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*LES IMAGES ET LES FORMES. FRANÇOISE HENRY (1902-1982),
LES HÉRITAGES D'UNE ŒUVRE PIONNIÈRE*

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'A REMARKABLE CONTINUITY': FACT OR FICTION FIFTY-FIVE YEARS ON

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'A remarkable continuity': fact or fiction fifty-five years on

Conor Newman

Introduction

Françoise Henry was the pre-eminent ambassador and fiercest defender of the 'Irishness' of Irish art and its deep autochthonous roots, securing for her a permanent seat at the high table of Irish art and culture. With characteristic succinctness, she set out her stall vis-à-vis the roots of the Insular Style in the opening line of *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to A.D. 800)*, declaring: 'A remarkable continuity is one of the most striking aspects of Irish art'.¹

On the one hand, continuity in the general *aesthetic* of early Irish art is indisputable; the essential grammar of abstract, curvilinear forms, and in particular the reverse curve, endured until at least the 10th century, even if these building blocks are not exclusive to La Tène art, insular or otherwise. On the other, however, the assertion speaks also to a fealty to her adopted home that, consciously or unconsciously, appeared to eschew outside influences—particularly from the neighbouring island and its 'new' Germanic inhabitants—in the genesis of an Insular Style that reached full maturity in the 7th century. In the preface to the 1965 revision of the book, Henry goes even further, declaring that '...recent controversies as to the part played by England in the elaboration of Irish art [...] represent probably a passing phase and it would be dangerous to give them too much importance...'. An interesting choice of words that served to reinforce the view that Ultimate La Tène art was just that, the culmination of a Celtic art style that achieved perfection in ostensible isolation over a period of just over a thousand years.²

1 Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to A.D. 800)*, London, Methuen, 1965, p. 1.

2 Henry's first visit to Ireland, in 1926, came a mere five years after the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the founding of Saorstát na hÉireann (the Irish Free State), the same year Fianna Fáil, the dominant political party in Ireland, was founded, the first Free State coins were minted, and 'Celtic' crosses were erected over the graves of the fallen Irishmen at Flanders. This was a country forging its identity and carving out its place in the international arena, and when Henry took up post at UCD in 1932 that identity was assayed by the 31st International Eucharistic Congress, an event timed to commemorate the arrival of St Patrick in AD 432, and from which era it drew its visual and historical iconography. Whereas it may be blasphemous in the present context to suggest that when it came to narrating these critical early centuries Henry aligned with a nationalist doctrine of insular Christian exceptionalism, it would be naïve not to consider the times that were in it, and the political and intellectual landscape of the Ireland into which Henry arrived. Neither should we ignore the appeal of the treasure-trove of pre-industrial traditions that Irish-speaking rural communities in the West of Ireland in particular presented to someone with an ethnographical bent. How captivated Henry was by Inishkea and its people is testified to in her diaries from her time on the island (Janet T. Marquardt (ed.), *Françoise Henry in Co. Mayo. The Inishkea Journals*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2012). Remember too that Robert Lloyd Praeger's highly influential 1937 ethnographic survey *The Way That I Went. An Irishman in Ireland* was published in the year of her first visit to Inishkea—the feeling that here was living heritage of extraordinary antiquity is palpable

In this essay, I will critique the notion of insularity during the formative years of the emergence of the Insular Style and argue instead that Irish élites continued to emulate the politico-religious apparatus of their European and British counterparts, and drew from the same international lexicon of symbols to express it. I will begin by situating this critique in the context of contemporary approaches to the history of art of the period, summarising how a combination of new discoveries and new approaches have changed the paradigm and ushered in a more inclusive perspective on Irish art during the formative second quarter of the 1st millennium AD. By way of an example, I will then look at the pictographic evidence for the existence of a solar bull cult that was disseminated along complex networks operating from Ukraine and Persia to Gaul, suggesting that a reflex of this cult appears in Britain and Ireland. The evidence for this iteration of the bull cult in Ireland comes in the form of zoomorphic brooches but is *contextualised* by other aspects of the archaeological record.

The motif of the solar bull is chosen because it speaks to an important theme in early kingship. The agency and meaning of symbols, however, are contextual, and can change over space and time. One of the challenges, therefore, is to, as it were, close the chronological and spatial distance between the emergence – from an even older bull cult – of the solar bull motif in ancient Persia and around the Black Sea in the 4th millennium BC, and its appearance in France, Britain and Ireland as late as the 5th and 6th centuries AD. Moreover, since stories of bulls and royalty permeate medieval Irish literature, the hypothesis presented here supports the view that the literary corpus preserves elements of authentic pagan mythology and beliefs.³

New discoveries and a new era in scholarship

Fifty-five years on from the publication of *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period*, it is now evident that the process of Romanisation of Britain may not have been as thoroughgoing as was once believed, that the ‘native’ Briton (whatever that might mean)⁴ survived the Imperial period comparatively intact, culturally that is, and contributed greatly to the production and development of the Insular Style. Their world was, nevertheless, culturally complex.⁵ The view that Insular art owes its full aesthetic pedigree solely to the late-Iron Age natives; particularly of Ireland – whence the term ‘Ultimate La Tène Style’ – no longer holds. The style is more hybridised and complex than that, and the term ‘Insular’ is now applied, without qualification, to a distinctive early medieval art style produced on *both* islands.

and undoubtedly contributed to the feeling that here was a shielded Celtic idyll at the edge of the world, where Christianity blossomed in Edenic isolation.

3 E.g. John Waddell, *Archaeology and Celtic Myth. An Exploration*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2014; *Id.*, *Myth and Materiality*, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2018.

4 See Nick Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxons in England*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 2007.

5 E.g. Heinrich Härke, « Invisible Britons, Gallo-Romans and Russian: perspectives on cultural change », in *ibid.*, p. 57-67.

Similarly, our understanding of the range and depth of interaction between Ireland and Roman Britain is changing, alongside a view that, at least in respect of aesthetics, 4th-6th century, Insular art has a Late Antique seam running through it that, in the case of Ireland, is not necessarily predicated on the arrival of Christianity. Thus, to say that the same three elements, viz. Celtic, Classical and Germanic, that make up early medieval European art occur in the genome of Insular Late Iron Age art remains broadly true but only when it is understood that nowhere was this a triad of autonomous bloodlines. There are no primary colours but rather a palette of hues, blended and re-blended in a process of mutual, coeval evolution.

Across mainland Europe, cultural identities were hybrid and fluid, at least among the élite. And, people were mobile. The degree of coalescence between east and west, north and south, makes drawing lines on maps not only futile but arguably misleading; and even more so in light of genome and isotope analyses that pinpoint movement with a degree of precision not previously imaginable.⁶ While data from later prehistoric and early medieval Ireland are only slowly accumulating, it is clear that these types of data will impact significantly on archaeological and art-historical analysis going forward. At a macro level, before the influx of Scandinavian (Viking) haplotypes into the gene pool, there is clear evidence of a far older migratory wave from the Pontic Steppe as far as Ireland, associated with the spread of metallurgy, and possibly the introduction of Indo-European languages too. The sociological implications are manifold and may even lie behind connections attested to in the archaeological record into the early centuries AD. That such movements were episodic as far as the Irish record is concerned is confirmed by the identification of haplotypes common to the Irish, Scots and Welsh (diluted in the case of Anglo-Saxon England), indicating prolonged, largely uninterrupted, population continuity among the Celtic inhabitants of Britain and Ireland from around 2 000 BC.⁷ Continuity, however, does not necessarily mean isolation.

Moreover, in the nearly forty years since Françoise Henry's death in 1982, a wealth of new material has come to light, such as the cache of sublime altarware from Derrynaflan, Co. Tipperary, which Henry saw and commented upon but, unfortunately, did not experience *after* conservation; the door handles from Donore, near Kells in Co. Meath, a book-shrine from Lough Kinale, Co. Cavan, a processional cross from Tully Lough, Co. Roscommon, and the illuminated psalter from Faddan More bog, Co. Tipperary, with its stunning Coptic connections.⁸

Among the new international discoveries is a 6th-century Coptic fabric embroidered with an image of the Crux Gemmata (Fig. 1), which proves, once and for all, that the ringed high cross, which endures as an iconic feature of the Irish landscape, is not, after all, an Insular invention. Helen Roe's important paper on the assembly of the form of the ringed cross from different architectural features of *de locis sanctis* in Palestine was on the right track but failed to gain the traction it merited.

6 See Eupedia: European prehistory, anthropology and genetics <https://www.eupedia.com/genetics/>

7 Lara M. Cassidy, Rui Martiniano, Eileen M. Murphy *et al.*, « Neolithic and Bronze Age migration to Ireland and establishment of the insular Atlantic genome », *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, n° 113, 2, 2016, p. 372. Also, Ian Armit and David Reich, « The return of the Beaker Folk? Rethinking migration and population change in British prehistory », *Antiquity*, 95(384), p. 1464-1477, 2021.

8 John Gillis, *The Faddan More Psalter. The Discovery and Conservation of a Medieval Treasure*, Bray, Wordwell Books, 2021, identified papyrus in the binding during conservation.



Fig. 1 : Embroidered pall bearing an image of the Crux Gemmata. Coptic, 6th century AD. (Courtesy of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Centennial Fund: Aimee Mott Butler Charitable Trust, Mr and Mrs John F. Donovan, Estate of Margaret B. Hawkes, Eleanor Weld Reid 83. 126)

One wonders whether it might have been somewhat eclipsed by the publication of Henry's trilogy.⁹ Instead, generations of students (mine included) were fed on what ranks as one of Henry's more bizarre, typology-driven hypotheses, that the crossbar or transom of the high cross *escaped* from the confines of ever more elaborate cross-slabs (cf Fahan Mura). Here, and again in her theory of Irish manufacture of hanging bowls which are found overwhelmingly in Britain, one can detect bias in her approach to the early material.

The Bobbio and Clonmore reliquaries are also of signal importance (Fig. 2).¹⁰ Dating from the later-6th or 7th century, these represent the earliest indigenous ecclesiastical metalwork and are undeniably modelled on European exemplars. They too should be seen as outcomes of processes of encounter and assimilation. Late Antique in form and type, the decorative scheme is not per se

⁹ Helen Roe, « The Irish high cross: morphology and iconography », *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, n° 95, 1/2, 1965, p. 213-226. It is also noteworthy that the David Talbot Rice edited compendium *The Dark Ages. The Making of European Civilisation*, which adopts a pan-European perspective, was also published in 1965 (Thames & Hudson). Charles Thomas's chapter « The Coveted Isles. Celtic Britain and the Anglo-Saxons », p. 241-268, remains every bit as engaging and perspicacious.

¹⁰ Michael Ryan, « Decorated metalwork in the Museo dell' Abbazia, Bobbio, Italy », *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, n° 120, 1990, p. 102-111; Cormac Bourke, « Ireland's earliest Christian metalwork: the Clonmore Shrine », *Minerva: the International Review of Ancient Art and Archaeology*, n° 12/6, 2001, p. 6-7; Conor Newman, « Notes on the Bobbio reliquary », in Eleonora Destefanis (ed.), *L'Eredità di san Colombano: memoria e culto attraverso il Medioevo. Actes du colloque de Bobbio, 21-22 novembre 2015, Making Europe. Columbanus and his legacy*, Rennes, PUR, 2017, p. 269-282.

Insular, though it is executed in the Insular Style. Were it not for the legibility of the ornamentation of the prototypes, one might not entertain the idea that the curvilinear shapes on these Irish specimens represent vegetation, not to mention a motif as compact and particular as the Tree of Life. I have argued elsewhere that these objects bear witness to the complexity of cultural cross-pollination unfolding during these centuries. The curvilinear style harks back, oddly anachronistically, to earlier, Insular La Tène, but the dense, flashy, bi- or trichromatic, hand-carved surfaces are more in keeping with Provincial Roman or Late Antique Style and its Germanic first cousin.¹¹



Fig. 2 : Bobbio reliquary, early 7th century. (© F. Gavin & C. Newman, reproduced with kind permission of Don Mario Poggi, Museo dell'Abbazia di Bobbio) ; Clonmore reliquary (courtesy Ulster Museum)

A new and more theoretically robust era in scholarship, marking a definitive move away from endless typologies and fixation on dating towards semiotics, meaning and social context was precipitated, though not instigated, by a conference in 1985 (organised to mark the bicentenary of the Royal Irish Academy) that gave rise to the International Conference on Insular Art.¹² At the time of writing, the conference is about to convene for the tenth time. Many of the participants at the 1985 conference are still regular attendees and contributors, others, sadly, have passed on. Although the ranks have diversified as new voices bring different perspectives to the table, they have not grown much. Moreover, and perhaps revealing something of a personal bias here, it is telling that having made a brief appearance at the 1985 conference, latterly art of the 3rd to 5th century inclusive remains stubbornly underrepresented,¹³ and yet it is manifestly crucial to our understanding of the developmental origins of the Insular Style.¹⁴

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- 11 Conor Newman, « The Iron Age to Early Christian Transition: the evidence from dress fasteners », in Cormac Bourke (ed.), *From the Isles of the North. Early Medieval Art in Ireland and Britain. Proceedings of the third International Conference on Insular Art held in the Ulster Museum, Belfast, 7-11 April 1994*, Belfast, H.M.S.O., 1995, p. 23-25. Fiona Gavin and Conor Newman, « Notes on Insular silver in the "Military Style" », *Journal of Irish Archaeology*, n° 16, p. 1-10.
- 12 Michael Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500-1200*, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 1987.
- 13 The same seems to be true regarding the study of early Anglo-Saxon art, see John Hines, « Eclectic art of the early Anglo-Saxon Jewellery », in Katherine Reynolds Brown, Dafydd Kidd and Charles T. Little (ed.), *From Attila to Charlemagne: arts of the early medieval period in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New Haven, Yale University Press, « Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia », 2000, p. 282-291.
- 14 E.g. Susanna McNab, « Celtic antecedents to the treatment of the human figure in early Irish art », in Colum Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming. Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period in its European Context*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, « Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers », 2001, p. 161-182.

The semiotic turn is as good as paradigmatic. Speaking more directly to how culture informs taste, appetite, production, reception and visual literacy, symbols reveal the synaptic linkages that were generated by, and, in turn, shaped the concourse of the principal actors, of whom the early Church was but one. Reaching beyond style and taste, symbols map out the intellectual landscapes of early medieval Europe, its 'grammars of creation', to borrow from George Steiner for whom they represent 'the articulate organization of perception, reflection and experience; the nerve-structure of consciousness when it communicates with itself and others'.¹⁵

The insular world, europe and the east: vectors of exchange and assimilation and the emergence of a new art style

Students of 3rd to 5th centuries Ireland are forced to live off scraps. How Irish élites came to mimic codifications operating abroad is unclear. The sea was not the physical barrier it might appear to be today but the logistics of sea-crossings makes all other places and people *feel* distant and different.¹⁶ By imposing practical limits on what could be exchanged, and when (because we must assume that maritime trade along the Atlantic coasts was seasonal), the sea impacted on the cast of actors involved in what little external trade is evidenced in the archaeological record. Mercantile transactions, if that is all they amounted to, are a poor substitute for the types of cultural dialogues that might have occurred between land neighbours. A considerable number of intermediaries stood between Irish élites and their continental counterparts. In short, they were not ordinarily meeting their overseas equals face-to-face.¹⁷ Plato's allegory of the cave is a useful analogy for how the outside world might have been perceived from Ireland, moving in and out of focus as historical circumstances shaped and shaded the cultural lens through which it was reflected, assimilated and rehearsed.

