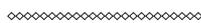


CHAPTER 1



OF MONSTERS AND FLOWERS

A NEW STYLE FOR IRON AGE EUROPE

A dramatic new style of imagery appeared in Europe twenty-five hundred years ago (Figure 1). Strange creatures, part human, part beast, were crafted onto gold and bronze jewelry and cast onto the handles and lids of bronze vessels. Metalsmiths created lush new forms of decoration—incised and relief ornament based on floral motifs such as leaves and petals, with spirals, S-curves, and whirligigs decorating objects ranging from pottery to sword scabbards.

This style was a radical departure from the forms of representation and decoration that preceded it. Throughout the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, representations of humans and animals had been rare, and those few that existed tended to be simple and naturalistic. There was no mistaking a water-bird or a stag for any other creature—their simple attributes made plain what animal was intended. Linear ornament was geometric, based on rectangles, rhomboids, triangles, and circles.

The reasons for the appearance of the new style, named La Tène after a site in western Switzerland, have been the source of endless controversy since the latter half of the nineteenth century. At that time archaeologists decided to divide the European Iron Age into an earlier stage called the “Hallstatt Period” (800–400 BC), after the great cemetery discovered at Hallstatt in Upper Austria, and a later stage designated the “La Tène Period” (from 400 BC to the Roman conquests), after the lakeshore site near Neuchâtel in Switzerland, where large numbers of metal objects, especially iron swords and their scabbards, had been found (see map, Figure 2). Debate has been dominated by two main questions. What was the source of the new style? And how was the new style related to social and political changes evident in the richly outfitted burials



Figure 1. (a) Bronze flagon with coral ornament from Basse-Yutz in eastern France. © *The Trustees of the British Museum*.



Figure 1. (b) Detail of the creature represented on the top of the handle. © *The Trustees of the British Museum*.



Figure 1. (c) Detail of the face at the base of the handle. © *The Trustees of the British Museum*.

of the fifth century BC, with their gold rings, imported Greek and Etruscan bronzes, and ornate chariots?

Discussion of the first question has revolved around identifying motifs and forms in the art and design traditions known as Greek, Scythian, and Etruscan that might have provided models for the new style in temperate Europe. Debate on the second question has explored the connections between the appearance of the new style and the decline in power of the centers of the sixth and early fifth centuries BC that were associated with the earlier Hallstatt style. These centers include the Heuneburg in southwest Germany, Mont Lassois in eastern France, Châtillon-sur-Glâne in Switzerland, Závist in Bohemia, and the Hellbrunnerberg in Austria, all of which thrived at the end of the sixth century BC and in the first decades of the fifth, and then fell into decline and abandonment in the middle years of that latter century.

My approach in this book is different. My principal concern with the new style of imagery and ornament is not where it came from or how it was connected to “dynasty change” during the European Iron Age. It is rather what the new style can tell us about how people’s ways of seeing, their visual



Figure 2. Map showing sites mentioned in the text.

perception, changed during the fifth century BC. As I argue below, this topic is not only of interest in its own right, but bears directly on our understanding of who we are today and how we got that way.

I began this chapter with this brief discussion of the new style that emerged during the fifth century BC, but my theme is much broader.

WRITTEN HISTORY AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF OBJECTS

Our understanding of the immediate past—of the past few weeks or even the past few decades—depends upon our personal experience, including our interactions with other individuals, our reading, and the news that we

may watch on TV or on the Internet. Understanding the more distant past—beyond a few decades—depends in large part on “history”; that is, on written (or filmed) accounts of what happened longer ago. But written history can take us back only so far. In North America north of Mexico, written texts take us back only as far as the end of the fifteenth century, when the first Europeans arrived. In Mesoamerica, written texts go back considerably further, at least to the beginnings of Classic Maya civilization in the third century AD. An earlier system of signs was used at Monte Alban (around 500 BC), and perhaps as far back as the Olmec culture, around 1000 BC (there is no consensus as yet as to whether or not the Olmec had writing). In Britain, the earliest writing (in Latin) appeared on local coinage of the latter half of the first century BC. In continental temperate Europe north of the Mediterranean Sea, there is early evidence of writing before the Roman conquest, but it is all in Greek or Latin script, and the inscriptions do not constitute anything that we would call history. In the Mediterranean, the alphabetic scripts of Greece, Etruria, and Rome developed during the first half of the first millennium BC. Linear B script in Greece emerged around the fourteenth century BC. Writing had begun at least by the time of the Shang Bronze Age in China, around the sixteenth century BC, and in the Indus Valley region of southern Asia, around the twenty-sixth century BC. The earliest signs that most scholars accept as writing developed in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, in both cases around the thirty-third century BC. But in both those cases, it was not until about seven centuries later that texts appeared that we might consider actual “history”—accounts of events and of rulers’ lives. For much of the world—South America, Africa south of Nubia, northern Asia, North America north of Mexico, the Pacific islands—what we understand as writing was first introduced by merchants and explorers from outside.

