Chapter 30

Arms, the armed, and armed violence

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Introduction

Iron Age Europe is widely seen as suffused by war, its societies dominated by warriors, often ruled by 'warrior elites'. This perception originates in Graeco-Roman accounts of bellicose northern 'barbarians': Scythians and Sarmatians, Thracians and Dacians, Gauls and Germans, Celtiberians and Caledonians. It was then apparently confirmed by nineteenth-century finds of splendid weaponry ascribed to these groups – the type-site of La Tène produced many swords – and by the dating of many hillforts to the era.

However, recent research on many, especially earlier, Iron Age societies, notably in Britain, has identified little evidence of carnage, weaponry or fortifications, let alone of 'warrior classes', leading to questioning of received ideas, particularly of warlike Celts with warrior elites. Arguably swinging to the opposite extreme, many British archaeologists have even interpreted structures long labelled hillforts as communal monuments for purposes other than conflict (Armit 2007; Lock 2011). Emphasis on agrarian life, symbolism and social power resulted in largely tacit 'pacification of the Iron Age' (James 2007; on wider 'pacification of the past' see Keeley 1996 and Vandkilde 2006).

Is absence of evidence of weapons and mayhem in some Iron Age cultural contexts consequently being fallaciously taken as evidence of absence? Have awkward data from others (hillforts do look like fortifications) been ignored or explained away? Or could the received image of a war-torn Iron Age actually be substantially a myth, rooted in Graeco-Roman propaganda, uncritically accepted by early modern scholars who venerated Classical texts? Might emphasis on 'combat culture' at least in many societies of the later pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age really mark responses to increasing threats from Greek and particularly Roman aggression – a 'violent edge of empire effect' (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992)? Or would framing indigenous Europeans as peaceable until externally destabilized be a simplistic post-colonial inversion of received ideas of a 'warlike Iron Age'? Paradoxically, apparently mutually exclusive traditional and revisionist readings of the same evidence tend to share a critical implicit assumption: that combat weapons and their use simply equate to warfare. Hence any armed Iron Age individual is often automatically

labelled a ‘warrior’, any burial accompanied by weapons a ‘warrior grave’, an equation long challenged by Collis (1994: 36–7).

There are serious dangers in shoving weaponry, its wielders and their practices into a box labelled ‘war’. As we shall see, much armed violence in European societies was not warfare, and there may often have been no ‘warriors’ on any definition of the term. Even more dangerous is the further implication often tacitly drawn: that everything outside the box-called-war constituted ‘peace’, which equalled ‘normal’ life. The war-box illusion and its implicit reciprocal of peaceful normality in the European Iron Age arise from a combination of factors. Firstly, the simple equation ‘weapons = warriors + warfare’ is the superficial impression given by our historiographical starting point: Classical texts recount wars against, more than internal dynamics of, Iron Age societies. I believe this has been overlain by cultural assumptions of post-World War II generations of Europeans whose shared default experience has involved little or no exposure to weapons and combat, in our societies the preserve of specialist minorities (professional soldiers, armed police). For us, wars generally happen far away. More local incidents of armed violence constitute rare aberrations mostly known only indirectly through news media. When thinking about ‘normal life’ in our own world, Europeans do not usually have to consider weapons and bloodshed. This mindset seems often to be simply back-projected onto the Iron Age: weapons were about warfare, and wars dysfunctional aberrations occurring at political boundaries. Literally and figuratively peripheral to social life, armed violence may then simply be ignored as a factor in modelling Iron Age societies. However, recent years have seen increasing willingness, notably in Scandinavia and among UK-based investigators, to consider the grim realities of armed aggression, based on new finds, reanalysing old data, and rethinking assumptions. (For an approach to wider questions of violence in Iron Age and Roman Britain, see also Redfern forthcoming.)

Terminology: ‘war’ and ‘warriors’?

In discourse on the European Iron Age, the terms ‘war’ and ‘warrior’ are rarely examined or defined. ‘War’ (except ‘civil war’) is commonly understood to connote organized collective armed violence between polities. Yet in many historically attested societies, possessing, displaying and using lethal weaponry are/were not about war, primarily and sometimes hardly at all. Rather weapons may articulate social dynamics, mutual fear and conflict within a polity – as exemplified by the contemporary United States.