As is the case elsewhere, the effect of having Rome on one's doorstep cannot be overestimated, even if it is not yet fully understood.¹⁸ Roman military deployment has long been recognised as an important driver of long-distance movement and absorption in these centuries. The range, distribution and context of Roman objects in Ireland suggest that a closed hand of diplomacy,

¹⁵ George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation. Originating in the Gifford Lectures for 1990*, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 5. I see a resonance here with the distinction made between 'presentation' (style per se) and 'content' (images used and ideas conveyed) applied in Stephen Pollington, Lindsay Kerr and Brett Hammond, *Wayland's Work. Anglo-Saxon Art, Myth and Material Culture from the 4th to the 7th Century*, Ely, Anglo-Saxon Books, 2010, p. 27.

¹⁶ Regarding the present article, the important point is that trade with the Eastern Mediterranean and Western France is testified to in the archaeological record; see Christopher Loveluck and Aidan O'Sullivan, « Travel, transport and communication to and from Ireland ca 400-1100: an archaeological perspective », in Roy Fletcher and Sven Meeder (ed.), *The early Irish in Medieval Europe. Identity, Culture and Religion*, London/New York, Palgrave, 2016, p. 21-23.

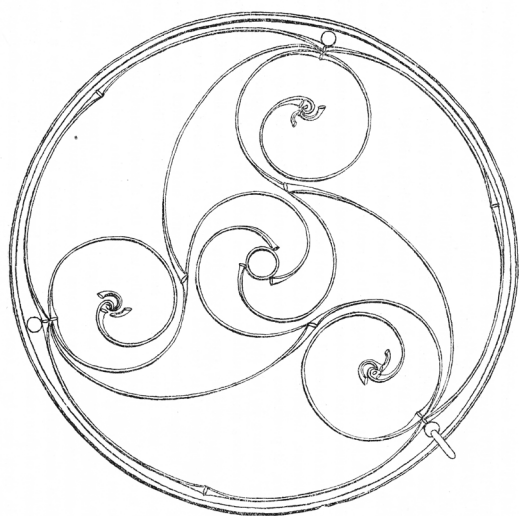
¹⁷ The closest to genuine international alliance involving the Irish in the pre-Christian period may have arisen during a time of unrest referred to as the *barbarica conspiratio* (ca. AD 367) when Picts, Scotti and Attacotti from the north and west, Franks and Saxons from the south, and an assortment of disgruntled deserters ran amok in Britain. Ironically, the adversary against whom they united supplied the archetype of rule and regalia to which so many of them aspired.

¹⁸ This aspect of Irish history is yet another casualty of the nationalist doctrine mentioned previously. Contemporary attitudes towards the issue are reflected in the Discovery Programme's Late Iron Age and Roman Ireland Project (2011-2014), see Jacqueline Cahill Wilson, « Romans and Roman material in Ireland: a wider social perspective », in Ead. and Terence B. Barry, *Late Iron Age and 'Roman' Ireland*, Dublin, Wordwell, « Discovery Programme Reports », 2014, p. 11-58.

comparable to what was offered elsewhere along the frontier, was also extended to Irish élites.¹⁹ It is also likely that, in the measures it took to delimit its boundaries and temper the ambitions of its neighbours, Imperial Rome disclosed enough of its military, political and cultural apparatus to implant a role model for others to follow. It is a model that endured, through various iterations, for centuries to follow, as Imperial gave way to Petrine Rome.

Mimesis and geographical circumstances aside, early medieval Ireland was materially impoverished. Raw materials, specifically precious and base metals, were in very short supply compared to what was available in Britain and on the Continent, and such exchange networks as existed were clearly too attenuated to secure a decent supply of raw or finished materials. Every mimetic expression is therefore physically smaller and abbreviated, shortcuts were taken (tin instead of silver, red enamel instead of garnet, and glass instead of gemstones²⁰), and miniaturisation, born out of necessity, was made into a virtue. This means we have to learn to read the shadows on the walls of Plato's cave if we are to detect outside influences in the insular material record.

In the very early centuries AD, for instance, one can observe the influence of Roman high art. I would suggest, for example, that the interplay on objects like the Bann disc (Fig. 3), Petrie Crown and Cork horns of tensile, fibrous curves arcing across reserved polished surfaces is inspired in



style and technique by, for instance, the style of the celebrated Hildesheim krater.²¹ It is telling, however, that these insular pieces are of copper alloy. By the later-4th century, however, silver becomes available and the aesthetic of the Bann disc is supplanted by panelled, textured, faceted friezes of densely packed, tight spirals, peltae, arcs and trumpets terminating in ivy leaves, berries and profiled comma-shaped heads.²² This represents a very important staging post in the emergence of the Insular Style because it derives from abroad, from provincial Roman and

Fig. 3 : « Bann Disc », Loughan Island, Coleraine, Derry. Early centuries AD. UM unnumbered (from J. Raftery, « A decorated bronze disc from the river Bann », *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, no 3.1, 1940, p. 27-30).

19 Roman material has turned up at, or in the vicinity of, most of the so-called 'royal sites', see Conor Newman, « Reflections on the making of a "Royal Site" in early Ireland », *World Archaeology*, n° 30/1, 1998, p. 127-141.

20 Niamh Whitfield, « Carmocul – an imitation garnet », in Mary Davies, Una McConville and Gabriel Cooney (eds.), *A Grand Gallimaufry collected in honour of Nick Maxwell*, Bray, Wordwell, 2010, p. 55-60.

21 E.g. Reinhard Stupperich, « Der Hildesheimer Silberschatz. Römisches Tafelgeschirr der augusteischen Zeit », in Wolfgang Schlüter, Frank Berger (eds.), *Kalkriese-Römer im Osnabrücker Land. Archäologische Forschungen zu Varusschlacht*, exh. cat., Osnabrück, Bramsche, 1993, fig. 5.

22 See Fiona Gavin, « Insular Military-Style silver pins in late Iron Age Ireland », in Fraser Hunter and Kenneth Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver. The Traprain Law Treasure in context*, Edinburgh, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2013, p. 428-430.

cognate Germanic styles circulating in Northern and North-western Europe.²³ Hints in the symbolic register of Mithraism and Bacchism, and possibly other Mystery cults popular among the Roman military, raise the possibility of deep cultural assimilation. Schorsch, for instance, suggests that the six-pointed star and rosette on one of the Military Style mounts from Ballinrees, Coleraine, Co. Derry, (Fig. 4) is evidence of Eastern iconography, possibly attributable to Sarmatian influence, disseminated by devotees from the high-ranking military and mercantile classes, among whom such religions were particularly popular.²⁴



Fig. 4 : Buckle fragment from the Ballinrees, Coleraine, Co. Derry, hoard. Later-4th century AD. BM 1855, 0815.12 (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Böhme refers to this important horizon in metalwork as the 'Military Style' (a term that has not been widely adopted but for which no alternative has been offered either). The aesthetic might otherwise be described as Late Antique, were it not for the fact that the term seems incongruous when applied to Germanic art. It may be more accurate to read the Military Style as a fusion of the two. The literary scholar Michael Roberts suggests the term 'Jeweled Style', arguing that it is the *style de l'époque*, colouring all aspects of the creative arts, from mosaics to prose.²⁵ Regardless of nomenclature, its arrival in Ireland is announced with the Ballinrees hoard (also known as the Coleraine hoard) of 4th century hacksilver, which contains items as accomplished as any of the surviving fittings from the famous Vermand (Aisne) treasure.²⁶

Given the likelihood that it is a donative, used to broker social relations and, in this case, possibly the supply of troops, Ballinrees brings Ireland into spheres of political and cultural influence associated with the Military Style.²⁷ Insular-style dress fasteners and hairpins (viz. zoomorphic

23 Salin's Style 1; see Horst Böhme, « The Vermand Treasure », in Katherine Reynolds Brown, Dafydd Kidd and Charles T. Little (eds.), *From Attila to Charlemagne*, op. cit., p. 78.

24 Deborah Schorsch, « The Vermand treasure: a testimony to the presence of Sarmatians in the Western Roman Empire », *The Metropolitan Museum Journal*, n° 21, 1986, p. 30.

25 Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1989.

26 Harold Mattingly, Bertram W. Pearce and Thomas D. Kendrick, « The Coleraine hoard », *Antiquity*, n° 11/41, 1937, p. 39-44.

27 See Sonja Marzinzik, « The Coleraine treasure from Northern Ireland: a consideration of the fittings », in Fraser Hunter and Kenneth Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver...op. cit.*, p. 182. Richard B. Warner, « The Late Roman silver hoard from Ballinrees, Co. Derry. Observations and implications », *Journal of Irish Archaeology*, n° 29, 2020, p. 79-102.

penannular brooches, disc-headed pins and hand pins; Fig. 5) decorated in the same style and mirroring copper-alloy pins from Xanten (Germany) and Asselt (Netherlands)²⁸ followed closely, demonstrating that this aesthetic quickly achieved full cultural purchase.²⁹ These Insular facsimiles are of soft copper alloys and high-purity Roman silver acquired, by fair means or foul, from the Late Roman West, and the ornamentation is executed in hand-carved *Kerbschnitt*.³⁰ Additional colour was supplied by niello and red enamel.

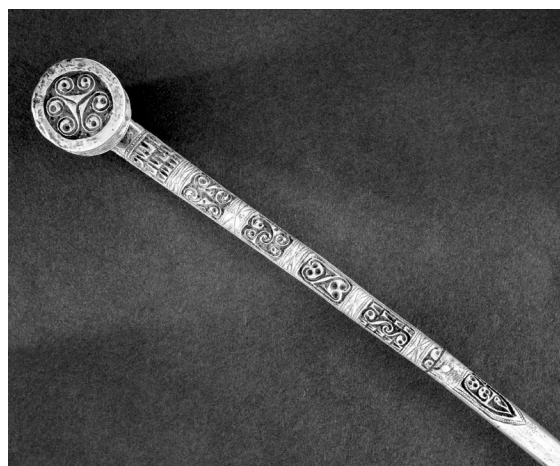


Fig. 5 : « Londesborough » Disc-headed pin, unprovenanced, Ireland. 5th century AD. BM 1888, 0719.100 (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Although it may be a little out of date, Böhme's distribution map of Military Style remains highly significant.³¹ As well as mapping a cultural phenomenon, it traces out an age-old, largely riverine corridor from the Black Sea to northern and north-western Europe that is reflected in the distribution patterns of a wide variety of types,³² including prestige, garnet-inlaid items such as swords, buckles, belt fittings and so on, bound for the élites of Germanic Europe. There is also correspondence with the distribution patterns of objects studied by Swift, and, perhaps even more importantly, the distribution of Britons on the Continent, whose whereabouts have been determined epigraphically and in items of personal jewellery.³³ All of these distributions also correspond with that of solar taurian symbolism to the extent that it is likely that these were the principal vectors that carried it westwards.

Paul Rance, « Attacotti, Déisi and Magnus Maximus: the case for Irish federates in late Roman Britain », *Britannia*, n° 32, p. 243-270. Peter Crawford, « The Coleraine hoard and Romano-Irish relations in Late Antiquity », *Classics Ireland*, n° 21-22, 2014-2015, p. 41-118.

28 Wim A. van Es, « Late Roman pins from Xanten/Dodewaard and Asselt », *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, n° 17, 1967, p. 121-128.

29 From an art-historical point of view, the revised dating of the softer compounds, from the late-6th/7th to the 4th century, recalibrates, significantly, the emergence of the Insular Style, demonstrating that it has an older and more complex, international parentage than was once believed to be the case. By the mid-6th century, or possibly earlier, supplies of silver had dried up, and craftspeople reverted to casting in copper alloys.

30 n. 20.

31 Horst Böhme, « Bemerkungen zum spätrömischen Militärstil », in Helmut Roth (ed.), *Zum Problem der Deutung frühmittelalterlicher Bildinhalte: Akten des 1. Internationalen Kolloquiums in Marburg a.d. Lahn, 15 bis 19. Februar 1983*, Thorbeck, Sigmaringen, 1986, p. 25-49, fig. 8.

32 Dieter Quast, « Ein byzantinischer Gürtelbeschlag der Zeit um 500 aus Weingarten (Lkr. Ravensburg) Grab 189 », *Fundberichte aus Baden-Württemberg*, n° 21, 1996, p. 527-539, fig. 6. See also the distribution patterns of the wide variety of accessories studied by Ellen Swift, *Regionality in Dress Accessories in the Late Roman West*, Montagnac, Monique Mergoïl, « Monographies Instrumentum », 2000. Note, the geographical reach of her research is as far as Pannonia.

33 Tatiana Ivleva, « British emigrants in the Roman Empire: complexities and symbols of ethnic identities », in Dragana Mladenović and Ben Russell (eds.), *TRAC 2010. Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Oxford 2010*, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2011, p. 132-153; in particular the distribution map reproduced in Tatiana Ivleva, « Britons abroad. The untold story of emigration and object mobility from Roman Britain », *Current Archaeology*, n° 311, 2016, p. 12-17.

The tomb of Childeric: a bridgehead between east and west



Fig. 6 : Bucranium with solar symbol, and other items, tombe de Childéric, Tournai, Belgium, (from Jean-Jacques Chifflet *Anastasis Childerici I, Francorum regis sive Thesaurus sepulchralis*, Antwerp, Ex officina Plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, 1655, p. 141)

Garnet and solar taurian symbolism come together spectacularly in the grave of Childéric (Fig. 6). A rare example of a secure and datable context, this assemblage establishes an important bridgehead between the wider, Indo-European tradition of solar taurian symbolism and its appearance in early medieval Britain and Ireland. The rehearsal of this ancient resurrection iconography in a late-5th century royal burial testifies to its enduring currency and closes the geographical and chronological distance between the source area of the solar bull and its appearance in the iconography of kingship in the Atlantic West.

As we shall see, examples of sun bulls from a richly endowed female burial at Hallstatt (Grave 671)³⁴ and Býčí skála (Bull Cave; Moravia, Czech Republic)³⁵ testify to the penetration of this particular iconography into Western Europe as early as the 7th/6th century BC, where there is already ample evidence of taurian symbolism.³⁶ That solar taurian symbolism endures in the West into the 1st millennium AD is no more exceptional

than is its continuity into the early centuries AD in South-eastern Europe, and, in any case, cultural vectors, such as Roman networks and trade in garnet and other items, kept these ancient corridors alive.