While history in this sense of written documents takes us back only a few centuries in most of the world (or at most a few millennia), the techniques of archaeology provide us with ways of learning about human actions, practices, and behaviors all the way back to the time of the earliest datable products of human activity, stone tools manufactured 2.6 million years ago. Just as the earliest texts do not provide much information from which we can write history, the earliest archaeological materials do not allow us to say very much about human behaviors or practices. But from later periods in human development, we often have access to rich sources of information in the form of physical evidence, as from Bronze and Iron Age Europe. I define “archaeological materials” here as any objects shaped or arranged by humans. These include tools made of stone, bone, copper, bronze, and iron; ornaments of shell, silver, and gold; pottery; textiles; wheeled vehicles; walls around settlements; graves; ditches—anything that humans have made.

The aspect of the past that constitutes the focus of this book is visual perception—how people saw in the past, compared to how we see today. “We” is not as simple as it might seem. We tend to assume that everyone perceives things as we do. But already in 1912, the American psychologist William James raised the question, can two different individuals perceive in exactly the same way. And indeed between two individuals raised in very different environments—one in a modern Western city and the other in a Bronze Age house in France, say—differences in perception are likely to be substantial.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

There is a general tendency in our society, as in all societies, to interpret objects from the past in terms of objects with which we are familiar. If we see an Early Bronze Age bracelet in a museum, we think about the bracelets that people in our own society wear and assume that the ancient bracelet served the same purpose. We read Caesar’s description of the peoples of Gaul as if they were modern newspaper reports or magazine stories about peoples with different customs from our own. We look at a seventeenth-century painting by de Hooch showing the inside of a house, with furniture and people in it, and transpose ourselves into that house and imagine what it would be like to live there. In the case of all of these reactions, we assume that we understand the object, the story, and the scene, because they all seem familiar. They look and read like things that we know about from our daily lives, and we have no reason to suspect that understanding them is any more complicated than understanding how a bracelet that we buy in a jewelry store should be worn, how to read a story in *National Geographic*, or how to interpret a photograph of a living-room setting in an interior design advertisement. But just because things look familiar, we cannot safely assume that we can understand them, without considering the context in which they occur.

But the matter is yet more complicated. People who lived in the Early Bronze Age, who led Roman armies against the inhabitants of France, or who lived in seventeenth-century Holland all inhabited worlds different from ours. A bracelet meant one thing in 1800 BC; a bracelet today can mean something quite different. Caesar saw the Iron Age peoples of Europe through the eyes of a wealthy and powerful member of Roman society. Dutch genre painters of the seventeenth century were conveying specific social and political messages with their paintings of house interiors. In each case, there is a great deal of background information that we need to know about the Early Bronze Age, about elite Roman attitudes toward other peoples, and about

ideology and politics in seventeenth-century Holland if we are to understand what these things meant to the people who created them and to those who experienced them.

In order to get some understanding of the past, an appreciation of how people lived and what they experienced, and to better understand objects that survive from the past (paintings, sculpture, buildings, pottery, brooches . . .), we need to take account of how peoples' experience in the past was different from ours today. It is all too easy to visit a reconstructed house at Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts, for example, or the reconstructed medieval village of West Stow in southern England, and think "they must have been so uncomfortable living in such small houses," or "how could they possibly see with no big glassed windows and no electric lights." In thinking this way, we imagine putting ourselves, with our experiences and our knowledge of our own world, into the physical situation we see before us. But our experience and knowledge are profoundly different from theirs, the peoples who lived in the situation we are imagining.