In 2007 the USA averaged 88 civilian firearms per 100 people: c. 270 million guns, by far the world’s highest absolute and relative numbers (Small Arms Survey 2007: chapter 2, annexe 4). Many are for hunting, but millions are ostensibly for protection against fellow citizens. In 2011 alone, 8,583 Americans were murdered by firearms (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2011). This figure, rather low by historical standards, dwarfs US combat fatalities by an order of magnitude: 5,324 over more than a decade of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (as of 15 August 2014: Department of Defense 2014). In terms of personal weapon ‘culture’ and body count, in the USA internal armed violence far outweighs external war in importance.

I suggest similar patterns prevailed in other cultural contexts across time, including many societies of Iron Age Europe. It is, then, unjustifiable, and potentially profoundly misleading, automatically to discuss archaeological evidence of weapons and their use solely in terms of warfare. Conversely, much violence in war is committed not with dedicated weapons but with fist, foot, and phallus; war is not even simply a subset of armed violence. Rather, there exists a broad field of interpersonal violence, in which war and weapon-use only partially overlap.

Similar lack of critical analysis of the term 'warrior', in archaeology in general, has been addressed by Vandkilde (2006: 393–403). Her work, undertaken in the context of a study of Copper Age Europe, identified in anthropological literature several different forms of 'warriordom'. This is a valuable contribution, yet still limited in that she focuses on war and the specialized war-fighter, without really considering armed violence in contexts other than war between polities. Nor does she much examine the question of who possessed and used weapons. While it seems that in later prehistory, as in historical times, females did not normally directly participate in armed violence, there were some striking Iron Age exceptions, notably on the Eurasian steppe.

Ukrainian sites have produced graves of over a hundred females, mostly younger adults, buried with arms between the seventh and third centuries BC, some also bearing injuries from arrows and hand-held weapons (Guliaev 2003: 114–15). Some Scythian women evidently possessed combat skills, although systematic differences in weaponry between male and female interments probably reflect gender distinctions in fighting styles. Such armed women are plausibly the inspiration for Herodotus's Amazons (*Histories* 4. 110–17). Away from the Steppes, in Iron Age Europe inflicting armed violence appears to have been near-universally a male practice often closely tied to masculine ideology. One weapon burial from Rudston (R163; Stead 1991: 205, fig. 113) suggests that biological females were not entirely excluded from using arms in Iron Age East Yorkshire, although it is unclear how this individual's gender was constructed culturally (Giles 2012: 166), and s/he may well have been regarded as entirely masculine (see also Redfern 2008 on females and violence in Iron Age Dorset.) Nevertheless, in general wielding weapons was, as it still is, especially associated with young adult males at the height of their strength and aggressiveness.

Given the foregoing, rather than the more traditional 'weapons, warriors, and warfare', this chapter is framed in terms of 'arms, the armed, and armed violence' which, where involving confrontation between armed opponents rather than using weapons on the unarmed, comprised 'combat'.

To investigate these matters, we should turn first to the direct testimony left by Iron Age peoples themselves: archaeological remains. We have material evidence for fortified places, specialized weapons, and graphic instances of their impact on human bodies. However, while such evidence confirms – unsurprisingly – that at least some Iron Age Europeans valued arms and used them, what does it tell us about contexts and purposes of such use, or about the raising of armies among Iron Age European societies? What actually is the evidence for arms, the armed, and armed violence in Iron Age Europe, and what does it mean? What surviving traces might we expect to find of cultural phenomena which in physical terms were episodic, explosive, and transient?

Bones of the dead: direct evidence of armed violence – or its absence?

Human remains potentially offer us the most direct surviving evidence of armed violence. However, while it does attest specific incidents, some extremely graphic, taken as a whole this source of testimony can be highly problematic. A profound general limitation is that, with the rare exceptions of bog bodies, we are dealing at best with the bones of the dead; no soft-tissue evidence survives (below). Worse, for much of the era, we have only cremated remains, or none at all, due to soil conditions or disposal of the dead by means other than burial.

Where they survive, Iron Age skeletons may be examined for evidence of Sharp-Force Trauma (SFT), here injuries from points or edges of metal weapons. However, we cannot always assume that any single injury on a body is evidence of deliberate armed assault. A proportion of injuries inevitably resulted from misadventure with blades or projectiles in working, hunting, training or play, rather than calculated aggression. Even injuries unequivocally inflicted with combat weapons need not reflect deliberate violent killing. For example, a skull from Danebury hillfort, in southern England, had been transfixed by a spear through the forehead (Cunliffe 2003: 41; Fig. 30.1). This injury looks calculated, was peri-mortem (inflicted around the time of death) and would almost certainly have been lethal; yet even so, it was not necessarily the actual cause of death. This could, for example, represent spearing of a body already dead (the fragment also bears serious blunt-force injuries), as part of funerary rites like those attested in East Yorkshire where spears were thrust into corpses already laid in their graves (Giles 2012: 1–2). However, the pattern of evidence on this bone strongly suggests armed violence.