Childéric was buried in AD 481 or 482 at Tournai. The grave was discovered during the refurbishment of the hospice of Saint-Brice in 1653 and first published by Jean-Jacques Chifflet, the *figura paterna* of French archaeology, in 1655. *Anastasis Childerici I Francorum Regis sive Thesaurus sepulchralis* is a foundation stone of French archaeology.³⁷ Readers will be sufficiently familiar with

34 Karl Kromer, *Das Gräberfeld von Hallstatt*, Florence, Sansoni, 1959, p. 220, pl. 130.

35 Examining mimetic behaviours of early Iron Age élites in central Europe, Chytráček *et al.* suggest the bull figurine from Býčí skála may be from Etruria but that it reveals how strongly influenced Northern Italy was from the Middle East. See Miloslav Chytráček, Martin Golec, Věra Klontza-Jaklová *et al.*, « Zur Wirkung der Situlenkunst auf die Kunst der Fürstenschicht des 7.–5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. in Mitteleuropa », in Christine Bockisch-Bräuer, Bernd Mühldorfer and Martin Schönfelder (eds.), *Die frühe Eisenzeit in Mitteleuropa. Early Iron Age in Central Europe 2017*, Nürnberg, « Beiträge zur Vorgeschichte Nordostbayerns », 2019, p. 217-218.

36 E.g. Carola Metzger-Nebelsick, « Sumptuous vessels and animal protomes – new finds of the early Hallstatt period in Southeast Pannonia », in Erzsébet Jerem (ed.) *Das Nördliche Karpatenbecken in der Hallstattzeit Wirtschaft, Handel und Kommunikation in früheisenzeitlichen Gesellschaften zwischen Ostalpen und Westpannonien*, Budapest, Archaeolingua Alapítvány, 2017, p. 433-470.

37 If Chifflet's idiosyncratic Latin proves too much of an obstacle, Dieter Quast, *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs*

the grave assemblage and its regrettable history to obviate the need for detailed rehearsal of its contents here. Recent commentators emphasise the role of the chief mourner's management of the funeral in respect of specific 'target audiences': the burial was a moment for Clovis to assert and legitimise his political and cultural credentials.³⁸

Much of the assemblage is now missing and reconstructions are based on woodcuts from Chifflet's book. Along with a veritable colony of gold bees—the consensus seems to be that there were 30 and not 300—the grave goods included various prestige items, such as a portrait signet ring inscribed CHIDERICI REGIS, gold and garnet-inlaid pieces, including a sword and originally matching scabbard and belt, as well as an Eastern-style (i.e. Pontic Steppe) scramasax, a solid gold bracelet (*Kolbenarmring*), a gold crossbow fibula, a crystal orb and a gold bucranium with a solar symbol on its forehead. An accompanying purse contained 300 *solidi*, *denarii* and *siliques*, a rare mixture of silver and gold coins stretching over a remarkable five centuries, from the 1st century BC Roman Republic issue to the end of the 5th century (Zeno 474–475 and 476–491).³⁹ Most of the coins were minted AD 471–473, and are good (i.e. not debased) *solidi* from the Eastern treasury for use in Italy during the late reign of Anthemius.⁴⁰ In their forensic analysis of the coins, Fischer and Lind remind us of the deliberation behind the selection of grave goods, whose function was to speak to the international outlook and standing of the deceased *and* his nearest living relative(s). Such iconographies of cosmopolitanism continued for centuries to follow, as demonstrated by the assemblages from PrITTLEWELL and Sutton Hoo,⁴¹ and resonate, for instance, with the admixture of ethnic identities adopted by different members of one Alemannic kin group buried in an early 7th century cemetery at Niederstotzingen (Baden-Württemberg).⁴²

In order to preserve and profit from the various connections his father maintained, when choosing the grave goods Clovis directed his attention East and West. Objects of later Roman/Byzantine character addressed sub-Roman élites to the West and in the Byzantine court too, reminding the mourners that Childéric's authority was acknowledged and legitimated augustly.⁴³

Childeric in Tournai und die Anastasis Childerici von Jean-Jacques Chifflet aus dem Jahre 1655, Regensburg, Schnell & Steiner, « Monographien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums », 2015, makes the corpus accessible to a contemporary audience; see also Jean Benoît Cochet, *Le Tombeau de Childéric I^{er}, roi des Francs, restitué à l'aide de l'archéologie et des découvertes récentes faites en France, en Belgique, en Suisse, en Allemagne et en Angleterre*, Paris, Derache/Didron/Durand, 1859.

38 Heiko Steuer, « Archaeology and History: proposals on the social structure of the Merovingian kingdom », in Klaus Randsborg (ed.), *The Birth of Europe: Archaeology and Social Development in the First Millennium AD*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1989, p. 100–122; see also his Proposition 4.1, p. 107–108. Svante Fischer and Lennart Lind, « Coins in the grave of king Childeric », *Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History*, n° 14, 2015, p. 3–36. Dieter Quast, « Chlodwig – die Codes der Macht », in *Id.* (ed.) *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs Childerich*, *op. cit.*, p. 238 ff.

39 Svante Fischer and Lennart Lind, « Coins in the grave of Childeric », *art. cit.* With such a chronological range one wonders how many of the coins Childeric inherited from his ancestors?

40 *Ibid.*? *Art. cit.* p. 18.

41 Lynn Blackmore, Ian Blair, Sue Hirst *et al.*, *The PrITTLEWELL princely burial: excavations at Priory Crescent, Southend-On-Sea, Essex, 2003*, London, Museum of London Archaeology, « MOLA Monograph Series », 2019.

42 Niall O'Sullivan, Cosimo Posth, Valentina Coia *et al.*, « Ancient genome-wide analyses infer kinship structure in an Early Medieval Alemannic graveyard », *Sciences Advances*, n° 4/9, 2018, eaa0 1262. Genome and strontium and oxygen isotope analyses indicates that across just two generations, close kin had appropriated Byzantine, Lombard and Frankish identities as reflected in their grave-goods.

43 Quast characterises Clovis's use of his father's material wealth to authenticate his own claims as *regnum cum thesauro*

Excavations at Tournai suggest the grave originally comprised a tumulus, 20 m-30 m in diameter, surrounded by three fosses lined with sacrificed horses, mostly young stallions and geldings.⁴⁴ Comparable to the practice of funerary horse sacrifice among the Thuringii and in Thuringian-dominated Moravia, it was a formula directed at warrior élites east of the Rhine and designed to lay claim to Clovis's Germanic heritage.⁴⁵ The tradition of large funerary tumuli, elaborate grave assemblages and horse sacrifice is, in fact, far older and more widespread, and therefore attached the Franks to an exceptionally rich cultural sphere. From the Black Sea westwards to the Pannonian Basin was an area of unparalleled dynamism where, from the 7th century BC, the partially Hellenised cultures of the Western Steppe converged with those of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Balkans and, of course, the Eastern Celts.⁴⁶ Both Greeks and Romans exploited what was unfolding, the former laying down an infrastructure of emporia around the Black Sea coastline, the latter a network that channelled goods and people from here to the furthest, northwestern reaches of the Empire. From the 5th century AD, garnet emerges as one of the more visible and exotic cultural products moving from East to West.⁴⁷

(rule with treasury), Dieter Quast, *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs Childerich*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

- 44 Raymond Brulet, Gérard Coulon, Marie-Jeanne Ghenne-Dubois *et al.*, « Nouvelles recherches à Tournai autour de la sépulture de Childéric », *Actes des VIII^{es} Journées internationales d'Archéologie mérovingienne de Soissons (19-22 juin 1986)*, *Revue archéologique de Picardie*, n^{os} 3-4, 1988, p. 39-43; Raymond Brulet, « La tombe de Childéric et la topographie funéraire de Tournai à la fin du v^e siècle », in Michel Rouche (ed.), *Clovis, Histoire et Mémoire. Le Baptême de Clovis, son écho à travers l'histoire*, Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1997, p. 59-78. Pauline Hanot, Sylvian Gerber, Claude Guitard *et al.*, « Reconstructing the funeral traits of the horses from the tomb of King Childeric », *Journal of Archaeological Science*, n^o 121, 2020, p. 1-12
- 45 Patrick Périn and Michel Kazanski, « La tombe de Childéric, le Danube et la Méditerranée », in Laurent Verslype (ed.), *Villes et campagnes en Neustrie. Sociétés, économies, territoires, christianisation. Actes des XXV^{es} Journées internationales d'archéologie mérovingienne de l'AFAM*, Montagnac, Monique Mergoil, « Mémoires publiés par l'Association française d'archéologie mérovingienne », 2007, p. 32-34, suggest comparison with the Moravian tumulus at Žuran and note the practice in the Hunnic east, as far as Kazakhstan (cf. the twenty-two horses arranged around the late-7th/early 6th century BC Scythian kurgan at Kostromsky, see Boris Piotrovsky, « Excavations and Discoveries in Scythian Lands », in *Id.*, *From the Lands of the Scythians. Ancient Treasures from the Museums of the U.S.S.R. 3000 B.C.–100 B.C.*, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n^o 32/5, 1973-1974, p. 26-31. Stéphane Lebecq, « Les deux faces du roi Childéric : histoire, archéologie, historiographie », in *Id.* (ed.), *Hommes, mers et terres du Nord au début du Moyen Âge*, 1, *Peuples, cultures, territoires [online]*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2011, p. 19-33.
- 46 E.g. Svetlana V. Pankova and St John Simpson (eds.), *Masters of the Steppe: The Impact of the Scythians and Later Nomad Societies of Eurasia. Proceedings of a conference held at the British Museum, 27-19 October 2017*, Oxford Archaeopress, 2020; Jordan Anastassov, « The Celtic presence in Thrace during the 3rd century BC in the light of new archaeological data », in Mitja Guštin and Miloš Jevtić (eds.), *The Eastern Celts. The Communities between the Alps and the Black Sea*, Koper, Belgrade Univerza na Primorskem, « Annales Mediterraneae », 2011, p. 227-239; Alexander V. Podossinova, « Nomads of the Eurasian Steppe and Greeks of the Northern Black Sea region: encounter of two great civilisations in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages », in Chen Hao (ed.), *Competing Narratives between Nomadic People and their Sedentary Neighbours. Papers of the 7th International Conference on the Medieval History of the Eurasian Steppe*, November 9-12, 2018, Shanghai University, China, Szeged, University of Szeged, « Studia Uralo-Altaica », 2019, p. 237-251.
- 47 E.g. Helena Hammero, « The circulation of garnets in the North Sea Zone ca. 400-700 », in Alexander Hilger, Susanne Greiff and Dieter Quast (eds.), *Gemstones in the First Millennium AD: Mines, Trade, Workshops and Symbolism*, Mainz, Verlag des Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, « RGZM Tagungen », 2017, p. 71-84. While the use of garnet persisted into the 7th century in Britain and Scandinavia, inexplicably it died out somewhat across the Continent. These are all factors that must be considered when assessing the use of red enamel in early medieval Ireland.

The first scientific analyses of the garnet from the Tournai assemblage appeared in Birgit Arrhenius's 1985 survey of Merovingian garnet jewellery.⁴⁸ Arrhenius leans more heavily than is generally acknowledged on the different adhesives used to hold the garnet in place than on the quality of the garnet or the gem-cutting itself. Based on the identification of a signature 'dirty mix' of Syrian and Egyptian gypsum and quartz-sand cement employed in Byzantine workshops, she argues that the garnet cloisonné ornamenting various objects in the Tournai assemblage was prepared in Constantinople. Her thesis is that the direct diplomatic ties with Constantinople, signalled by high-quality crossbow brooches both here and, for example, in the broadly contemporary assemblages from Apahida, Transylvania (Romania), contextualise the use of 'dirty' gypsum adhesive in both instances, and establish the connection archaeologically: if the brooches were supplied from the Constantinopolitan court, then so too was the garnet.⁴⁹

The garnet inlays on Childéric's sword, however, reveal a more complex picture for, as Klaus Böhner recognised as long ago as 1948,⁵⁰ the upper and lower hilt guards are later additions, probably applied in a Western workshop. Gypsum-quartz cement may have been used to anchor the garnets on the sic 'panel', but the cement used on the upper and lower hilt guards is the calcite adhesive characteristic of regional/provincial workshops, located somewhere in the Rhineland, where, according to Arrhenius, the sword might have been assembled using garnets prepared in a 'central' or more central workshop. Accordingly, Arrhenius's B-pattern garnets on the upper and lower guards from Tournai are thought to have been imported ready-cut and fixed in their cloisons with wax for transit, and then anchored in 'cement' to the finished item. Childéric's was not the only sword with such an interesting history; composite manufacture is posited in the case of the swords from Altlußheim, Eich, and Planig too.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Birgit Arrhenius, *Merovingian Garnet Jewellery: emergence and social implications*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1985. The Syrian-Egyptian « dirty mix » that she identifies with Byzantine workshops, predates the use of gypsum from near Paris, which was not exploited until the 7th century, and Calcite in the case of the Tournai assemblage.

⁴⁹ Birgit Arrhenius, *Merovingian Garnet*, *op. cit.*, p. 84 and 100 ff.

⁵⁰ Klaus Böhner, « Das Langschwert des Frankenkönigs Childéric », *Bonner Jahrbücher des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande und des Rheinischen Provinzialmuseums in Bonn*, 148, 1948, 218-248; for discussion of swords Birgit Arrhenius, *Merovingian Garnet*, *op. cit.*, 102 ff.

⁵¹ In fact, Birgit Arrhenius *Merovingian Garnet*, *op. cit.*, p. 84-86, 106, seems to suggest that since aragonite decays to calcite, this might have been the adhesive of choice in « satellite » workshops. I am not an apologist for Arrhenius, but while it is easy to see why some commentators think she is Constantinople-focused, in actual fact she regards the Rhenish workshops as satellites which is probably logical since the archaeological evidence suggest very close collaboration in the manufacture of items; 'satellite' might be too loaded a term but they were certainly part of a network.

François Farges's analysis of the garnet from the necropolis at Saint-Rieul, Louvres (Val-d'Oise), concerning people who were in the 'close entourage of the first kings of France', speaks, however, to the source of the garnet.⁵² He identified three types: two Moldanubicum pyropes, probably from the Podsedic area of Bohemia, and a Rhodolite (Farges' Type I) of low-Ca content mineralogy but possibly too almandine-rich to have come from Central European granulitic sources, raising the possibility, nay probability, of origin in South India/Sri Lanka.⁵³ An important conclusion reached by Farges is that unlike Roman lapidaries who used colour and medicinal properties as the measure of value, the Louvres assemblage suggests a more refined, *qua* scientific approach that genuinely identifies and preferences rare and superior Sri Lankan garnet, reserving it for the ornamentation of the most élite.⁵⁴ Evidence of this sort attests to the sophistication and normalcy of intercultural connections and assimilation at work between these ostensibly quite distant places, which continued into the 7th century AD.⁵⁵

The Constantinopolitan connection is reinforced by Fischer and Lind's analysis of the coins from Childéric's grave. They argue, cogently, of at least an emulative connection with the monarchs of that great Bosporan city. Their concern that this could be peculiar to Childéric and the precise historical moment of his life has, as we have seen, been substantially negated by the new evidence from Niederstotzingen.⁵⁶ In the same vein, the gold crossbow brooch from Tournai—how Chifflet confused it with a stylus is unfathomable—belongs to a small but important corpus including, as we have seen, mid-5th century specimens from Apahida (AD 453). Others include two in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one from Assiû (Egypt), the other unprovenanced, that are discussed by Deppert-Lippitz who mentions others from the Palatine and Reggio Emilia, all of which are in the *opus interrasile* (openwork) style. Barbarian leaders wore them strictly with the permission of the emperor.⁵⁷ The Tournai brooch is a later variant—the triangular profile of the footplate is now semicircular—and Deppert-Lippitz dates it to ca AD 463–469 when, she suggests, Childéric was ap-

52 François Farges, « Mineralogy of the Louvres Merovingian garnet cloisonné jewellery: origins of the gems of the first kings of France », *American Mineralogist*, 83, 1998, p. 324, 327-328.

