-Celtic interactions, especially in central France beginning around the second century BC, the possibility of some degree of Roman influence having a role to play in the development of late La Tène burial practices seems credible. Naturally, this does not conclusively nor decisively prove anything. In particular, even if Roman influence was involved, there is still the question of “how.” Either the influence the Roman Empire was giving was more of an overt sort of cultural diffusion, or it was more indirect, such as the political and economic presence of the empire acting as a catalyst (but not a source) for change amongst the neighboring La Tène.

The fact that the Roman world may not have been the only external culture zone exerting influence on the late La Tène world, at least as far as the north Gallic burial practice is concerned, makes this question even more complex. Evidence of increased trade contact between northern Germany and the La Tène world aside, there seems to be a compelling
possibility of northern German “Germanic” influences being involved in the development of the northern Gallic burial tradition. Déchelette saw the transition from inhumation to cremation in Belgium coinciding with the arrival of Germans in to the area (1927[1914]:543). Additionally, the Roman historian Tacitus, in his account of the peoples of Germany, stated that the Nervii and Treveri tribes of northeastern Gaul claimed German ancestry, which they felt made them superior to nearby fully Gallic tribes (Tacitus:52; Wightman 1971:17). Archaeological evidence from this region may strongly support this as a possibility (Wightman 1971:17).

Frankenstein and Rowland’s theory about the significance of Mediterranean goods found in elite burials during the late Hallstatt/early La Tène period (1978) may actually add some important further insight into why the pattern of late La Tène burials are the way that they are. The rite of Collis’ identified North Gallic tradition, with its regular and elite burials, is remarkably similar to that of the predominant burial hierarchy system during the late Hallstatt/early La Tène period, the first age of considerable trade contact with the Mediterranean. Additionally, Collis’ identified North Gallic tradition geographically more or less coincides with Patrice Brun’s designation of the outer concentric zones of interaction where Roman influence and imported goods were much less common. Subsequently, the “other” burial rites found in Gaul are located in the same approximate geographic region as Brun’s identified zone in the Celtic complex. This was the concentric zone containing the largest and most centralized states and the greatest degree of contact with the Roman world, as well as the greatest concentration of imported Roman goods (see Collis 1984:163 figure 9-22). Thus, because Roman goods were less common in the outer zones of Gaul, there is a greater likelihood that they may have still held the “exotic prestige” status that Frankenstein and Rowlands thought Mediterranean imports had in general during the earlier Iron Age trade “boom.” Further south in Gaul, where Roman imports were much more common (see Collis 1984:163 figure 9-22) and presumably more familiar, there would have no longer been this traditional prestige associated with the acquirement of Mediterranean goods. Elite burial practices, if they existed at all during this time period outside of the region of the northern Gaul, would have to have been defined by other criterion.

In general, the correlation in the shift in burial trends with degree of complexity and contact with the Roman sphere seems too convenient to be brushed off as mere coincidence. The presence of the expanding Roman Empire seems to have had some sort of drastic effect on Tène culture and society. This is evident by the fact that so much of the cultural developments that made the La Tène D period unique came into prominence around the same time southern Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis) was occupied in 120 BC. Before going any further, however, it is important to analyze some notable trends in the burial patterns of the La Tène world outside of the North Gallic culture.

What analysis of the burial data outside of the North Gallic culture showed was that the funerary practices of the La Tène D period were not quite as incoherent as they appeared to be at face value. With the exception of the smaller burial tradition in northern France, Belgium, and nearby regions, there were no obvious regional similarities in the overall structure of the burial (treatment and placement of the body, funerary artifacts, etc.). Individual or particular elements of burials, however, showed their own individual distributions over certain areas. In areas of southwest France to the south and west of the Massif Central, the two sites identified were both graves built under a tumulus, even though the contents and treatment of the body within each grave were dissimilar. In Switzerland, the
Rhone Valley region, and parts of Alpine France, flat inhumation cemeteries most closely resembling the burial tradition of the previous La Tène B and C periods (flat inhumation cemeteries) and located outside the settlement area are more commonly found here than elsewhere.

In particular sites along the Rhone Valley, Switzerland, and Brittany, as well as commonly throughout the North Gallic tradition the placement of cremated remains into ceramic containers, varying from locally manufactured pots to Roman amphorae to Roman-inspired vases, is found. This particular tradition intriguingly resembles the elite Roman funerary practice of placing ashes into an urn that was common during the same era, especially considering that the Rhone Valley and areas of northern France were major trade thoroughfares between temperate Europe and the Mediterranean. At specific localities in central France, Switzerland, and possibly southeast Germany, human remains are often found in close proximity to or even within the wall surrounding the settlement. These, and numerous other examples just like them, show a general trend of overlapping funerary practices that in of themselves have limited ranges (see Figure 6). Some of these practices suggest Mediterranean influence, some from cultures to the north, while other practices suggest ties to earlier burial traditions, and others still are just plain new and unexpected.

In light of the question of how exactly social complexification and Roman influence shaped changes in the burial practices of the late La Tène peoples, it seems evident that despite the prevalence of these two factors accounting for a great deal of change in the socio-cultural lives of these people. Some characteristics of the cultural landscape of burial practices, however, cannot seem to be explained simply by being a result of these two processes taking effect, such as the overlapping ranges of varying burial practices and treatments. It is for these unaccounted-for aspects of late La Tène burial practices that the term “cosmopolitanization” was coined. This attitude shift would have allowed a “tolerance” for greater variability and flexibility in the use of mortuary rituals, thus allowing for the overlapping and localized burial traits. Despite the plausible nature of the concept of “cosmopolitanization,” actually identifying the existence of this cultural attitude amongst the archaeological record of the La Tène is complicated at best, and far beyond the scope of discussion for this paper. Additionally, a variety of other explanations involving changes in cultural attitude can be proposed in this scenario which would be equally valid. The reason that this idea is ventured, however, is due to the fact that because this shift in burial practice is associated with a growth in settlement size, and increased contact with neighboring cultures. The semi-urban and trade-oriented nature of the oppida give them considerable plausibility as sources of “cosmopolitanization” amongst the Le Tène (urban environments tend to be favorable places for the blending of cultures and the adopting of more cosmopolitan ideas). At this juncture, however, “cosmopolitanization” is a reasonable venture at an explanation, but nothing more.

