

Lecture Summaries 1996–7

Mont Beuvray and the later Iron Age settlement record of central France

Ian Ralston

Mont Beuvray in upland Burgundy is a key example of a much-discussed series of large late Iron Age sites (*oppida*) distributed across a wide swathe of temperate Europe from the Atlantic coasts to the middle Danube. In the mid 19th century, it was identified as *Bibracte*, mentioned in Caesar's account of the *Gallic War* and there termed the chief oppidum of the Aedui, an important philo-Roman Gallic tribe. The evidence recovered by excavations between the 1860s and the first decade of this century, latterly directed by Joseph Déchelette, has been frequently deployed in discussions on the degree of political, economic and social complexity achieved in temperate Europe on the eve of the Roman military expansion northwards. The prevailing view is that Beuvray, and comparable sites, were at least proto-urban centres of substantial territorial polities. Artefactual and structural evidence indicates that long-distance trade and industry were well developed within at least some of them. Ripples of this perspective on the complexity of late Iron Age settlements have extended as far as Scotland, where Childe christened sites such as Traprain Law 'hill-top towns', and subsequently Feachem employed the term 'minor oppida' in his review of Scottish hillforts.

Although the evidence garnered during the early campaigns in ancient *Bibracte* is very important, it is also problematic, not least because Mont Beuvray was originally conceived as a single-horizon site, rapidly abandoned before the beginning of our era in favour of the new Roman foundation, *Augustodunum* (now Autun). Since 1984, a long-term collaborative research project has been developed to investigate the site. Adopted by President Mitterand and the then French government within its Grand Travaux programme, archaeological work at Beuvray has been in receipt of enormous state investment, and some of the concomitants of this, both favourable and less beneficial to archaeological research, were reviewed.

An overview of the results achieved from the new excavations and fieldwork demonstrates that the site is of greater complexity than had previously been recognized. The identification of an outer rampart shows that the enclosed area once attained some 200 ha, probably at a time preceding the construction of the inner rampart, that known since last century, surrounding the summits of Beuvray. Amongst new discoveries, the Romanized courtyard-style houses within the site can be seen as the culmination, after the Conquest, of successive and increasingly grandiose buildings on their sites; ritual use of one of the summits seems to begin at around 300 BC; and a planned 'quarter' on a terrace reveals evidence of both successive rebuildings and a layout in which preferred, perhaps celestial, orientations were respected. Imports (notably Greco-Italic amphorae) from the Mediterranean basin were certainly arriving early in the second century BC.

On a saddle outwith the fortifications, a cemetery, marked by rectilinear enclosures and containing cremations, apparently mostly of children, has been identified.

Relatively little additional evidence has yet been recovered about on-site industry, although one workshop, used successively as an iron smithy and then for the manufacture of copper-alloy brooches, displays remarkable internal fittings. Elements such as the range of coins recovered, and the presence of carbonized cereals containing weeds from limestone terrain not present within 40 km of the site, betoken elaborate linkages with surrounding areas. The presence of painted ceramics in quantity suggests that the last continental phase of 'Early Celtic Art' was not the shadowy twilight it sometimes appears.

Parts of *Bibracte's* interior were, however, much less densely settled, and extensive stone quarrying, some for the wall-faces of the defences, has been examined. As regards the fortifications, the re-examination of a massive inturned entranceway, some 20 m wide, demonstrates this to have been flanked by repeatedly rebuilt — and poor-quality — *muri gallici* but to lack substantial gate-furniture. In essence, the requirements of providing a monumental entranceway for prestige seem to have outweighed those of defence capability.

Mont Beuvray appears to have been a successful 'new town' of the later Iron Age, implanted on a traditional hill-top location during the second century BC. It seems to have declined relatively rapidly by the middle of the first century AD, although it continued thereafter to be the setting for cult practices and perhaps seasonal fairs. Its abandonment means the archaeological evidence is relatively accessible.

Selective evidence was introduced from elsewhere in central France indicative of considerable diversity amongst the major settlements of the late Iron Age. In the upland territory of the Lemovices, an oppidum of dinosauric size, seems never to have been intensively settled and to have been rapidly deserted; other sites are generally small. Between there and the civitas of the Aedui, that of the Bituriges cubi possesses a series of hill-forts not dissimilar in scale to the biggest of those in eastern Scotland. Some grew from the abandonment of neighbouring lowland industrial villages, whilst Avaricum (Bourges) shows evidence of use that spans much of the Iron Age and includes Mediterranean imports of sixth century and later date. Like new towns in more recent times, there are successes and failures, and perhaps considerable variations in foundation dates. A recurrent feature is their enclosure with stone-timber-and-earth walls of traditional, if militarily outmoded, temperate European types, highly consumptive of natural resources and labour.