53 Sensus stricto Central Europe and Scandinavia cannot be ruled out but Farges is keen to keep this possibility on the table, *pace* Arrhenius. See also Thomas Calligaro, Patrick Périn, Françoise Vallet *et al.*, « Contribution à l'étude des grenats mérovingiens (Basilique de Saint-Denis et autres collections du musée d'Archéologie nationale, diverses collections publiques et objets de fouilles récentes). Nouvelles analyses gemmologiques et géochimiques effectuées au Centre de recherche et de restauration des Musées de France », *Antiquités nationales*, n° 38, 2006-2007, p. 124 ff.

54 The Louvres assemblage is rich in pyrope rather than almandine, which was to the fore in the assemblages Arrhenius analysed.

55 Emma Brownlee, « Connectivity and funerary change in early medieval Europe », *Antiquity*, n° 95, 2021, p. 145-159.

56 Niall O'Sullivan *et al.*, « Ancient genome », art. cit. See also William Daly, « Clovis; how Barbaric, how Pagan? », *Speculum*, 69/3, 1994, p. 624-627, who argues that Clovis's alliance with Aegidius, the last loyal Gallo-Roman leader, ought to be seen in the context of the threat posed to both the kingdom of the Franks and the neighbouring kingdom of Soissons by Visigothic advances into Northern Gaul; Jörg Drauschke, « 'Byzantine' and 'Oriental' imports in the Merovingian Empire from the second half of the fifth to the beginning of the eighth century », in Anthea Harris (ed.), *Incipient globalization? Long-distance contacts in the sixth century*, Oxford, Archaeopress, « BAR International Series », 2007, p. 53-74.

57 Barbara Deppert-Lippitz, « Late Roman and Early Byzantine Jewellery », in Katherine Reynolds Brown *et al.* (ed.), *From Attila to Charlemagne, op. cit.*, p. 67, fig. 7.11. An uncontexted, incomplete crossbow brooch with an interrasile arch commemorating Diocletian's 20th year as Augustus (A.D. 303) was found at Erickstanebrae, Dumfries and Galloway, see Martin A. Guggisberg, « Silver and donatives: non-coin exchange within and outside the Roman empire », in Fraser Hunter and Kenneth Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver...op. cit.*, p. 193-212.

pointed a Roman official. She does not support the idea that they were centrally made and then gifted, probably because some are solid gold while others are gilded copper alloy.⁵⁸

Similarly, with reference to the gold and garnet bees from Childéric's grave, Quast provides a very useful list of examples of bees/cicadas,⁵⁹ although he refrains from exploring the iconographical connection between bees and bulls. Because of their long association with resurrection, and their role as intermediaries between people and their gods, bees are entirely at home in a funerary context.⁶⁰ In fact, Childéric was surrounded by a veritable armoury of apotropaic devices. Like the gold bracelet from the Louvres necropolis,⁶¹ to take just one contemporary example, the now damaged zoomorph on the pommel of Childéric's sword was originally two-headed, or bicephalic, which is another ancient symbol of rebirth that transitioned seamlessly from pagan to Christian lexica, as evidenced by the tiny, gold *fibule ansée symétrique* from the tomb of sainte Bathilde, buried at Chelles in AD 680.⁶² We shall see presently that the oxhead protome can also symbolise rebirth.

Thus, we begin to see that the assemblage from Childéric's grave is culturally diverse and captures in its mixture of élite iconographies the cultural hybridity of the so-called 'Dark Age' West, which Fischer and Lind observe marks 'one of the most important transition points on the long path from Late Antiquity to the Medieval Period'.⁶³

Solar taurian symbolism

Essentially, two types of solar symbol occur on the foreheads of sacred bulls. The one on the bucranium from Childéric's grave is in the form of a rayed swirl. Elsewhere, solar symbols take the form of an inverted, usually white, triangle, commonly recognised as the distinguishing mark of the Egyptian bull-god Apis.⁶⁴ Here is not the place to interrogate the relationship between these two forms, except to say that the indications are that they are ostensibly interchangeable. The origins of the symbol (also beyond our remit) are obscure and complex: the bull cult is possibly the most ancient and primordial of them all and is a vast and fascinating subject. Suffice to say that the

58 Ellen Swift, *Regionality in Dress*, op. cit., p. 3, concurs.

59 Dieter Quast, *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs Childerich*, op. cit., p. 247 ff.

60 Daryn Lehoux, « Why does Aristotle think bees are divine? Proportion, triplicity and order in the natural world », *British Journal for the History of Science*, n° 52/3, 2019, p. 383-403. Rachel D. Carlson, *Apian Imagery in Classical Studies*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2015; Arthur Bernard Cook, « The Bee in Greek Mythology », *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, n° 15, 1895, p. 1-24.

61 LM3 François Farges, « Mineralogy », art. cit., fig. 2, (b)

62 Jean-Pierre Laporte and Raymond Boyer, *Trésors de Chelles : sépultures et reliques de la reine Bathilde († vers 680) et de l'abbesse Bertille († vers 704)*, cat. exp., Chelles, musée Alfred-Bonno, Chelles, Société archéologique et historique de Chelles, 1991, p. 39-40.

63 Svante Fischer and Lennart Lind, « Coins in the grave of Childeric », art. cit., p. 30.

64 The selection of the actual, living representative of Apis was based on a complex series of markings, including the shape of an eagle across his back, a parting in his switch (tail hairs) and a scarab-shaped knot under its tongue (see Herodotus, *Histories*, III.28)

evidence from Çatalhöyük indicates bull worship from at least the 7th millennium BC.⁶⁵ My purpose will be served by merely sketching the spatial and temporal range of the motif, to contextualise and support the suggestion that the same iconography could occur in Ireland (Fig. 7).

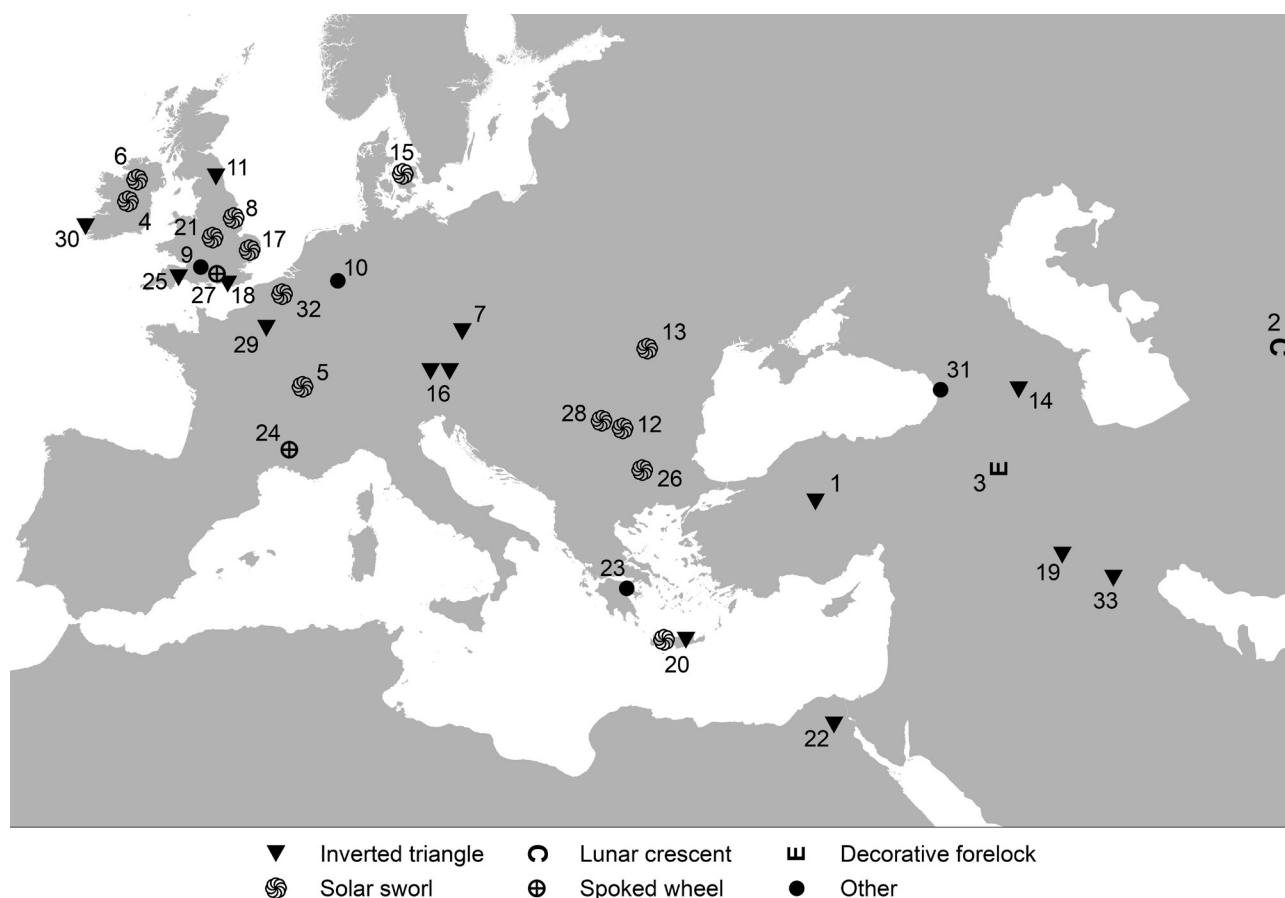


Fig. 7 : Findspots of bucrania with forehead ornamentation mentioned in the text: **1.** Alaca Höyük, Boğazköy, Turkey **2.** Altin-Depe, Turkmenistan **3.** Altin-Depe, Turkey **4.** Athlone, Westmeath, Ireland **5.** Avigney, Haute-Saône, France **6.** Belcoo, Fermanagh, Ireland **7.** Býčí skála, Moravia, Czech Republic **8.** Caistor, Lincolnshire, England **9.** Cassington, Berkshire, England **10.** Cologne, Germany **11.** Corbridge, Northumberland, England **12.** Craiova, Dolj, Romania **13.** Cucuteni-Băiceni, Curtești, Romania **14.** Dovşanlı, Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan **15.** Gundestrup, Himmerland, Denmark **16.** Hallstatt, Salzkammergut, Austria **17.** Haughley, Suffolk, England **18.** High Down, Sussex, England **19.** Khafaje, Dyiala, Iraq **20.** Knossos, Heraklion, Crete **21.** Loughborough, Leicestershire, England **22.** Memphis, Giza, Egypt **23.** Mycenaia, Argolis, Greece **24.** Orange, Vaucluse, France **25.** Ottery St. Mary, Devon, England **26.** Panagyurishte, Pazardzhik, Bulgaria **27.** Petersfield, Hampshire, England **28.** Poroina Mare, Mehedinti, Romania **29.** Saint-Denis, Saint-Denis, France **30.** Shroneberrane, Co. Kerry, Ireland **31.** Supsa, Lanchkhuti, Georgia **32.** Tournai, Hainaut, Belgium **33.** Ur, Dhi Qar, Iraq **34.** West Azerbaijan (note unprovenanced specimens not included)

Attributing what he termed the '*rouelle*' motif to earlier solar imagery, Joseph Déchelette was among the first to acknowledge the impressively long history of this form of taurian symbolism. The wheel is a recognised solar symbol, and when combined with horned helmets—which have a place in any consideration of bull cults in prehistory—, as is the case on the Triumphal Arch in Orange (Vaucluse), provides us with yet another version of the iconography.⁶⁶ To begin unravelling

⁶⁵ Joan Relke, « Interpreting the bucrania of Çatalhöyük: James Mellaart, Dorothy Cameron, and beyond », *Anthrozoös*, n° 20/4, 2007, p. 317-328.

⁶⁶ Joseph Déchelette, *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique, celtique et gallo-romaine*, Paris, Librairie Alphonse Picard et fils, 1908-1914, 1 & 2, p. 480, 1910, 1310; for Triumphal Arch at Orange, see fig. 484. For solar wheel see John Waddell, *Archaeology and Celtic Myth*, op. cit., p. 33-47.

the meaning and significance of taurian solar symbolism, which, in all likelihood, varied somewhat, we must turn to Egypt, where, in addition to providing some of the earliest traces of this iteration of the bull cult, no fewer than three bull cults coexisted (Apis at Memphis, Mnevis at Heliopolis, and Buchis at Armant).⁶⁷ Apis was the archetype, and his cult endured from the late-4th millennium BC to the reign of Diocletian (AD 284–305).⁶⁸ The earliest archaeological evidence of solar markings on Apis' brow dates from the second half of the 2nd millennium, when interments began at the Serapeum at Memphis, but it seems that the motif is older than this.⁶⁹ Successive empires – Persian, Hellenistic and Roman – and their associated diplomatic and trade networks could have contributed to the dissemination of this particular iconography, but the likelihood is that pre-existing bull cults throughout this very large area prepared the ground for this iteration to take root,⁷⁰ if indeed the motif itself was not already widely distributed by then.⁷¹ Comparable, and roughly contemporary symbolism occurs in early Greece, for example, as evidenced by the famous bull's head rhytons from Mycenea (Grave IV, Grave Circle A, dating from around 1600 BC), and Knossos (1600–1450 BC) respectively. In the case of the former, the solar motif is floral in shape whereas the latter, made of

67 The cults are attested to in text and artefacts, e.g. shabtis, canopic jars and mummies. The curvature of the horns on the Orange helmets contrasts with conical horns of the Waterloo helmet, and the elongated horns on the Torrs chamfrein.

68 Apis was a sky-deity of light and cosmic rebirth, including that of the kings, see Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology. A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 137. Often depicted carrying the solar disc between his horns, the inverted white triangle in the centre of his forehead marks where he was struck by a beam of sunlight or, alternatively, is a sort of umbilical scar from when he was birthed by the Sun. The animals kept at Memphis were duly mummified and an inverted triangle of white was sewn or sometimes painted onto the brow. An Egyptian, copper-alloy bucranium, which may have been a weight dating from c. 1550–1391 BCE, has an inverted triangle on the forehead, demonstrating that the tradition extended to portable objects as well (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 68.139.2; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548729>)

69 E.g. Vadim M. Masson, « Altin-depe and the Bull Cult », *Antiquity*, n° 50, 1976, p. 14–19, 17; « The art of Altin-depe: the artistic traditions of the urbanized cultures between Sumer and India », in John Vincent Megaw (ed.), *To Illustrate the Monuments. Essays on Archaeology Presented to Stuart Piggott*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1976, p. 254–262, 260–261, figs 10 and 11. See also Marina Miličević Bradač, « The transfer of symbols and meanings. The case of the 'horns of consecration' », *Documenta Praehistorica*, n° 32, 2005, p. 187–196, 193 and fig. 27. In her early survey of the motif, Anne Roes, « L'animal au signe solaire », *Revue archéologique*, 12, 6^e Sér., 1938, p. 153–182, suggests the motif is present on Middle Halaf pottery from excavations at Yunus, Karkemish, Syria. Interments at Memphis appear to have ceased around the time of the Roman conquest (30 BC), but they continued into the reign of Diocletian with the burial at Armant (*Hermonthis*, Egypt) of the heifer that had given birth to one of the Buchis bulls. For comprehensive survey see: Aidan M. Dobson, « Bull Cults », in Salima Ikram (ed.), *Divine Creatures. Animal Mummies in Ancient Egypt*, Cairo, American University in Cairo, 2004, p. 72–105. Remarking on the differently shaped horns (curved and straight) in depictions of Apis, Dobson (p. 73) makes the interesting suggestion that the horns may have been decorated with silver sheaths, which is potentially significant in light of the removable horns of the Gundestrup and Cork bulls and the possibility that the tips of the unprovenanced Irish specimen were sleeved.