We know that the experiences of people in ages past were different from ours, but the only intellectual tools that we can bring to examine and study those experiences are our minds of today. In this sense, we can never really experience what things were like in the past. But there are ways that we can get closer to a sense of what they were like. One way is to read what people have written about the worlds they inhabited. From Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories, we get a feel for what life was like in nineteenth-century New England. Samuel Pepys helps us to understand London during the seventeenth century. Pliny the Elder gives us an idea of what the Roman Mediterranean world was like in the first century AD. Of course, their writings express their personal points of view, and they may be consciously representing things in a way favorable to them. Certainly, no individual can ever represent more than the fraction of the society and experience with which he or she is familiar. Even the meanings of words change over time, so that a word that Pepys used may have a different meaning or a different connotation today, and when it comes to translations from another language, matters are of course even more complex. For the most part, texts expose us only to the perspectives of elite members of society. But we can nonetheless learn a great deal about living conditions, the physical realities of life, values, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, and much else from writers who set their stories in the times in which they lived. Charles Dickens is a prime example, since much of our understanding of life in mid-nineteenth century Britain comes from his descriptions of conditions in his time.

Visual representations are another important source. From paintings, drawings, and photographs, we can glean information about conditions and lifestyles of the past. Jacob Riis's photographs from the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries are an important source of information about society and economy in New York City. James Fenton's photographs of mid-nineteenth-century England provide information about the character of the English countryside and about architecture, while his photographs from the Crimea show what the results of war really looked like. Landscape paintings by Rubens, van Ruisdael, and Constable inform us about agriculture, forestry, settlement patterns, and economy in early modern Europe. In Egypt and Mesopotamia we can study scenes going back some five thousand years to see how painters, sculptors, and other artisans represented the worlds in which they lived. As with written texts, we need to approach pictorial representations critically if we are to gain real insight into what they can tell us. Paintings and drawings are artists' creations, not objective representations of reality. Even photographs have never been as straightforward and objective as some people think—and this was true even before the possibilities of Photoshop. Yet despite such shortcomings, these sources of information are important for understanding the past.

We can also use nonverbal and nonpictorial objects from the past to help us to understand peoples' perceptions, practices, and experiences. Every manufactured object embodies essential features of the society that produced it, and the more complex the object, the more information we should be able to derive from it. As I shall argue in this book, objects played a much greater role in communication and expression in societies that do not have writing than in societies that do. Howard Morphy speaks of the "multidimensional nature of objects," and the myriad ways in which they can communicate meanings. As Jan Mukarovsky has argued for art objects in particular (but the same is true of all crafted items), every object can be viewed as possessing two essential aspects: the basic physical thing, and the meanings that the object embodies in the unique cultural context in which it was produced. Chapter 11 treats this topic in some detail.

DIFFERENT VISUAL WORLDS

People who lived in Europe between four thousand and two thousand years ago inhabited a different world from that of today. Though they were physically very much like us, and presumably psychologically similar as well, and although the landscape and climate were not very different either, their material culture was unlike ours in fundamental ways. Most importantly, they had far fewer objects than we have. There simply was not as much stuff around. Where the typical modern American or European might have a kitchen with

several hundred plates, glasses, and pieces of cutlery, a typical Iron Age European might have had five or ten ceramic containers at any one time. A modern American might have a tool chest containing fifty or a hundred tools, while his or her Iron Age counterpart had perhaps two or three, depending upon whether that individual was a craftsworker or a farmer. A modern American or British individual might own fifty to a hundred pieces of jewelry, an Iron Age person perhaps two or three. And there are many categories of things that we own that did not even exist in the Bronze and Iron Ages—cars, kitchen appliances, sports equipment, “collectibles.”

An implication of this difference is that the typical object means less to us today than an individual object would have meant to the person who owned it in late prehistoric Europe. And, as we shall see, objects that we might consider trash were valued by prehistoric people. Moreover, as many investigators have argued, objects had much greater significance to people who did not possess a system of writing, because they were means of communicating a whole range of kinds of information that writing communicates in literate societies.