Bibracte offers one model for their development and functions, but generalization across the set of oppida is increasingly unsafe as more diverse regional patterns come to light. Whilst Mediterranean models clearly underpinned some of the architecture of Beuvray, in some zones within the oppida band reliance on southern prototypes seems less conspicuous. If some oppida still have a claim to qualify as the first temperate European towns, their emergence as a symptom of increased integration into a world-system founded on the Mediterranean states is not a wholly satisfactory explanation. To that extent, ancient *Bibracte* may represent as much an exception as the norm in oppida development.

An important collection of archaeological textiles from Sillerholes, West Linton: a preliminary report

Thea Gabra-Sanders

Any evidence of medieval lead-mining is very scarce in Scotland but there is no doubt that the most significant feature of this site is the preservation of organic material which is in good condition. Apart from the medieval textile finds in Perth and Aberdeen, this is the largest medieval textile find in Scotland.

A range of textile and leather fragments, felt, rope, cordage and hair has been recovered which were deposited between the 13th and 15th centuries. They survived under special stable conditions.

Archaeological textiles are important as they give us an insight into the clothing of a particular time and they also provide us with information about cloth manufacture and the different types of cloth produced. A high proportion of the textiles is woven in the simplest three-shed and four-shed twill weave and a small group in the simplest form of weaving called tabby weave.

The variety in the cloth present is produced by using different spinning of fibres, different yarn thickness and coloured yarns which are either dyed or made from naturally coloured fleeces, eg grey, brown and black. So far 11 samples were tested for dye of which nine gave a positive result. A number of chemicals associated with natural dyes were detected.

Some five fragments of felt and a leather shoe with a complete brown felt lining were recovered. About a third of the fragments have been cut, various have folded hems and a few show evidence of sewing. Selvedges, simple or reinforced, are preserved and three fragments from the same material have a looped fringe.

The plucks of hair recovered have been tentatively identified as horse and cattle. Fragments of cabled rope of different thicknesses were made of hair.

These textiles, despite their size and condition, show a variety of cloth colour and yarn. Most fragments are in a 2/1 twill weave which show similarities to the cloth types found in Scotland (eg Perth and Aberdeen), England, Ireland and on the Continent. They also show a variety of weaving mistakes; from this it can be concluded that they were locally made.

It seems reasonable to assume that many of the fragments were originally destined for everyday clothing and perhaps blankets. Of some it can be said that they were reused — recycling is not new!

After having established this we have to ask ourselves how did this material get there and what was it used for? One possibility is that it was a midden. The textiles were found with an interesting assemblage of medieval pottery and leather and a range of butchered bone. Although some of the pieces are very fragmented and worn they are of suitable weight for clothing and blankets and some of this material could well have been used by the miners as their working dress.

Few records remain of the type of working clothes worn by miners. There is a medieval stone carving of a lead-miner in Wirksworth parish church. He seems to be wearing a round cap, a knee-covering shirt or caftan and low shoes, with a pick in the left hand and a kibble, an iron hoisting-bucket, in the other. A 14th-century town council seal from Byton shows the oldest image of a Polish miner in a flat cap and tight hose. Another image portrays lead-miners in Germany using a piece of linen to ventilate the shafts. Some of the rags found at Sillerholes could

well have served as protection for their heads, padding for legs, hands and backs, or even in the rag and chain pump, which drained the water out of the mine. The ropes and a noose made out of rags could also have been used in the mine.

With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers: Grooved Ware, grape-cups and prehistoric pharmacognosy