70 Such as the taurian symbolism of the Frasnes-lez-Buissenal (Belgium) torque discussed below.

71 Cf the four bull figurines, two of silver, two of gold, from the Maikop kurgan (3700–3000 BC) which are interpreted as mounts for the long gold and silver tubes found alongside them. Viktor Trifonov, Denis Petrov and Larisa Savelieva, « Party like a Sumerian: reinterpreting the "sceptres" from the Maikop kurgan », *Antiquity*, n° 96/385, 2022, p. 1–18, argue that they are, in fact, drinking tubes or straws. In a very poorly translated paper, Irada Avsharova, « The Reflection of "Bull" Cult at the Bronze Age Material Culture of Azerbaijan », *Mester*, n° 48, Special Issue 4, 2019, p. 157–169, fig. 2 (5–9), illustrates five Bronze Age copper-alloy bucrania. Three are clearly staff-heads, i.e. two unprovenanced specimens from South and West Azerbaijan (n° 7 and 8 resp.; n° 7 has an inverted triangular setting on the forehead), the third (n° 9) is from a mound excavated by Emil Resler in the late 19th century near the village of Dovşanlı, in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, where it was found with other bucranium (n° 5) similarly marked.

serpentinite and possibly with gilt wooden horns, has the more common solar swirl on its forehead. The animal in the Bull Leaping fresco at the palace of Knossos, however, has an inverted triangle on its forehead, demonstrating the interchangeability of the two forms.

The establishment of Greek trading emporia and cities around the Black Sea from ca 650 BC, and the appearance of Egyptian objects in Scythian contexts across the Caucasus as far north as the Urals,⁷² reflect conditions favourable to syncretic infusion of solar taurian symbolism into the region (e.g. Supsa; 5th cent. BC?), and account for its presence in the Sarmatian repertoire, and thence to the Danube basin. Here, however, we must exercise caution for, as Masson reminds us, in Sumer the crescentic shape of bulls' horns was linked to a lunar taurian deity, patron of Ur.⁷³ Sumerian reach also extended northwards across the Zagros Mountains to the Caucasus, as testified to in the locally produced gold bucranium with a turquoise lunar crescent from the Bronze Age (2400-2000 BC) funerary complex of Altin-Depe, near the Turkmenistan-Iran border.⁷⁴

Regardless of where it was made, the figurine from Býčí skála, Moravia (Czech Republic), which rehearses with notable accuracy the Egyptian iconography of the inverted triangle on the forehead and vestigial wings on the shoulders (Fig. 8), extends the temporal and geographical range of solar-bull imagery. A chance find from the mouth of the cave in 1869, it belongs to an extremely rich, clearly ritual, and, at times, frankly macabre assemblage of the Hallstatt Period (7th-4th century BC).⁷⁵

72 E.g. at the 5th-4th century BC Great Bliznitsa kurgan, on Taman Peninsula overlooking the Cimmerian Bosphoros. See Boris Piotrovsky, « Early Cultures of the Lands of the Scythians », in *Id.*, *From the Lands of the Scythians...*, *op. cit.*, p. 12-25, 20 ff. Such was the extent of cultural cross-pollination that Herodotus, who visited the area, referred to the Caipidae as « Graeco-Scythian ». Piotrovsky describes the clothing appliques, including a bucranium, from the Seven Brothers kurgan, near the Kuban estuary, as rather crude local adaptations of Greek motifs (Catalogue No. 51, p. 105).

73 E.g. Renate Marian van Dijk-Coombes, « Mesopotamian Gods and the Bull », *Sociedades Precapitalistas*, n° 8/1, (e030. <https://doi.org/10.24215/22505121e030>), part 5, « The Moon God ». Vadim M. Masson, « Art of Altin-depe », *art. cit.*

74 The complexity of the situation is demonstrated by the occurrence of bucrania with triangular markings from the royal cemetery at Ur (e.g. a copper-alloy bucranium, identified as an ornamental mount from a lyre, has a lapis lazuli inset in the form of an inverted triangle on the forehead. Dating to 2550-2450 BCE, it also has a modest elaboration of the forelock hair suggesting hybridity with bucrania of this form – University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, British Museum/University Museum Expedition to Ur, Iraq, 1930, U.12435 (see: <https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/184530>), and another from the Temple of the Sumerian Moon-god Sin, at Khafaje which has triangular sea-shell inlay on the forehead), leading Masson to conclude that the Akkadians and Sumerians had a role to play in the emergence of lunar and solar bulls; cf Vadim M. Masson « Altin-depe Bull Cult », *art. cit.*, p. 18, pl. 1. Viktor Trifonov *et al.*, « Party like a Sumerian », *art. cit.*, p. 67-84, reinterpret the sceptres with taurian mounts from Maikop kurgan as straws from a Sumerian-inspired drinking ritual. Note also that bull imagery (without explicit celestial symbols) is commonplace in the art of the Urartian Iron Age culture, around Lake Van, that followed from the 9th century BC.

75 Hermann Parzinger, Jindra Nekvasil and Fritz Eckart Barth (eds.), *Die Býčí skála-Höhle. Ein hallstattzeitlicher Höhlenopferplatz in Mähren*, Mainz am Rhein, Philip von Zabern, « Römisch-Germanische Forschungen », 1995; Martin Golec, « Prehistorie a Historie Jeskyně Býčí Skála a Blízkého Okolí Neolitu po Současnost », in Martin Oliva, Martin Golec, Radim Kratochvíl *et al.*, *Jeskyně Býčí skála ve svých dějích a pradějích. Býčí skála Cave: History and Prehistory, Anthropos. Studies in Anthropology, Palaeethnology, Palaeontology and Quarternary Geology*, n° 39, N.S. 31, 2015, p. 115-153, figs. VIII.30a and b; Martin Golec, *The Phenomenon of the Býčí Skála Cave. Landscape, Cave and Mankind*, Olmouc, Palacký University, « Archaeologica Olomucensia », 2017. Here, Golec suggests the figurine was associated with the grave of a sic 'magnate' and offers two hypothetical reconstructions (male and female, figs 66 and 67 respectively) with different items of Hallstatt date recovered from the area of the entrance based on patterns observable from cognate Horákov culture graves in the region such as those at Bračice and Vojkovice (*op. cit.*, p. 87-90). According to Golec the figurine was in a vessel with millet (p. 90-91) thus linking it thematically with the nearby millet-filled human skull (also in a Bronzve vessel) and the distinctive millet-filled anklets (referred to as « turbans ») associated with female burials, found here and elsewhere.

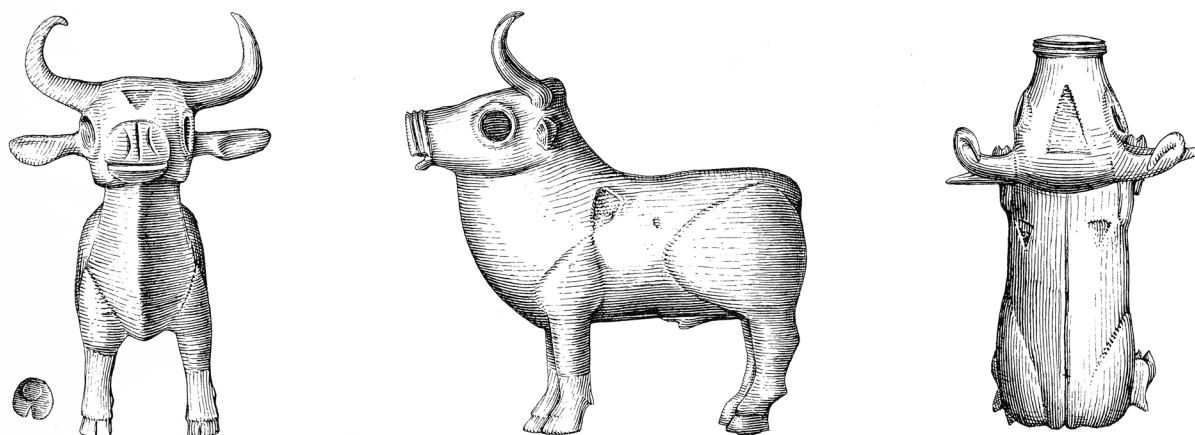


Fig. 8 : Bull figurine, Býčí skála, Moravia, Czech Republic. 7th-4th centuries BC. NHMW-Prae 11738 (from Hermann Parzinger, Jindra Nekvasil et Fritz Eckart Barth (dir.), *Die Býčí skála-Höhle*, fig. 9, 369).

It is not the first instance of different metals being used to distinguish significant areas of the body. The silver figurine of a bull, probably from an early Bronze Age cemetery (ca. 2,300 BC) predating the Hittite settlement of Alaca Höyük in present-day North-Central Turkey, has gold inlays on the forehead (in the form of an inverted triangle; (Fig. 9), and on the shoulders, flanks and hips.⁷⁶ Closer in date to the Býčí skála figurine is the Urartian series of taurian cauldron attachments dating from the 8th and 7th century BC, including a magnificent cauldron with four bulls' heads escutcheons



Fig. 9 : Bull figurine mount, silver with gold inlay, Alaca Höyük, Turkey, ca. 2300 BC. BM 135851 (© Trustees of the British Museum)

⁷⁶ British Museum 135851; e.g. John Collis, *The European Iron Age*, London, B. T. Batsford, 1984, fig. 4 but note Collis misidentifies the metals. In this case, the triangle on the forehead is elongated like that from Grave 671 at Hallstatt mentioned earlier.

and tripod from Altin-Depe, near Lake Van, in modern-day Turkey. In this series the forehead ornamentation takes the form of a decorative, plaited (?) forelock, closer in style to Assyrian traditions.⁷⁷

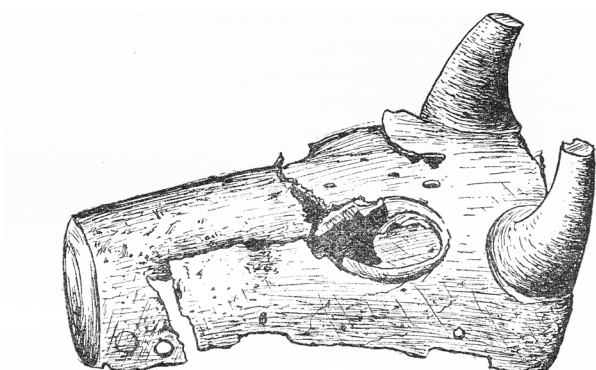


Fig. 10 : Bucranium, unprovenanced, Ireland, cast-bronze. NMI R.2949 (from Edmund C. Armstrong, « La Tène in Ireland », fig. 14, 1)

As has been remarked upon in the case of other specimens,⁷⁸ the figurine from Býčí skála also has a foreshortened, circumferentially lined, and somewhat porcine snout.⁷⁹ There is no speculation in the literature of deliberate melding of species in respect of either the snout or the disproportionately large, round eyes. These are, however, precisely the features of an unprovenanced, bronze bucranium from Ireland (NMI R.2949; Fig. 10). Though in this case the evidence of a forehead marking is equivocal, the comparanda suggest it may date from the early Iron Age.⁸⁰

Objects such as these are surely part of the ancestry of the famous later-4th to early-3rd century BC protomes from the Thraco-Getic Craiova Treasure (Romania; Fig. 11),⁸¹ the zoomorphs branded with solar symbols on the bracelet from the 'royal' burial at Cucuteni-Băiceni, and the rhytons from Poroina Mare (SW Romania) and Panagyurishte (Southern Bulgaria). Dating from the second half of the 4th century BC, the calf-headed, gilt-silver specimen from Poroina Mare has a solar swirl on the forehead, whereas the closely comparable cervid-headed gold rhyton (ca. 350-275 BC) from Panagyurishte appears to be of mixed

77 Richard David Barnett and Nuri Gökce, « The find of Urartian bronzes at Altin tepe, near Erzincan », *Anatolian Studies*, 3, 1953, p. 121-129; Oscar White Muscarella, « Winged Bull cauldron attachments from Iran », *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, n° 1, 1968, p. 7-18. See also Tomás Dezső, Zoltan Niederreiter and Csaba Bodnár, *Urartian Bronzes. A preliminary report on a looted hoard of Urartian Bronzes*, Budapest, Eötvös University Press, 2021.

78 I.e. in the case of the bucrania from Altin-Depe and Kara-Depe, Vadim M. Masson, « Altin-depe Bull Cult », art. cit., p. 16. The copper bull's head mount from Barbar Temple II, Bahrain, dated to around 2500 BCE, has the same features, see Elizabeth C. L. During Caspers, « The bull's head from Barbar Temple », *East and West*, n° 21/3-4, 1971, p. 217-223; Hussain Al Halwachi, « The copper bull's head at Barbar Temple: chemical composition and casting alloy », *Journal of Archaeological Science, Reports*, n° 32, 2020, 102390. Edward Martyn Jope, *Early Celtic Art in the British Isles*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000, considers it to be a boar's head, not *per se* on the basis of the snout but the vertical notches which, following the suggestion by Edmund C. R. Armstrong, « The La Tène Period in Ireland », *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, n° 53/1, 1923, p. 1-33, 28-29, fig. 14.1, that the marks indicate tusks.

79 Heidi Peter-Röcher, « Die Býčí skála-Höhle in Mähren-Opfer, Ahnenkult und Totenritual in der Hallstattzeit », *Das Altertum*, n° 44, 1998, p. 13 ff.

80 National Museum of Ireland, R. 2949. Edmund C. R. Armstrong, « La Tène Period », art. cit., p. 28-29, fig. 14.1; Barry Raftery, *A Catalogue of Iron Age Antiquities*, Marburg/Berlin, Philipps-Universität Marburg, « Vorgeschichtliche Seminar », 1983, cat. 832, fig. 230; *La Tène in Ireland. Problems of Origin and Chronology*, Marburg, Philipps-Universität Marburg, « Vorgeschichtliche Seminar », 1983, p. 306-307, fig. 148, 1. Armstrong's suggestion that the truncated horns may once have been topped with spheroids is worthy but we should also consider the possibility that precious metal sleeves or tips were placed over them as Dodson has suggested might have been the case of statuettes of Apis, Aidan Dodson, « Bull Cults », art. cit., p. 73.

81 E.g. Barbara Young, *The Metalwork of the Lower Danube 5th century B.C. – 4th century A.D.*, Phd under the dir. of Robert Hillenbrand, Edinburgh University, 1981, 243 ff.

heritage, Greek and Thracian, as evident in the iconographies and execution. Notwithstanding the fact that the principle animal is a stag, taurian symbolism is present around the neck of the vessel which depicts Theseus tackling the Marathonian Bull which has the by-now familiar solar swirl on its forehead.⁸²



Fig. 11 : One of six appliques in the form of bucrania (five of which have solar symbols on the forehead) from the Craiova hoard (collection of the National History Museum of Romania, inv. nos. 11166), © MNIR 2021, photo: Marius Amarie.