OBJECTS IN TIMES BEFORE WRITING

This book is a study of a two-thousand-year period in Europe (Figure 3) from which we have vast quantities of material for study and analysis, but with which the great majority of people today are not very familiar. This period, from 2000 BC to the Roman conquests during the last century BC and the first century AD, is known by the terms “Bronze Age” and “Iron Age,” names devised by archaeologists during the nineteenth century, when the discipline of archaeology was first becoming systematic in its approaches to understanding the past. From these millennia we have large collections of pottery, jewelry, tools, weapons, metal vessels, wagons, horse harness ornaments, farming implements, and kitchen utensils, as well as rich documentation of settlements, cemeteries, and other places of human activity. Museums all over Europe offer rich and informative displays of objects from local cultures of the period. Reconstructed settlements are accessible to the public as open-air museums, often with costumed performers demonstrating how pottery was made, how bronze was cast, and how food was prepared. Thousands of publications illustrate and discuss material from the Bronze and Iron Ages, ranging from detailed reports on new discoveries and excavations to glossy coffee-table books with photographs of the most stunning prehistoric objects.

Before the Roman conquests, the peoples of temperate Europe had not developed any kind of communication technology that we would consider

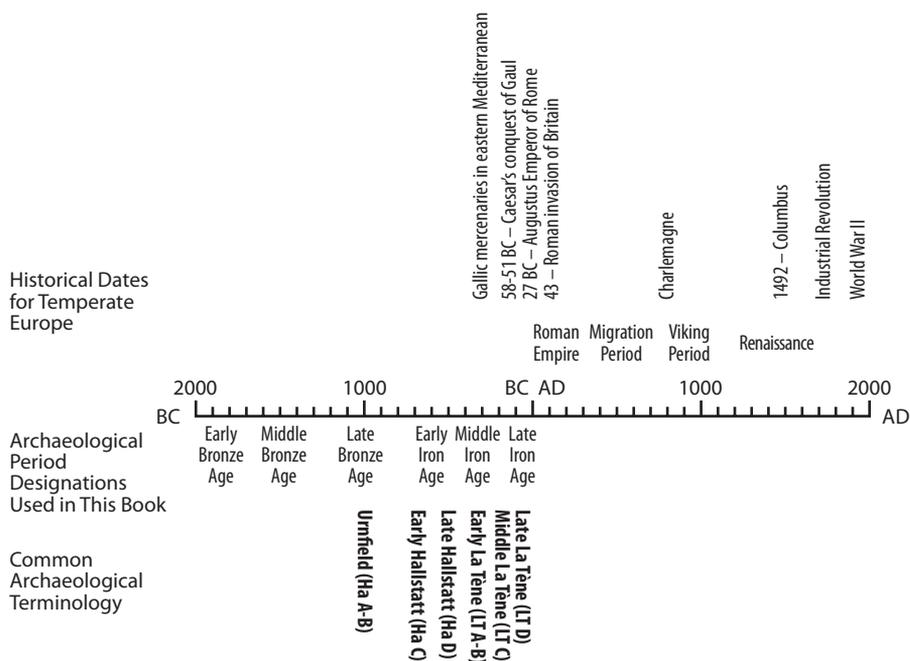


Figure 3. Timeline from 2000 BC to AD 2000, showing the approximate dates for the periods discussed in the text (center), other terms commonly used in the archaeological chronology of prehistoric temperate Europe (bottom), and some historical dates (top).

writing. The many short inscriptions from the second and first century BC, most of them on coins, are names in Greek and Latin characters, not part of any indigenous writing system. Many scholars, Jack Goody and Walter Ong prominently among them, argue that the development of writing has had a profound effect on human history, not only because it enables us to preserve records of the past in a permanent form and allows the circulation of information on a vastly larger than direct person-to-person basis, but because it fundamentally changed the way that humans perceived their world and interacted with others. In the past few decades we have seen much similar discussion about the effects that television has had on perception and thought, and today much the same dialogue critiques the impact of the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and other media of contemporary communication. If it is true that writing has profoundly affected human perception and thought wherever it has been introduced, then to understand human development more broadly, it is essential that we examine the character of perception and thought *before* the introduction of writing.