Andrew Sherratt

Friar Lawrence's speech in *Romeo and Juliet* offers some clues about the extensive knowledge of naturally occurring drugs that was available to prehistoric and early historic populations, and which is echoed in a multitude of ethnographic accounts. Descriptions of prehistoric life will be much impoverished if such uses are not taken into account. This lecture described the evidence for the preparation of alcoholic drinks in prehistoric Europe, and raised the question of what other drugs may have attained a socially privileged position before this time. It described the social and ideological importance of tobacco inhalation in the native cultures of North America, and suggested that burning and smoke-inhalation was a widespread practice in early Europe. The firmest evidence comes from the steppe region in the Iron Age, when Herodotus' description of Scythian cannabis-inhalation is matched by archaeological evidence from the frozen tomb at Pazyryk in the Altai mountains. Pottery braziers are common grave-goods in some of the earlier cultures of the Pontic steppes, however, and in two cases have been found associated with hemp seeds. With this model in mind, he drew attention both to the 'incense cups' of the Wessex culture and the *brûle-parfums* of the Neolithic Chasseyen culture of France, as two examples of distinctive, highly decorated pottery braziers which occur in religious or élite contexts. Since the opium poppy is a local domesticate in the west Mediterranean, and was widely cultivated in the Neolithic period, it is likely that its narcotic properties were already appreciated. Suggestive finds are the occurrence of poppy capsules in esparto-grass bags in the famous burial-cave of los Murcielagos in southern Spain. The symbolism becomes more explicit in the Aegean Bronze Age and traces of opium (in an olive oil base) have been identified chemically in the poppy-shaped juglets which were manufactured in quantity on Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age. With the spread of alcohol, the liquid consumption of psychotropic substances seems to have attained greater prestige than consumption by smoking; and this may explain the shapes of containers such as the TRB collared flask. This vessel, associated in graves with an amphora and a beaker, is a characteristic 'kit' and diagnostic for the TRB culture: it probably reflects both the consumption of a particular substance and a specific social practice. Other categories of distinctive prehistoric pottery, which occur in ritual (eg funerary) contexts and are likely candidates for such socially privileged forms of consumption, are Danish Middle Neolithic 'fruitstands' and British Grooved Ware. Dr Sherratt concluded that prehistoric religious practices often involved shamanism, in which the use of drugs was an important component. The examination of residues from early pottery, and particularly from classes of vessels which seem to have a special function, is likely to throw considerable light on such practices.

Admiral Duncan: a forgotten national hero

David Stockdale

Admiral Duncan (1731–1804), the victorious British commander at the naval Battle of Camperdown (11 October 1797) is remembered by the Royal Navy, by historians of the French Revolutionary Wars and curiously enough by a large proportion of the population of Dundee, where his achievements have entered local folklore. Dundee was Duncan's birthplace and his family played an important part in the town's history in the generations which came before and after him. But outside these narrow boundaries Duncan's name is hardly recognized.

He was once a national hero. His handling of one of the episodes which made up the Great Naval Mutiny of 1797 and his stunning victory over the Dutch Republican fleet off the coast of the Netherlands delighted the whole of the United Kingdom. He remained a household name after Horatio Nelson rose to prominence in the same Wars and, until his death, he was widely regarded as one of the four key figures — all naval commanders — to whom Britain owed her escape from defeat at the hands of France and her allies.

Duncan's achievements were rewarded amply at the time. As with other successful commanders of the 1790s he received a peerage and a large pension from the government. He was awarded the Naval Gold Medal and presented with numerous gifts and honours by towns, cities and public bodies right across Britain and Ireland from Dover to Dublin and Leith to Liverpool. His portrait was painted at others' expense by two of the foremost portrait painters of the day — Henry Raeburn in Edinburgh and John Hoppner in London.

He was a hero in more popular circles, too. Commercial souvenirs in every conceivable medium — prints and pamphlets, ceramics and medals, dress fabrics and costume jewellery — reproduced his image and lauded his success in battle. He was the centre of attention for crowds in the streets of London and Edinburgh and the subject of dramatic and musical works on stage.

To realize the extent of his contemporary fame and to chart the decline of his cult hero status, Admiral Duncan must be seen in the context of both the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars that followed them. The nation was so 'joyful' at his victory because it came at a juncture in the Wars when Britain faced a multiplicity of threats abroad and at home. Camperdown was at least as important in raising the desperately low national morale, as it was militarily in neutralizing the Dutch Navy as a serious threat and in preventing a much-feared invasion of Ireland, where internal political unrest might be fomented by external help into revolution. The victory came close on the heels of two French incursions — at Bantry Bay and Fishguard — and straight after the body blow of the Naval Mutinies throughout the fleets stationed in home waters. It proved decisively that the competence and the loyalty of the Royal Navy were no longer in doubt and provided a foundation for continuing the war-effort.

Duncan's success, therefore, not only bolstered the confidence of Pitt's government, it was also exploited by that government's public actions — notably in the awarding of peerages and the arranging of a special Thanksgiving Service in December 1797 — in order to help strengthen a flagging resolve to pursue the war.

The resumption of War from 1803 to 1815 inevitably started to eclipse the fame of Admiral Duncan, as it did that of Admirals Howe and St Vincent — for none of the three saw service in the later campaigns. Other heroes, particularly Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, grabbed the public imagination. The lapse of time and the high drama of Trafalgar and Waterloo aided this

process. The denouement of 1815 was also far more conclusive than the stalemate of 1801, and naturally the memory of the endgame outlived the brilliant captures made in the earlier Wars.

What was left for Duncan's reputation was to become absorbed into the wider British military myth of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period — his was one name and his victory a single exploit in the annals of an island nation, proud, invincible and assured of her destiny.