The zoomorphic terminals of the contemporary gold spiral armlet from the Băiceni hoard, on the other hand, seem to combine horses' heads with rams' horns. Here the ornamentation on the animal's forehead is more floral in appearance than we have previously encountered. However, a gold, discoidal appliqué from the hoard is decorated with a bull's head that has a noticeable but slightly amorphous protrusion on its forehead. This hoard has been variously dated from ca 400 BC to ca 300 BC.⁸³ Sîrbu et al. argue for Scythian influence in this instance. More generally, they envisage this sort of rich cultural admixture to be predicated on asymmetric, centre-periphery peer relations leading to mimesis of Greek and Macedonian fashions by a 'preeminent identity group' whose identities are expressed in what they refer to as a 'meaningful trinity' of fortified centres, tumuli graves and rich hoards (as witnessed in the case of Băiceni–Cucuteni-Cotnari). This model, they argue, had intrinsic durability, thus accounting for its wide chronological and geographical

82 See Asher Ovadia, « A new look at the mythological representations of the Panagyurishte gold treasure, Bulgaria », *Gerión*, n° 32, 2014, p. 138-139 and fig. 10.

83 Valeriu Sîrbu, Magdalena Duțescu and Dan Ștefan, « Burials as identity statements. Some remarks about the North-Thracian funerary phenomenon in the 4th-3rd centuries BC », *lid.*, *The Early Iron Age. Proceedings of the 60th Anniversary of Sergey Skory, Doctor of Archaeology, Kyiv-Poltava, National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Institute of Archaeology*, 2009, p. 427-453, fig. 13; for dating see n. 10.

range, extending from at least Serbia to the North-Pontus.⁸⁴ They conclude that from about 350-275/250, the greatest concentration of Getic power was in the region of Sboryanovo, Isperih, on the Krapinetz River, south of the lower reaches of the Danube, around their capital at Helis.

Roes too notes the connection between the solar ox in Childéric's grave and older specimens, such as the group of six comparable protomes from the 4th century BC Sarmatian/Thracian Treasure of Craiova (in modern-day Romania). However, she omits the dying bull in the baseplate of the Gundestrup cauldron (Fig. 12). The cauldron has been recently AMS-dated, with caveats, from the turn of the millennium to AD 300 (though the glass eyes were manufactured earlier).⁸⁵ The revised dating of the cauldron closes the chronological gap between the Thraco-Getic specimens just mentioned and the Tournai bucranium. Interestingly, not only does the Gundestrup bull have a solar swirl on its forehead, it also has a wing-like pattern in its shoulder fur and double tail hairs, all of which were definitive markings in the selection of the living, bovine representative of Apis kept in the Temple of Ptah at Memphis.⁸⁶



Fig. 12 : « Bull plate » from the Gundestrup cauldron, Himmerland, Denmark. 1st century BC - 3rd century AD. NMD C6563 (Photo: CC BY-SA, John Lee, National Museum of Denmark)

This so-called ' bull plate ' is, however, a recycled *phalera* (a decorative plate worn by men and horses) that was soldered to the bottom of the bowl to cover over a hole in the original.⁸⁷ A type associated in particular with the Sassanians, Dacians and Sarmatians, *phalerae* are distributed from

84 Valeriu Sîrbu *et al.*, « Burials as identity statements », art. cit., p. 443 ff.

85 Anne Roes, « L'animal au signe solaire », art. cit., p. 158; Svend Nielsen, Jan Holme Andersen, Joel A. Baker *et al.*, « The Gundestrup Cauldron. New scientific and technical investigations », *Acta Archaeologica*, n° 76, 2005, p. 1-58.

86 Herodotus, *Histories*, III.28. These features add weight to Arrhenius's suggestion that the sun symbol links the Tournai bucranium with Hapis, and that Childéric may have worshipped Isis, who takes over from Hathor (Sky-goddess mother of Apis) and wears a headdress comprising a solar disc held between two bovine horns, see Birgit Arrhenius, « Garnet jewellery of the fifth and sixth centuries », in Katherine Reynolds Brown *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 214-225, 215.

87 Erling Benner Larsen, « SEM-Identification and documentation of tool marks and surface textures on the Gundestrup Cauldron », in James Black (ed.), *Recent Advances in the Conservation and Analysis of Artifacts*, London, Summer Schools Press, 1987, p. 393-409.

the Indus Valley to the Atlantic.⁸⁸ A gilt-silver specimen in the Cabinet des Médailles (BnF), Paris, attributed to the North Pontic region, has a bucranium with a decorative, inverted triangle on its forehead, flanked by two griffons. It is dated to the 2nd-1st century BC.⁸⁹ Among the most westerly examples are the thirteen highly ornate specimens from a lost hoard of phalerae and silver coins from La Vaurocque on the Channel Island of Sark. One of the coins appears to be a *denarius* of the Roman moneyer Publius Crepusius dating from 82-81 BC, but the majority of the remaining identifiable coins are Armorican, and date from about 40 to 30 BC.⁹⁰ Taylor (1992) argues that phalerae from Sark are among the closest parallels for the bull plate of the Gundestrup cauldron, emphasising how widespread such symbols were and the belief systems that underpinned and animated them.⁹¹ The combination of Gallic coins and phalerae in the Sark hoard fits (cartographically) with the suggestion that tin from Cornwall was used to fix the glass eyes in place, and that the cauldron proper was made from what Nielsen et al. describe as the 'pool' of Sassanian silver and Gallic coinage from Western Germany and the Northern half of France respectively.⁹² Considering the possibility that the cauldron was made in North-western rather than South-eastern Europe, and the

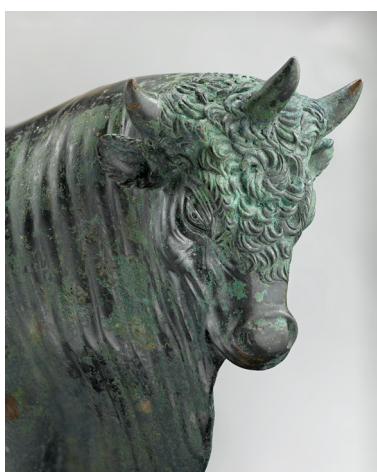


Fig. 13 : Three-horned bull figurine, Avrigny, Haute-Saône, France, 1st century AD. (Inv. 873.2.1 © Besançon, musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie – Photographie)

hybridity of its iconography, Nielsen et al. suggest the imperative to attribute it to this or that ethnicity is misguided. For them the cauldron encapsulates the cultural melting pot that was Europe from the mid-first century BC to the 5th century AD, during which period the movement of foreign auxiliaries was a significant driver of cultural exchange and assimilation. The 1st century AD bronze figurine of a three-horned bull with a solar swirl on its forehead from Avrigny (NW of Besançon, Haute-Saône) falls into the same category of mixed cultural and semiotic heritage (Fig. 13): comparisons have been drawn with a contemporary bucranium from Martigny-la-Romaine (Switzerland) which is also in the classical Greco-Roman tradition.⁹³

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- 88 E.g. Valeriu Sîrbu and Vitalie Bârca, « 9 figurative representations on the phalerae found between the Ural, the Caucasus, and the Balkan mountains (2nd-1st century BC) », in Lolita Nikolova, Marco Merlini and Alexandra Comşa (eds.), *Western-Pontic Culture Ambience and Pattern*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2016, p. 272-321, esp. fig. 9.8
- 89 <http://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/ws/catalogue/app/collection/record/ark:/12148/c33gbq8qm> (visited 08.01.22); Barbara Young, *Metalwork of the Lower Danube*, op. cit., p. 252-253, fig. 124. Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1922, p. 136.
- 90 Derek F. Allen, « The Sark Hoard of Celtic Coins and Phalerae », *The Numismatic Chronicle*, n° 8, 7^e ser., 1968, p. 37-54. Note: Allen draws comparisons between, inter alia, images on the Sark phalerae and the Gundestrup cauldron.
- 91 Timothy Taylor, « The Gundestrup Cauldron », *Scientific American*, n° 226/3, 1992, p. 84-89.
- 92 Svend Nielsen et al., « Gundestrup cauldron », art. cit., p. 34-35; Arne Jouttijärvi, « The Gundestrup Cauldron: Metallurgy and Manufacturing Techniques », *Materials and Manufacturing Processes*, 24, 2009, p. 960-966.
- 93 Miranda Green, « Crossing the boundaries: triple horns and emblematic transference », *European Journal of Archaeology*, 1/2, 1998, p. 219-240.

The Tournai bucranium in context

While not commenting on the solar motif, Quast seems a little sceptical of the view that the Tournai bucranium speaks to the 'myth' of the fathering of the eponymous Merovech by a sea bull recounted by Fredegar. Yet, he remains convinced of the importance of the piece, citing later comparanda such as the belt buckle (Fig. 14) from Arnegunde's grave, which, he points out, has two bucrania.⁹⁴ Callander Murray's rather jaundiced view of these latter is unmerited—horned, bestial crania they most certainly are! Zoomorphic art of this era is characteristically, and deliberately, ambivalent when it comes to species. His dismissal of the bucranium from Childéric's grave is, however, jejune—the small size of the object and its possibly having belonged to a horse harness⁹⁵ (this too has been challenged recently) are *not* legitimate grounds to belittle its significance. Moreover, the likelihood, as he sees it, of its having been an import and, therefore, not a true reflection of Frankish iconography is a non sequitur in respect of its potential symbolism. If it really is an import (which, as the evidence mounts, is less and less likely), its standing, like that of the Byzantine coins, is surely elevated rather than diminished by its deliberate inclusion among the grave goods.



Fig. 14 : Belt-buckle (detail), tomb of Arnegunde, Saint-Denis, Saint-Denis, France, 6th century AD, MAN 83471 (© RMN-Grand Palais (musée des Antiquités nationales) / Thierry Le Mage)

- ⁹⁴ Quast's hesitancy (n. 36, p. 245) seems to derive from Alexander Callander Murray, « Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'sacral Kingship' », in *Id.* (ed.), *After Rome's Fall. Narrators and sources of early Medieval History. Essays presented to Walter Goffart*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 125-126, where he characterises the Fredegar myth as little more than as a politically-motivated slight on the Merovingian royals, and dismisses the relevance of Fredegar's account of the birth of Merovech of Childéric's bucranium and the zoomorphs on the buckle from Arnegunde's tomb.
- ⁹⁵ Kurt Böhner, « Childeric von Tournai », in *Hoops Reallexikon der Germanische Altertumskunde*, vol. 3, Berlin/New York, 1981, hypothesises that the ox head was part of a bridle, possibly centred between the horse's eyes, in which case it would mirror the position of the solar symbol on the ox's forehead and might, one may speculate, cross-reference the place of horse-sacrifice in some kingship iconographies.

Leaving aside reservations that are now moot concerning the true identity of the Arnegunde burial (now dated to around AD 580),⁹⁶ the importance of the belt buckle is redoubled by the identification of a possible four *additional* bucrania, executed in filigree and garnet, in the fields between the scutiform panels of both parts of the buckle. As well as being adorsed relative to one another (and simultaneously affronted, chin-to-chin with the cast horned heads on the buckle plate) each one has an inverted triangle on the forehead, executed in garnet. Thus, not only is the number of bulls' heads on the piece trebled, but the taurian imagery itself is even more explicit given the solar symbolism associated with the inverted triangle. Finally, the circular garnet setting around the area of the mouth is suggestive of protruding tongues or flowers. The Tournai bull, on the other hand, is drawn with ribbons of gold emanating from its mouth. Is it possible that these represent stigma from the saffron crocus (*Crocus sativus*), recalling the tradition that Zeus, in the form of a white bull, emitted a saffron crocus from his mouth to attract Europa and thence carry her across the sea to Crete.⁹⁷

When set alongside the Tournai bucranium, the characterisation of the belt buckle as an original piece attributable to the inventive precociousness of *Mérovingien récent* 'court art' argues for the continued currency of solar taurian iconography in élite Frankish circles into the late-6th century.⁹⁸ Thus, it is against this backdrop that the two 6th-century, bull-form brooches from Arcy-Sainte-Restitue and Verly (both Aisne), and the later-6th/7th-century specimen from a richly endowed female grave in Cologne Cathedral dating from ca AD 625–650, should be considered.⁹⁹

Even if he was merely following scholastic convention, Chifflet's search for Greek, Egyptian and Roman comparanda led him to the tradition that connects bees and bulls in a potent motif of resurrection (*gignuntur apes ex bove*) viz. the Greek ritual of *begonia*. Performed by Aristaeus,

96 Patrick Périn, « Pour une révision de la datation de la tombe d'Arégonde, épouse de Clotaire I^{er}, découverte en 1959 dans la basilique de Saint-Denis », *Archéologie médiévale*, n° 21, 1991, p. 21-50. For revised dating following the rediscovery of the organic remains in 2003, see Patrick Périn and Thomas Calligaro, « La tombe d'Arégonde. Nouvelles analyses en laboratoire du mobilier métallique et des restes organiques de la défunte du sarcophage 49 de la basilique de Saint-Denis », *Antiquités nationales*, n° 37, 2005, p. 184. Fresh analysis of the skeletal remains indicates, inter alia, an age at death of about 61±3 years (and not 45 as previously suggested; Arégonde may have suffered from polio in childhood) leading to the suggestion that Arégonde's death occurred ca AD 580 (specifically AD 572-583). Previous estimates of age-at-death leading to a reckoned demise in 565-570 were incompatible with the « evolved Style II » animals of the belt- and shoe-buckles. Périn and Calligaro (p. 189-191) speculate that the polyhedral on the great pin from Arégonde's grave may be a re-used piece from the Caucasus.

97 A timely reminder that some traded items were perishable, e.g. Rachel Dewan, « Bronze Age flower power. The Minoan use and social significance of saffron and crocus flowers », *Chronika*, n° 5, 2015, p. 42-55; also Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women* (frag 19). The motif links the eponymous Merovech to the myth of Europa.