The adoption of writing changes the meaning of objects. Temperate Europe in the period between 2000 BC and the Roman conquest is an ideal context in which to investigate this phenomenon, because the database is much richer than that available anywhere else in the world at a comparable period. The results of this investigation will also point the way toward thinking about some of the changes that are taking place in human perception and thought as new communication technologies take their places in human action and perception.

In addition to enabling investigation into this larger, comparative anthropological issue, study of this period in temperate Europe also provides new insight into the development of European civilization, or “the West.” Discussions of the “civilization of the West” ordinarily begin with Greece and Rome (sometimes with the Near East), with no serious consideration given to the prehistoric societies of Europe, then move directly into the rise of the early medieval kingdoms of Merovingian Europe and on to Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Empire, the Renaissance, the age of exploration, and modern times. When historians write about the so-called “barbarians” of the Late Roman and early medieval periods, the Franks, Goths, Burgundians, and Saxons, in particular, as well as about other groups, such as the Huns, and their roles in subsequent developments, their discussions depend almost exclusively upon the existing texts of the period, which were of course written largely from a Roman perspective, rather than based upon serious evaluation of the material evidence of these nonliterate peoples. And in all of this discussion, the prehistoric peoples of Europe are all but ignored. I shall argue in this book that the ways of seeing of the Bronze Age and Iron Age peoples of temperate Europe played an integral part in the development of the “ways of seeing” that characterized subsequent Europeans, ways of seeing that were, in fact, quite different from those of the Mediterranean peoples of Greece and Rome.

SEEING AND EXPERIENCE

My approach in this book to understanding the peoples of later prehistoric Europe is through *visuality*, by which I mean the visual properties of things *as they are perceived by a viewer*. As David Brett writes, “Vision is a form of cognition.” My argument is that the people of the European Bronze and Iron Ages saw differently from the way we see today, and that through systematic examination of how they patterned the objects that they made and how they arranged and displayed them, we can develop an understanding of how they perceived and fashioned their worlds.

Numerous studies in the fields of neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and ethnographic anthropology have shown that what we see depends upon what we have seen before—on our experience seeing. What we see is not like a photographic replication of “what is out there.” It is a hypothesis based on our personal experience, an interpretation that we *create* from our experience of seeing other things before. As the psychologist Richard Gregory has argued, our visual system develops from a very early age, long before we are able to talk, and in concert with our sense of touch. An infant learns about seeing through the experience of touching its parents, stuffed animals, the edges of its crib, and other things in its environment. The developing sense of sight is calibrated by that of touch. Sight goes on developing and refining throughout our lifetimes, always in concert with the other senses and through the life experiences of the individual.

An infant in modern America or Europe experiences a very different visual and tactile environment from that which an infant in Bronze Age or Iron Age Europe would have experienced. We would therefore expect the modern infant to develop a visual system different from that of infants born three thousand years ago.

Images are an important subcategory of things. Today we are flooded with them—pictures on the Internet, photographs and advertisements in newspapers, billboards along the highways, television, film, magazines. An American typically sees hundreds if not thousands of images every day. Our brain is conditioned to ignore the vast majority of them, paying attention only to those that strike us as having something significant to show us. In the Bronze and Iron Ages, images were rare. The European who lived three thousand years ago probably did not see any on an average day. Bronze figurines, incised scenes on pottery, and other kinds of images were associated with richly equipped burials, ordinarily restricted to a very small portion of society. And because they were so uncommon, images were potent in prehistoric Europe.

Perception is not a passive process but an active one in which our body interacts with our environment. It is the process of physical interaction that enables us to perceive. Several centuries of observation and experiment have taught us that actual perception is accomplished, not by our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, or fingertips, but by our brain. Our sense receptors are the front-line receivers of signals about the nature of the environment around us, but it is our brain that does the actual perceiving, that receives the signals and makes sense out of them, deciding how we should respond to what we sense in the environment.

In the case of seeing, many theorists long believed that the lens at the front of our eyes projects an image of what is in front of us onto the retina at the back of the eyeball, and that it is that image that we see. Since the work of

Helmholtz (1821–1894), however, it has been generally accepted that there is no such projection onto the retina. Rather, the light waves that penetrate the front of the eye stimulate receptors on the retina that send electrical signals to different parts of the brain (as many as thirty different regions are believed to be involved). The brain then interprets those signals on the basis of past experience, and it is this interpretation that we see.