Before coming to any final conclusions about the nature of La Tène D burial practices, one final bit of information, mostly literary, needs to be addressed. Whether or not the people of Gaul practiced sacrifice or not is a question that has been a long-standing point of contention amongst scholars. Strabo and Julius Caesar, among many other Greco-Roman authors, wrote about such practices (Crumley 1974; Wiedmer 1963). The accuracy of such documentation, however, is suspect, since many of the authors from the era had their own agendas or personal prejudices concerning the peoples north of the Mediterranean Sea. If sacrifice was practiced, however, this factor would certainly completely alter the scope of the
analysis of the La Tène and their burial traditions. In addition to investigating the specific meanings of different burials in different locations and contexts, the existence of human sacrifice would also require identifying what particular mortuary practices amongst the La Tène were associate with it. This is especially difficult in the case of the La Tène D, when burials are already variable from location to location. Thus, burial practices associated with sacrifice may have been just as variable as well. Perrot and Perichon (1969b) thought that the frequency of cremation burials amongst children at the site of Aulnat may have been associated with a sort of sacrificial practice involving the use of children. This conclusion is doubtful considering Binford’s assertion that the practice of having special mortuary traditions for specific categories of death (ex. such as from sickness or in the death of a child) is a common feature among many cultures (Binford 1971). Additionally, according to Wells (1999), sacrifice is a practice that cannot be easily identified archaeologically in the late La Tène scenario. Until the presence of human sacrifice can be conclusively demonstrated in the archaeological record of the La Tène, however, this variable will only make interpretations of their burials that much more difficult and complicated.

Conclusion

First and foremost, it is clear overall that the nature of the shift in late La Tène burial practice is extremely complicated, and can only be understood by recognizing that the complex interactions of multiple processes and factors were involved. Additionally, different processes and factors may have been in play in certain regions in the La Tène world, such as the potential Germanic element in northern Gaul.

Overall, it seems that the nature of burial practices in Gaul can be divided into two general regions of certain similar characteristics. The most obvious is Collis’ north Gallic burial tradition, which basically geographically coincides with Brun’s outer concentric zones of interaction with the Roman Empire, and potentially was more influenced by contact with Germanic peoples than with people from other regions. Further south, in the concentric zone of greatest social development and interaction and contact with the Roman Empire, various local burial elements that overlap one another geographically (burials near/within settlement walls, inhumation cemeteries, etc.). Within this zone, however, two interesting subdivisions can be noted. To the west of the Massif Central, the general practice of burials with tumuli, possibly a an act of retaining older cultural traditions dating back to the late Hallstatt/early La Tène period, can be found. To the east, along the Rhone corridor and in Switzerland, settlement sites contain examples of both cemeteries outside the settlement area and individual burials within. Each of these designations are certainly not exclusive to one another, since many elements of burial practices overlap, but overall this general pattern seems reasonably compelling.

Unfortunately, numerous problems regarding the available information on late La Tène burials prevents the possibility of coming to a definitive conclusion about general trends in such practices. One is the complete dearth of burial information from most of southern Germany, as well as the extremely limited scope and availability of such information on La Tène practices further east. A full appreciation and understanding of the scope of the processes involved in the nature of burial practices during this time cannot be fully appreciated without such information. Another problem is the lack of availability and reliability of many of the original sources for much of the burial data from this time period. Much has never been published, or is largely unavailable in the United States. Some of the
published information, however, was written as much as a century ago, when modern standards for archaeological analysis were not yet in place. Much of the literature is excessively narrative in nature, and tends to gloss over certain bits of relevant information and/or make inappropriate assumptions and conclusions based on information available.

Yet another problem with the available data on La Tène D burials is, because of the dearth of overall available data, there are considerable gaps in the temporal uniformity of much of the information over the full geographic area, even within the relatively short time span involved. There is the possibility that, if these gaps are subsequently filled in the archaeological record, the trends identified in this paper may be fundamentally incorrect. Yet again, there is even less information available from La Tène areas further east, in places such as Hungary. Finally, there is the question of whether or not human sacrifice was practiced by the late La Tène people. Whether or not such practices were truly in existence drastically changes the potential of interpretation for the overall nature and trends of late La Tène burial traditions.

Ultimately, it would seem that a combination of increased social complexity, the presence of the Roman Empire as a catalyst for change, random internal changes, and some degree of cultural diffusion were all involved in creating the burial scenario as it existed during the La Tène D period. “Cosmopolitanization” may have also had a role to play in this, but being able to identify whether or not this cultural attitude predominated amongst the La Tène peoples is questionable at best. As stated before, however, it is premature at this stage to try and propose any definite theories or conclusions about what was truly occurring during this time period. It is the ultimate hope of this author, however, that this paper succeeds in presenting a new and unique perspective that ultimately opens up new channels of dialogue and discussion about this particular question in the prehistory of continental Europe. From there, it may be able to open up new dialogue about changing cultures and societies on the borders of expanding states and empires.

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