98 Patrick Périn and Thomas Calligaro, « La tombe d'Arégonde », art. cit., p. 198. See https://musee-archeologienationale.fr/phototheque/oeuvres/parure-de-la-reine-aregonde-plaque-boucle-de-ceinture-ou-baudrier_argent-metal_nielle_or-metal_verre-de-couleur_filigrane-or_grenat_cloisonne-technique

99 The cemetery at Arcy-Sainte-Restitue has been dated to the reign of Clovis, see Françoise Vallet, « À propos des tombes à épées d'apparat de La Rue-Saint-Pierre (Oise) et d'Arcy-Sainte-Restitue (Aisne) », *Revue archéologique de Picardie*, n° 198, 1988, p. 45-55. According to Arrhenius, the garnet on the Cologne bucranium was cemented in place with a sulphur paste that is the signature of a west European workshop; Birgit Arrhenius, *Merovingian Garnet*, op. cit., p. 163-170, figs. 200-202. See also Herbert Schultz, *Tools, Weapons and Ornaments. Germanic material culture in pre-Carolingian Central Europe 400-750*, Leiden/Boston/Cologne, Brill, 2001, p. 162, pl. 3b. Dieter Quast, « Ein byzantinischer Gürtelbeschlag der Zeit um 500 aus Weingarten (Lkr. Ravensburg) Grab 189 », *Fundberichte aus Baden-Württemberg*, n° 21, 1996, p. 527-539, 531-532, fig. 7.7. For illustrations of these latter bucrania see *Id.*, *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs Childerich*, op. cit., p. 247. Quast also illustrates a highly accomplished specimen in polychrome cloisonné enamel with an inverted white triangle on its forehead, observing that the distribution of this

the god who lost his bees, it is a formula of sacrifice and preparation of a bull or ox so that from its corpse will emerge, ostensibly *ex nihilo*, a new colony of bees. No mere vessel of anastasis, however, from at least the 3rd millennium BC, the ox was also regarded as a demiurgic intermediary, and bull sacrifice itself as a prelude to resurrection (*Zeugungskraft*) or institutional renewal. The theme arises in various manifestations, including the Mithraic reflex of tauroctony, and in the Irish ceremony of *tarbfheis* (Bull Feast), a ritual involving bull sacrifice described in early Irish literature as central to the revelation of the identity of the successor king. Thus, in story are bee and bull united, bookending kingly reign and the tricky navigation of renewal and succession (*stirps regia*): Conaire Mór's reign begins with bull sacrifice, while Congal Cáech's is ended with a bee sting.¹⁰⁰ The humble agent of Congal Cáech's demise is redolent with direct and indirect symbolic imagery, prompting us to consider whether the beehive and its colony might serve as an analogue of the *cosmion*. The spent drone (Congal Cáech) is stung and banished, a replacement must be found, so a bull or ox must be sacrificed. A familiar solution to be sure—according to the Greek tradition to produce a new hive, according to the Irish one to identify a new [sun–]king—so that order/colony/cosmos might be restored. As Cooke puts it, 'the death of the bull meant new life to the world at large'.¹⁰¹

Thus, in Childéric's grave, there are possibly *three* established resurrection symbols: the bees, the solar bull and the bicephalus, the first two of which also have a long association with kingship. In what follows I will argue that comparable iconographies occur in the Insular archaeological record from the 4th/5th century. Predating the written record, though perhaps not the oral one (that is a question for another day), are brooches in the form of bicephalic zoomorphs with solar symbols on the forehead.

Solar bulls in Britain and Ireland

As was the case elsewhere, solar taurian symbolism seems to have mapped onto pre-existing bull cults in Ireland and Britain.¹⁰² The unprovenanced bronze bucranium (NMI R.2949) from Ireland mentioned above is one of just two specimens, the other being a lost protome from the Galtee mountains, Co. Cork.¹⁰³ Britain, on the other hand, boasts quite a large number of bovine or taurian forms, some of which are quite similar to NMI R.2949, the unprovenanced Irish specimen.¹⁰⁴ In her

form of belt-fitting speaks to a Byzantine origin for the type. This example is attributed to Asia Minor confirming the continued currency of the motif at both ends of Europe.

100 Sacral kingship was cyclical in nature, and regicide marked the first step in a cosmogonic process that resurrected not only the kingship itself but the cosmos brought into being through hierogamous marriage (*banfheis*) to the Earth goddess.

101 Arthur Bernard Cook, *Zeus. A study in ancient religion*, t. 1, *Zeus God of the bright sky*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914, p. 518. Cook observes that « The parallelism between the procreation of bees from a bull and the Mythriac myth is here distinctly recognised », n. 2, p. 518.

102 John Coles, « The archaeological evidence for a "bull-cult" in late Bronze Age Europe », *Antiquity*, 39, 1965, p. 217-219. Edward Martyn Jope, *Early Celtic Art*, *op. cit.*, p. 109-110.

103 See Charles Drury Edward Fortnum, « Bronze Bovine Mask », *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* (London), March 20th 1879, p. 80-86. Notice in *The Western Star* and *Ballinasloe Advertiser* (Nov. 9, 1861) of a since-lost gold specimen was kindly brought to my attention by Aideen Ireland.

104 A perusal of Edward Martyn Jope, *Early Celtic Art*, *op. cit.*, pl. 166-173, is sufficient to establish the general Insular context of the corpus. See also Barry Raftery, *La Tène in Ireland*, *op. cit.*, p. 306-307, who suggests the unprovenanced

1974 survey of Celtic art in North Britain, MacGregor writes of almost 40 examples, and still more have been brought to light through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). Besides an interesting series decorating cosmetic mortars,¹⁰⁵ most of the objects in question are detached mounts of one sort or another (many from swing-handle buckets and pans),¹⁰⁶ and there is at least one figurine, that from Bank Farm, Dolphinton, Lanarkshire.¹⁰⁷ Some have solar or potentially solar symbols (Fig. 15). The copper-alloy bucranium from Ottery St. Mary, Devon (PAS DEV-E8CD43),¹⁰⁸ for instance, has an inverted triangular sic 'depression' (likely to be a setting) on the forehead, and there is a triangular pattern of light incisions on the forehead of a bucranium from Corbridge, Northumberland.¹⁰⁹ Ornamental rivet holes are commonplace on the foreheads of bovine-shaped bucket mounts (e. g. West Berkshire; Aylesbury Vale, Buckinghamshire; Wymondley, North Hertfordshire). Even though this is a practical place to position a rivet, it is rare for such prominently positioned rivets not to have a decorative dimension, so it is possible that there is some reference to solar iconography at play here as well.¹¹⁰ In general, bucket mounts/escutcheons such as these are ascribed to the early centuries AD. The British specimens are evidence that solar taurian symbolism was present in Britain in the first two or three centuries AD, which implicates the Romans in its arrival.



Fig. 15 : Bovine forms, UK, 1st-3rd centuries AD: a protome, Ottery St Mary, Devon (PAS DEV-E8CD43)

Ultimately, a Romano-British type from the 5th century AD, the zoomorphic penannular brooch became *the* dress fastener of choice in Ireland. Speculating on why this particular form emerged, as it were, from the pack, Youngs suggests the immediate inspiration may have been Roman

specimen NMI R.2949 may have also been a bucket mount or a staff-head mount.

105 <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/bull+headed+mortar> (visited 28.01.22). Morna MacGregor, *Early Celtic Art in North Britain. A Study of decorative metalwork from the 3rd century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D.*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1976, vol. 1, p. 153-155.

106 Christopher Hawkes, « Bronze-workers, cauldrons, and bucket-animals in Iron Age and Roman Britain », in William F. Grimes (ed.), *Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond. Essays presented to O. G. S. Crawford*, London, H. W. Edwards, 1951, p. 189-198.

107 Morna MacGregor, *Early Celtic Art, op. cit.*, vol. 2, cat. 312.

108 <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/877561> (visited 21.02.2022)

109 Morna MacGregor, *Early Celtic Art, op. cit.*, vol. 2, cat. 315.

110 Berkshire, PAS BERK-878EDD; Aylesbury Vale, PAS SUR-7F1C60; Cassington, PAS BERK-A03B79; Wymondley, Hertfordshire, PAS BH-1729A7; Withington, Gloucestershire, PAS GLO-754F3B; etc.)

military decorations in the shape of miniature torcs which, in referencing the far older tradition of torcs among the Persians, Scythians and Celts, honoured and appropriated a historically resonant motif.¹¹¹ Like phalerae, they too were worn on the breast.¹¹²

The first zoomorphic brooches in Ireland are from an important horizon of Romano-British material visible at places like Newgrange, Knowth and Freestone Hill; evidence not just of material exchange but also of the adoption of aspects of religious practices of the Roman World.¹¹³ They should also be recognised as an Insular iteration of the pan-European bicephalic forms that became increasingly popular throughout the Migration Period. As a type, zoomorphic brooches straddle the pagan-Christian divide, and bear witness to syncretistic metamorphoses of pagan symbols into Christian ones: depictions of the chalice of resurrection in the terminals of later brooches lend weight to the hypothesis that the bicephalic form of pre-Christian specimens also symbolised rebirth.¹¹⁴

From earliest times, the forehead of the zoomorph was a location privileged for ornamentation and symbolism (Fig. 16). In the case of some typologically early zoomorphic brooches that may date from the 4th century (i. e. an unprovenanced Irish specimen and two closely comparable specimens from High Down, Sussex, and Shroneberrane, Co. Kerry (Fig. 17) this takes the form of an inverted, concavo-convex, peltate triangle.¹¹⁵ These specimens are closely related to brooches of Kilbride Jones's Type B₁, which, on the basis of both style



Fig. 16 : Zoomorphic penannular brooch, Suffolk, (PAS SF-EBD824) (Portable Antiquities Scheme)

- 111 Susan Youngs, « Britain, Wales and Ireland: holding things together », in Karen Jankulak and Jonathan M. Wooding (eds.), *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2007, p. 86ff.
- 112 Undoubtedly, the snake-headed armillae, another important military decoration, also contributed to the form and associative cultural agency of the zoomorphic penannular brooch.
- 113 Ragnall Ó Floinn, « Freestone Hill, Co. Kilkenny: a reassessment », in Alfie P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: Studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2000, p. 12-29; also Susan Youngs, « Holding things together », art. cit., p. 85-86.
- 114 Conor Newman and Sandra Bourke, « The symbolism of zoomorphic penannular brooches », in Jane Hawkes (ed.), *Making Histories. Proceedings of the sixth international conference on Insular art, York 2011*, Donington, Shaun Tyas, 2013, p. 201-214.
- 115 Conor Newman, « Iron Age to Early Christian transition », art. cit., p. 20-23; the High Down zoomorphic brooch which was found in a grave with two small-long brooches, a popular Anglo-Saxon type dating between AD 450 and 550. For dating of small-long brooches, see Kenneth Penn and Birte Bruggmann, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon inhumation burial: Morning Thorpe, Spong Hill, Bergh Apton and Westgarth Gardens*, Gressen Hall, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, « East Anglian Archaeology », 2007.



Fig. 17 : Early zoomorphic penannular brooch with sub-triangular setting of red enamel on forehead. Unprovenanced, Ireland, NMI unnumbered (photo: C. Newman, reproduced with kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland)

and execution, are associated with the Military or Jeweled Style, providing them with a general *terminus ante quem* and a cultural context.¹¹⁶ The corpus of B1 and related brooches has grown since Kilbride Jones's study,¹¹⁷ most notably with the discovery of additional specimens in Britain, where they take their place beside long-shank pins from the same horizon. Among the most important additions to the corpus are two *detachable* brooch terminals of probable 5th century date from near Caistor (Lincolnshire) and Loughborough (Leicestershire) (Fig. 18).¹¹⁸ Each has a triskele on the forehead of the zoomorph, and while the zoomorphs are not bovine, the triskeles recall the solar discs or swirls on the foreheads of the bucrania we have been examining.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Conor Newman, « Iron Age to Early Christian transition », art. cit., p. 23; Fiona Gavin and Conor Newman, « Insular "Military Style" », art. cit., p. 1-10.

¹¹⁷ Howard Kilbride Jones, « Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches », *Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, n° 39, 1980.

¹¹⁸ Susan Youngs, « From metalwork to manuscript: some observations on the use of Celtic art in Insular manuscripts », in Sally Crawford, Helena Hammett and Leslie Webster (eds.), *Form and Order in the Anglo-Saxon World*, Oxford, Oxford University School of Archaeology, « Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History », 2009, p. 57-60, fig. 16. Also, *Ead.*, « Holding things together », art. cit., p. 80-101. See <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/448414> (visited 06.11.17)

¹¹⁹ To this select group should also be added a fragmentary zoomorphic brooch with a circular, probably enamel, setting on the forehead and pert 'ears' from Haughley, Suffolk, reported by the PAS (SF-EBD824). Similarly, a connection is possible with the cruciform and sunburst ornamentation of the prominent central, 'finger' of contemporary three-fingered hand-pins, which Fiona Gavin has suggested might be stylised heads; see Fiona Gavin, *Insular Ornamental Metalwork AD 300-500. « Military Style » inspired art in Ireland and Britain*, PhD under the dir. of Conor Newman, National University of Ireland Galway, 2014, p. 218-288; *Ead.*, « Symbolism and mimesis: new perspectives on Late Iron Age pins from Ireland », in Jane Hawkes (ed.), *Making Histories. Proceedings of the sixth international conference on Insular art, York 2011*, Donington, Shaun Tyas, 2013, p. 193-195. The inverted, peltate triangle seems to be comparatively short-lived on zoomorphic brooches; I suspect it had ceased before AD 500, and I doubt that the pairs of concave-sided triangles on later brooches symbolise the same thing. On the other hand, triskeles remain in the repertoire into the 6th and early-7th century (conservatively four specimens viz. Kilbride Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, cat. 62, 63, 66 & 67— the latter two from near Athlone), by which time Christian symbols have also started to appear. While cognisant of the speculative nature of the argument, it may be noteworthy that apart from the unprovenanced specimen that has a bill-like snout, the rest of the early specimens are characterised by flat, abrupt snouts comparable to those of the bucrania. Indeed, Youngs has queried whether the zoomorphs of the F3 brooches really are adorsed, as is normally the case, or whether they face one another, giving them snouts that are flat and circumferentially ribbed. See Conor Newman, « Fowler's Type F3 Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches »,



Fig. 18 : Zoomorphic brooch terminals (detachable), 5th century AD: **a** near Caistor, Lincolnshire, England, (CAAM NOLMS:2011.025.010.001; reproduced courtesy of North Lincolnshire Museum); **b** Loughborough, Leicestershire, England, (PAS LEIC-9CDC85; courtesy Leicestershire County Council)

These latter specimens are also distinguished as the only detached/detachable terminals from a corpus of over two hundred zoomorphic penannular brooches. While this is anomalous in the context of a series in which hoop and terminal are *always* cast as one, it reminds us of the use of detachable parts and the composite nature of some of the bucrania we have been looking at (e. g. the missing horns of the Gundrestup bull and those of the Poriona Mare rhyton), bucrania that are themselves fittings, such as the ones from Tournai, Craiova, Altin-Depe, and the possibility that the horns of the unprovenanced cast bronze bull's head from Ireland (NMI R.2949) may have been tipped in a different metal. The horns of the bovine protome from Cork are detachable and missing. If, indeed, they are a reflex of solar taurian symbolism, it might be observed that, as brooch terminals, they rehearse the iconography of cyclical eternity associated with the solar bull, but when separated from the hoops, the Caistor and Loughborough terminals morph into protomes, in which guise they may have acquired additional functions and meanings.