WAYS OF VISUALIZING THINGS IN THE WORLD

While all societies are in a constant process of change, we can identify times when change seems to happen faster than it does at other times. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the period we know as the Industrial Revolution, was such a time of rapid transitions. Not only did the way that goods were produced change, but everything else in society was affected as well, from settlement patterns and social structures to subjects and styles of painting and themes in literature. In like manner, today's social scientists are grappling with the on-going and profound changes brought about by twenty-first-century technologies of communication. As I demonstrate in the chapters that follow, two fundamental changes took place during the two millennia at the end of European prehistory, one in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BC, the other during the second century BC. These changes were every bit as sweeping as those brought about by the Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century. In this book, I shall show how they affected the ways that objects such as everyday pottery and jewelry were made, how high-status items such as swords were decorated, and how rituals were practiced.

A number of important studies in different disciplines have explored ways of seeing in different contexts and have demonstrated that the way that people perceive things visually depends upon the cultural and historical circumstances in which they live. Simon Goldhill shows how the culture of seeing changed in the Greek world, from democratic Athens of the fifth century BC, to Hellenistic Alexandria with its less democratic traditions and more expert testimony of seeing, to the time when Christianity was taking over the Roman Empire. His focus is on institutions and how they fostered different ways of seeing and of thinking about seeing. Peter De Bolla does something similar for the Enlightenment, demonstrating how ideas about vision and visibility during that period were different from those that came before. W. H. Sewell shows how pictorial representations of people working changed between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, when people were represented

communicating and interacting against detailed workplace backgrounds, and the middle of the eighteenth century, when figures were represented not interacting, their faces were often not portrayed, and background scenes were bare. For Sewell, these changes in representation reflect the political and ideological changes of the time. In an ethnographic study, Anthony Forge shows how a group in New Guinea has very specific meanings for certain kinds of things that are to be seen and, conversely, how people in that society cannot see some things that we see easily, because of their specific expectations and experiences.

The second part of my argument is that we can learn much about how people who lived in Europe between four thousand and two thousand years ago saw—how they perceived visually—by examining systematically their material culture and the ways in which they patterned the things that they made, decorated, built, and arranged.

VISUAL STRUCTURES AND DIAGRAMS

“Every morning, Fr. Schroeder arranges [her knickknacks] very carefully in certain unvarying positions: there they stand, like an uncompromising statement of her views on Capital and Society, Religion and Sex.” This sentence from Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* illustrates an important point about material culture that is central to the argument of this book: The way that people make things and the way that they arrange them are determined by their basic beliefs and attitudes. As Daniel Miller puts it, “A . . . society elaborates its cultural practices through an underlying pattern which is manifested in a multitude of diverse forms.” Every product of a society—religious rituals, kinship systems, marriage practices, myths, burial customs, decorative patterns applied to pottery—encapsulates the whole of the society. Thus cultural anthropologists can use a single ritual to elucidate the social, economic, and political workings of a society, as Glifford Geertz did in his classic analysis of the Balinese cockfight. From songs and stories, folklorists can derive rich information about the basic structures and beliefs of the societies that sing and tell them. Art historians can use paintings to explore in detail the complexities of life in a society, as Simon Schama demonstrates in the case of seventeenth-century Holland.

In my exploration of the societies of Bronze and Iron Age Europe, I apply this principle to investigate how people arranged things in media that survive for us to examine, four thousand or two thousand years later. The way that a potter shaped and decorated a ceramic jar, the style and ornament that a

jeweler applied to a bronze brooch, and the way that performers of a funerary ritual arranged objects in the grave of a deceased woman—all of these were determined by the values and beliefs of the communities whose members fashioned the pottery and brooch and arranged the grave goods. As we would anticipate from the studies by Miller, Geertz, and Schama cited above, these patterns are not random but reflect the fundamental character of the societies. The extraordinary richness and high quality of the archaeological evidence from later prehistoric Europe enables us to use these patterns in the material to examine how people perceived and understood the world around them. Most importantly for the argument of this book, these high-quality data enable us to examine changes in these patterns over time and thus to put forward a new model for understanding European societies at the time that they came into intensive contact with the literate Roman world. As we have mentioned, the evidence shows two major shifts in material patterning and visual perception during the course of the Bronze and Iron Age, one during the fifth and the other during the second century BC.