Figure 30.1. Skull fragment from Danebury hillfort, UK, exhibiting blunt-force trauma and a graphic perimortem injury from a spear closely similar to this example also found at the site. (Scale of centimetres: photos by Simon James).

Reciprocally, lack of skeletal trauma does not constitute evidence of absence of armed violence in a particular cultural context. The absence may be more apparent than real, especially with small bone assemblages, where some kinds of injuries suffered in a population may not be encountered due to simple statistical chance. On poorly preserved remains, traces of violence may survive but go unrecognized. Even in substantial bone assemblages, smaller skeletal injuries and, equally, healed ante-mortem damage which have been called the 'subtle stigmata' of armed violence, may be missed simply because they are not looked for carefully enough (Knüsel 2005).

Slight bone wounds can attest devastating soft tissue damage. Further, modern trauma medicine and forensic pathology show that many lethal injuries – including those inflicted through preferred modes of attack – need leave no skeletal trace at all (Shepherd et al. 1990; Redfern 2011: 131). Throat wounds, and puncture wounds between the ribs or piercing the abdomen, can kill within minutes or hours through respiratory failure, blood loss, and shock. Even superficial flesh wounds may kill through infection (James 2010: 49). Without surviving soft tissues, these are wholly vanishing stigmata of violence. There are also taphonomic considerations: even mass casualties of huge battles, in which the defeated dead were despoiled and left to rot, need leave no detectable traces. The site of a previously unknown battle c. AD 230 between Romans and Germans at Harzhorn, Germany, was identified through scatters of Roman metal items which had escaped scavengers and corrosion; no bones survived (Geschwinde et al. 2009). Similar scatters at Kalkriese near Osnabrück, Germany, led to the discovery of some pits of collected human remains, deriving from the historically-attested massacre of Varus's three legions by Arminius in AD 9; but only a handful of more than 10,000 dead are known archaeologically (Schlüter and Wiegels 1999; Derks and Burmeister 2009).

Direct bioarchaeological testimony of armed violence, then, can be elusive and, even where identified, ambiguous or enigmatic. However, larger patterns of trauma, on individuals and especially across assemblages, provide our best evidence for deliberate violence, armed or otherwise. Some British case studies illustrate this.

In comparing assemblages from Hampshire and East Yorkshire, King (2010) detected extensive skeletal trauma evidence for violent practices (healed as well as peri-mortem injuries) in both regions, albeit exhibiting different patterns. Notably, SFT on East Yorkshire bodies is consistent with ritualized intragroup duelling (below), while in Hampshire such injuries more probably attest slaughter and special disposal of foreign enemies in war (ibid: 235–43).

Redfern's reanalysis of the bones from Maiden Castle hillfort, Dorset, identified peri-mortem and healed trauma indicating that armed violence was indeed not confined to the Roman conquest of southern Britain during the AD 40s; that was apparently just the last of a series of violent episodes resulting in death or injury of adult males, females, and children (Redfern 2011: 133–4). She attributed this evidence to 'intra- or intertribal warfare' (ibid: 111), and in other work has argued that groups in Iron Age Dorset were far from being internally harmonious either. Her study of Iron Age remains from multiple sites revealed extensive blunt-force trauma suggestive of 'domestic violence' inflicted on, and likely often by, females as well as males (Redfern 2008).

The Iron Age peoples of southern Italy – especially the Samnites – offer further good case studies as they interred their dead in cemeteries often on geologies favouring bone survival. A number of skeletal assemblages have been studied for violent trauma. For example, Paine's study of cranial injuries among males buried during the sixth and fifth centuries BC at Alfedena concluded that they faced a high risk of meeting a violent end (Paine et al. 2007). Sparacello's work on the same assemblage makes a compelling, if not conclusive, case that unusually high levels of asymmetric development of the upper limbs among the males in this population resulted from habitual training with the weaponry interred with them (Sparacello et al. 2011).