The possibility of an aesthetic connection between some of these brooches and the Military Style is important because it deepens our understanding of their cultural milieu in Ireland and Britain. The succession of Roman and Germanic colonisation/migration clearly forged connections with the Continent that were direct and immediate. If Britons travelled throughout the Empire, as *auxilia*, *numeri*, or in a non-military capacity, we should be open to the possibility that some Irish did too. The archaeological background of caches, burials and so forth in Ireland clearly paves the way for recruitment among the Irish—twenty-five or so years of military service is bound to have shaped and distinguished the outlook and beliefs of any that returned. The phenomenon of emulative behaviour and the dissemination of cultural practices and beliefs brought about by the deployment of ethnic troops by the Romans is complex. The posting of five-and-a-half thousand Sarmatian *cataphractarii* (cavalry) in Britain ca AD 200 (Dio Cassius 71.16), for instance, is likely to

have left its mark and contributed to the embedding of mystery cults in the region,¹²⁰ and may lie behind the discovery of an Irish-derivative three-link horse bit in Transylvania (ancient Dacia).¹²¹ Based on Hutchinson's exploration of the cult and its symbolism in Britain, Gavin has suggested the berry-and-foliage motifs on some of the early silver pins may be Bacchic or Dionysian symbols. In Britain, the majority of Bacchic symbols occur on jewellery. Hutchinson credits the penetration of the cult to the existence of 'kindred religious concepts', which accords with the identification of syncretic fusion of Celtic and Romano-British cults in the Thetford Treasure.¹²² Perhaps even more interesting from our point of view is Gavin's suggestion of solar symbolism on the tip of the middle digit of early silver three-fingered hand pins. Her suggestion that such pins might represent highly abstract human heads locates the solar symbol on the forehead. By way of comparison, she cites the Atrebatian coin from near Petersfield, Hampshire (which features a frontal bust with a headdress comprising a spoked wheel between horns or antlers), and the chain headdress from Wanborough, Surrey, supporting a five-spoked wheel located on the crown.¹²³

Archaeology and early Irish literature

The significance of this line of enquiry crystallises when the archaeological evidence is considered alongside the manifold early references to bulls and their association with order, rule and kingship.¹²⁴ Among early Irish law tracts, a legal code for beekeeping, the *Bechbretha*, preserves, inter alia, the Indo-European ancestry of the Old Irish lexicon associated with bees and beekeeping.¹²⁵ The second annual swarm, referred to in *Bechbretha* as the *tarbsaithe* or 'bull swarm',¹²⁶ introduces a

120 In the 5th and 6th centuries the Alans settled in Gaul. Is it possible that the Alanic practice of worshipping a naked sword plunged into the earth is related to cosmogonic bull sacrifice and the practice of burying a sacrificed bull in the earth with just its horns exposed (cf the horns of Knossos)? Are the Alans sacrificing the earth? See Scott Littleton, « From swords in the earth to the sword in the stone: a possible reflection of an Alano-Sarmatian rite of passage in the Arthurian tradition », in Edgar Charles Polomé (ed.), *Homage to Georges Dumézil, Journal of Indo-European Studies, Monograph Series*, 1982, p. 57ff.

121 Barry Raftery, « A bit too far: Ireland's Transylvanian link in the later Iron Age », in Alfie P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas, op. cit.*, p. 1-11. Raftery favours the Legio II Adiutrix as a possible vector of transmission.

122 Valerie J. Hutchinson, *Bacchus in Roman Britain: the Evidence for his Cult*, Oxford, Archeopress, « BAR British Series », 1986. Fiona Gavin, *Insular Ornamental Metalwork, op. cit.*, p. 300-303. Catherine Johns and Timothy W. Potter, *The Thetford Treasure: Roman Jewellery and Silver*, London, British Museum Publications, 1983.

123 Martin G. O'Connell and Joanna Bird, « The Roman Temple at Wanborough. Excavations 1985-1986 », *Surrey Archaeological Collection*, n° 82, 1994, p. 93-98, pl. 10 (Petersfield coin) and 11 (Wanborough Headress).

124 As Anthony T. Lucas, *Cattle in Ancient Ireland*, Kilkenny, Boethius Press, 1989, p. 12-14, 146-148, points out, the tradition of the *creach rí* (king's [cattle] raid) was an essential component of the inauguration ritual. Also the yield of milch cows was propitious.

125 Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly (eds.), *Bechbretha: An Old Irish Law-Tract on Beekeeping*, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, « Early Irish Law Series », 1983; Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997, p. 108ff.

126 Welsh *tarwhaid*; Breton *tarvhet*; the term 'bull-swarm' is still in use today. See Eva Crane, « Terms in Indo-European languages for some concepts related to honey, bees and hives », (On-line publication, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2009, <https://www.dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/terms-in-Indo-european-languages-for-some-concepts-related-to-honey-bees-and-hives/>). The symbolism linking bee colony and king is further reinforced by an adjudication made by the king of Tara, Domnall mac Áedo, in the case brought by the Ulstermen for recompense for Congal Cáech's lost eye. They were demanding as recompense Domnall's son's eye – and in the long version of *Cath Magh Rath* (the Battle of Magh Rath), an eye from Domnall as well, a blatant attempt to bring to an end breed and seed – but Domnall pronounced that the whole swarm should be killed off to ensure the offending bee was killed. The

possible thematic connection between bees and bulls in Ireland vis-à-vis the *tarbhfhéis*, enacted to select a new king (e.g. *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*, and *Serglige Con Culainn*).¹²⁷ Whereas Mac Cana sees in the Irish practice connections with tauroctonos Gallic rituals reported by Pliny the Elder, the practice is older and more widespread.¹²⁸ In the centuries relevant to this paper, it was central to, among others, the cults of Cybele and Mithras. Of special significance in the present discussion is the belief that by slaying the bull, who 'represents primordial chaos', Mithras 'releas[ed] creative and life-giving forces into the world',¹²⁹ a motif that resonates with the cosmogonic nature of kingly inauguration, from Persia to Ireland.¹³⁰ The sacrifice, as depicted on, for instance, the tauroctony from the *Mithraeum* at Walbrook, London, shows, inter alia, the accompanying torch-bearing figures Cautes and Cautopates representing darkness and light.¹³¹ Their presence is a reminder that the Mithras of the West was a Sun-god. This latter prompts us to reconsider as possible images of *Sol Invictus* two of the sculptures at Armagh; one a full figure, the other a bust, whose heads are framed by radiating lines. This is a hypothesis that merits serious consideration given the close parallel on the rhyton from Poriona Mare for the manner in which the right arm of another statue in Armagh Cathedral (the so-called 'Lurgan' figure), reaches across to the left shoulder and grasps a small ring.¹³² The comparison is compelling and introduces the possibility not just of a mithraeum in the vicinity of Armagh, but also a connection with the cult site of Emain Macha (Navan Fort), itself and its association with Conchobar and Lug whom Deane identifies as Sun and Light respectively.¹³³ It may be relevant that the discoidal and triangular mounts/settings on the foreheads of the bulls we have examined are positioned where typically there is a swirl or 'crown' in the animal's fur and also marks the spot where they are poleaxed (i. e. slaughter by striking the frontal bone of the cranium, between the eyes, with a heavy, blunt instrument), which is attested to in the Irish early medieval archaeozoological record. The Gundestrup bull is dying, its head raised one final time.

implication is that the incident arose from the king's negligence: Domnall's mis-management led to the swarming. (See Carl Marstrander, « A new version of the Battle of Mag Rath », *Ériu*, n° 5, 1911, p. 228–229. Might it be the case that unlike Cormac's handling of Gráinne's elopement (the virgin queen leaving the hive), Domnall dealt with the swarming decisively, securing, as is his responsibility, the integrity of the one hive/cosmion? In a narrative parallax, Domnall's decision to wipe out the entire swarm counterpoints Cormac's intervention in the court of Lughaid mac Con where the flock (swarm) of sheep that strayed into and consumed the queen's field of woad was under threat of forfeiture but, as a result of Cormac's intervention, only one year's growth of fleece (one season's honey harvest) was offered to the plaintiff.

127 See John Waddell, *Archaeology and Celtic Myth*, *op. cit.*, p. 136–137.

128 Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 16: 95. Proinsias Mac Cana, « Conservation and innovation in early Irish literature », *Études celtiques*, n° 13, 1973, p. 92.

129 Timothy W. Potter and Catherine Johns, *Roman Britain*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 182.

130 Conor Newman, « The sacral landscape of Tara: a preliminary exploration », in Roseanne Schot, Conor Newman and Edel Bhreathnach (eds.), *Landscapes of Cult and Kingship*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2011, p. 23–26. Charles Doherty, « Kingship in early Ireland », in Edel Bhreathnach (ed.), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2005, p. 15ff.

131 E. g. Guy De la Bédoyère, *Roman Britain. A New History*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2006, fig. 241.

132 AS6 and AS7; « Lurgan » figure (AS10) after Richard Warner, « The Armagh pagan statues: a checklist, a summary of their known history and possible evidence of their original location », *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, n° 72, 3rd ser., 2013/2014, p. 55–69.

133 Marion Deane, « From sacred marriage to clientship: a mythical account of the establishment of kingship as an institution », in Roseanne Schot, Conor Newman and Edel Bhreathnach (eds.), *Landscapes of Cult and Kingship*, *op. cit.*, p. 6–10.

The mark on its forehead might depict its sacred marking, declaring that this is no ordinary bull, as well as signifying that it has been poleaxed, in which case the woman with the sword over its back, who is often credited with its death, might instead be poised to deliver a *coup de grâce*. Her role might even be to sever the jugular in order to bleed the bull for purposes of ritualised bathing and imbibing.

The recurring association of caves (or cave-like structures) and bulls is also noteworthy. Rehearsed in the ox sacrifice performed by Aristaeus to resurrect his bees, it also features in the cults of Mithras and Cybele. In honour of the tradition that Mithras slew his bull in a cave, one of the initiation rituals involved being buried alive and, as it were, 'resurrected' in the *Mithraeum* (Mithraic temples are typically subterranean). Devotees of the cult of Cybele, on the other hand, reportedly entered an earthen hole or cavern beneath the dying, sacrificed bull, bathing in and imbibing its blood. Michael Grant reminds us that the last recorded *taurobolium* took place in the 4th century AD on the site of what is now the Vatican.¹³⁴ Comparable themes are present in Ireland. In the *tarbhfeis*, the identity of the new king is revealed in a dream to a man who, having first feasted and supped on the slain bull, and been placed under a spell of truth, sleeps on or under the hide, which we perhaps ought to think of as a cave. In addition to strong evidence of a bull cult expressed in placename (e. g. Rathnadarve, 'Fort of the Bulls') and in literature (cf. *Táin Bó Cúailgne*), the sacred complex of Crúacháin (Rathcroghan, Roscommon Co.) boasts one of Ireland's most celebrated caves, Oweynagat, the entrance to Hell or the Underworld which also has a taurian connection—the fearsome war-goddess Morrígan installed the bull Slemuin in Oweynagat, along with a cow he had impregnated from Odras'herd.¹³⁵ Equivalent traditions may have existed in Iron Age Gaul. Just 15 km east of Tournai, the ravine where the hoard from Frasnes-lez-Buissenal, named *Fontaine d'Enfer* (Hell's Source), is described by Leman-Delérie and Warmenbol as '... une véritable saignée dans le paysage...'. The hoard comprised two gold torcs—one of which is famously decorated with a bull—a small bracelet-like gold ring, and possibly as many as thirty gold coins.¹³⁶ A historico-thematic connection with the bucranium from Childéric's tomb is plausible, introducing the possibility of an enduring tradition of bull cult in this area. Ultimately, such traditions share the same Indo-European origins: rites and traditions of Mithras are recorded in Zoroastrian laws and Vedic hymns.¹³⁷ Thus, the two antique motifs of bull sacrifice and preternatural caves, combined or otherwise, appear,

134 Michael Grant, *The World of Rome. History of Civilisation*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960, p. 168-172.

135 Whitley Stokes, « The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas », *Revue celtique*, n° 16, 1895, p. 65. Odras is later turned into a pool by Morrígan after she attempts to follow her cow westwards to the síd mound (otherworldly mound) of Cruachú. I am indebted to John Waddell for bringing this reference to my attention.

136 Germaine Leman-Delérie and Eugène Warmenbol, « Dépôts et sites culturels en contexte "humide" dans les civitates des Nerviens et des Atrébates », in Philippe Barral, Alain Daubigney, Cynthia Dunning et al., (eds.), *L'Âge du Fer dans l'arc jurassien et ses marges. Dépôts, lieux sacrés et territorialité à l'âge du Fer. Actes du XXIX^e colloque international de l'AFEAF, Bienne, 5-8 mai 2005*, Besançon, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007, vol. 2, p. 425-423. John Evans, « On some gold ornaments and Gaulish coins found together at Frasnes in Belgium », *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, n° 4, 1864, p. 96-101. See also Venceslas Kruta, « L'ornementation de grande torque de Frasnes-lez-Buissenal et sa place dans l'art celtique », in *Les Celtes en France du Nord et en Belgique: VI^e-I^{er} siècles av. J.-C.*, Brussels, Crédit communal, 1990, p. 156-158. The torcs from Frasnes and Mailly-le-Camp compare closely to the famous Broighter torc from Ireland, see Barry Raftery, *La Tène in Ireland*, op. cit., p. 185-190.

137 E.g. Guy De la Bédoyère, *Roman Britain. A New History*, op. cit., p. 176.

and appear to be shared, across large swathes of space and time.¹³⁸

The archaeological evidence presented here builds on the recognition that taurian iconography was present in Ireland from at least the Bronze Age, and indicates that the highly significant association with solar symbolism was a combination known in Ireland from at least the 4th century AD.¹³⁹ The building blocks of cosmologies of kingship, renewal and eternity—solarism, bulls, bees, horses, bicephalism, and sacrifice—are deep, and appear to have retained their familial symbolic currency well into the Christian era: the latest *tarbhfeis* occurred in AD 560, in honour of Diarmait macCerbail, the last of the sacral kings of Tara. The importance of the forehead of the bull is signalled, fittingly, in the closing episode of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*; when the *Donn Cúailnge* (the Brown Bull of Cooley) finally returns to Cooley, after having slain and dismembered *Findbennach* (the White Bull of Connaught), he is spotted first by the women, boys and children who ‘saw the forehead of the Donn Cúailnge coming towards them. “A bull’s forehead comes to us!” they cried’. A gloss adds ‘Hence the name *Taul Tairb* (Bull’s Brow) ever since.’¹⁴⁰

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¹³⁸ Late-Celtic and so-called ‘Ultimate La Tène’ art display comparable *post hoc* confraternity: precipitated by the spread westwards of the Roman Empire, receptivity to the style and motifs of Roman and Provincial art was provisioned by, inter alia, pre-existing Classical chains in the genome of Celtic art.

¹³⁹ John Waddell has identified evidence of solar worship from early prehistory in Ireland, and, as we have seen (n. 133), Deane has identified it in early Irish myth.

¹⁴⁰ Cecile O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, (ed. and transl.) Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967, p. 272. The gloss is from Joseph Dunne, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge* (trans), London, David Nutt, 1914, p. 67–68, as quoted in Bruce Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle. A Study in the Ecology of Religions*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981, p. 89. See also Kay Muhr’s discussion of the placename « Éadan Tarbh » (Edendarriff, Co. Down) « hill-brow of the bull » in her « Where did the Brown Bull Die? An Hypothesis from Ireland’s Epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Version 1 », in Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (eds.) *Ulidia 2. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 24–27 June 2005*, Maynooth, An Sagart, 2009, p. 123–124. The *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (eDIL s.v. taul or dil.ie/40238) defines *taul* as ‘protuberance, projecting part, swelling’, such as the boss of a shield, part of a cross (such as the bosses typical of high crosses?), or forehead. Carl Marstrander, « A new version of the Battle of Mag Rath », art. cit., p. 226–247, p. 228–229.