In highly complex, market-driven societies like our own, changing correlations between pattern and perception are difficult to discern, because the very nature of a market economy encourages the proliferation of ever newer products. But in smaller-scale societies with more limited material resources, such patterns can be more readily identified. Howard Morphy's studies of material culture in modern Australia provide many examples.

GREEK AND ROMAN TEXTS

The subject of this book is the peoples of temperate Europe, north of the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. As noted already, these peoples of what we call the Bronze and Iron Ages did not have a system of writing. But from the time of Herodotus in the middle of the fifth century BC on, Greek and Roman writers mention and later describe some of the groups whose material culture we shall consider. Because my focus is on the visual experiences of the peoples of temperate Europe, and not on what others said about them, I shall not say much about these written sources from the Mediterranean world.

Ancient texts have, however, played a very large role in past studies of the Bronze and Iron Age peoples of Europe, and not always a helpful role. Too often the accounts of Greek and Roman writers have been accepted by archaeologists and historians without adequate critical evaluation, and this approach has often led to confusion and even misrepresentation. There is now a substantial critical literature dealing with ways of understanding what these

texts tell us about the peoples north of the Mediterranean, and I refer to some of the most useful works in the bibliographic essay at the end of this book.

ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Ever since researchers have tried to make sense of archaeological materials as remains of earlier societies, they have grappled with the problem of how to think about and characterize the social systems of prehistoric Europe. This issue came strikingly to the fore with the discovery of graves that were outfitted much more richly, with gold ornaments, elaborate craft products, exotic imports, and larger numbers of objects than was typical in most burials of the period. The problem has always been what to call the apparently elite persons represented in these special graves.

In the continental literature, the common practice is to use the German term *Fürstengräber* (generally translated into English as “princely burials”) as a catchword to characterize all graves that are substantially richer in their contents than the majority. Recent debate around the Hochdorf burial and the status of the man in it illustrates the problem. Some argue that the man was a “chieftain.” Others use the term “prince” (or *Fürst*). Still others suggest that he was not just a prince, but a prince of interregional importance, perhaps a king. Analogies, explicit or implicit, are drawn with the “tribal leaders” described by Caesar, with early medieval social and political structures, and with “chiefs” described in ethnographically studied societies in other parts of the world.

This approach is loaded with problems, as J. D. Hill and Niall Sharpley have argued. We have no idea how the prehistoric Bronze Age and Iron Age communities and societies were organized, and applying such terms as those noted above only masks our lack of understanding. Even when we consider Caesar’s descriptions, we need to take into account that he was an outsider, from a very different society, writing about people whose language he probably did not understand. And as a general leading armies of conquest, he is unlikely to have provided the most objective description of his enemies, even if he were in a position to do so.

In the absence of any reasonable system for characterizing the social and political structures of Bronze and Iron Age Europe, I use the more neutral term “elite” to characterize individuals and groups who are marked in their burials by greater “wealth” than the majority in their communities. This term is not ideal either, but it avoids the historically specific and anthropological implications of “chief” and “prince.” “Wealth” is also a subjective term, of

course. I use it and the concept to characterize graves that have in them more objects than do the majority of graves, especially objects of gold, bronze vessels, weapons, and ornaments of all kinds. One useful way of thinking about grave wealth is in terms of the amount of effort that had to go into procuring objects that were placed in burials, including considerations of the rarity of the raw material, the distance the objects were transported, and the amount of craft effort that went into producing them.

APPROACH AND PRESENTATION

The book is divided into four sections. The first introduces the theme and the approach and includes discussion of techniques for the analysis of visual features that are especially relevant to the world of late prehistoric Europe. The second examines three main categories of objects, ways that people arranged and manipulated objects in the context of communicating with others, and the appearance of two new media in the Late Iron Age; namely, coins and writing. The third section evaluates and interprets the evidence and suggests ways of understanding how and why observed changes came about. The fourth situates the subject of this book in larger historical and contemporary contexts and considers the implications of this study for our experiences in the twenty-first century.