Another important skeletal assemblage with dramatic evidence of SFT, found with weaponry, comes from Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme, France), one of a number of a number of northern Gaulish sanctuary sites of the middle La Tène, long before the coming of Roman influence (Brunaux 1999; 2001; Craig et al. 2005: 172–4). Disarticulated skeletons of several hundred young adult males were found, with whole and fragmentary weapons and remains of horses. Many bones bear sharp-force trauma consistent with combat wounds, while gnaw-marks and corrosion on the weapons suggest the bodies were exposed before burial, even if Brunaux's original idea that one group of around 75 individuals were suspended on a wooden rack (Brunaux 2001) now looks unlikely. Strikingly, heads are almost entirely absent. The Ribemont deposits probably represent multiple battles in the third century BC, following which collected headless corpses of defeated enemies and their weapons were ritually displayed for collective triumphing before eventual burial (Armit 2012: 198–201). Individuals perhaps took the heads as personal trophies, consistent with Classical accounts of later Iron Age Gaulish combat practices (see also Armit, Chapter 00, on the complexities behind 'Celtic headhunting').

Similarly dramatic skeletal evidence indicating battle comes from recent finds at Alken Enge, Jutland in Denmark. Remains apparently of hundreds of adult males were deposited around the turn of the first millennia BC/AD in Lake Mossø (Skanderborg Museum 2012). The bones, some of which exhibit SFT, had been exposed for some time and been dismembered before deposition accompanied by evidence of feasting. This evidence is yet to be fully studied, but the bones are thought to represent the dead of a defeated army ritually processed and deposited (Maribo 2014). They echo a number of earlier wetland finds from Denmark and North Germany, of mass offerings of weapons rather than bodies. At a spot just 5 km up the Illerup Ådal (river valley) from Alken Enge, c. 200 years after the bones were deposited, the equipment of what seems to be another entire defeated army was sacrificed to the waters (Ilkjaer 2000). The Illerup Ådal finds bring us on to the testimony of the artefacts of armed violence.

Portable material culture of armed violence

Just as evidence for armed violence on Iron Age bodies often proves elusive or ambiguous, similarly few signs have yet been identified of damage on Iron Age weapons certainly resulting from actual combat. As with bone injuries, combat damage can be hard to

distinguish from other phenomena, e.g. 'ritual killing' of weaponry prior to deposition through hacking cutting-edges, bending blades or denting shield-bosses (as at Illerup), or as a result of post-depositional damage. However, we can say much more by turning our attention from the elusive results of acts of armed violence to the more plentiful evidence for intent and preparation implied by the weapons themselves.

In contrast to much modern armament, which inflicts multiple deaths at great distances, Iron Age weaponry was about one individual directly inflicting violent trauma on another, at short range and especially within arm's reach. Even battles against invading Roman armies were largely aggregations of 1:1 encounters, more or less mediated by team training and organization into battle lines.

Co-evolution of material culture, practices, and ideologies of armed violence during the era exhibited a widespread cultural preference for toe-to-toe (or horse-to-horse) combat on open ground. Nevertheless, like so much else in Iron Age European archaeology, there is great spatiotemporal variation and diversity in the material culture of armed violence – much of which, most unambiguously helmets, shields and body armour, is specifically designed for combat. We can identify two distinct large-scale traditions: the primarily equestrian 'combat culture' of the Steppe grasslands from the Great Hungarian Plain to the Urals (and beyond: this is a Eurasian tradition), and the mainly foot-fighting culture of the rest of Europe, shared with much of the Mediterranean: Greek and Italian fighting styles belonged to this tradition, more suited to farmed and hilly landscapes. We will examine this latter tradition first.

Archaeological finds show that, while in some areas of the broad western zone slings inflicting blunt-force injury at a distance were employed in fighting, and bows and javelins were also known, design of offensive weaponry focused on infliction of direct sharp-force trauma using hand-held weapons at close quarters, mostly on foot but sometimes (and increasingly commonly towards the end of the late pre-Roman Iron Age) from horseback. The principal offensive weapons were iron-tipped thrusting spears (Fig. 30.1) and iron swords (Fig. 30.2). Material countermeasures to these primarily comprised wooden shields, sometimes with metal fittings and occasionally full metal facings. Shields were generally wielded by a single, central, horizontal handle, protected by a projecting boss, allowing the shield to be used to strike the opponent. In some contexts, shields were supplemented by helmets. In such defensive kit, copper alloy was also increasingly (but not entirely) displaced by stronger iron. From the fourth century BC body armour also rapidly became known across a swathe of the continent, in the form of iron mail ('chain-mail' of interlocking rings). Sophisticated late pre-Roman Iron Age iron helmets and swords at least partly made of steel attest growing mastery of ironworking in several regions of Europe. Archaeological evidence is consistent with Classical texts recording that the Romans copied innovations in weapons technology developed by 'barbarians', from the Gauls mail and, later, iron helmet designs, and from Iberia sword technology which provided later Republican legionaries with the famous *gladius Hispaniensis*. (Fig. 30.2: 1–3)

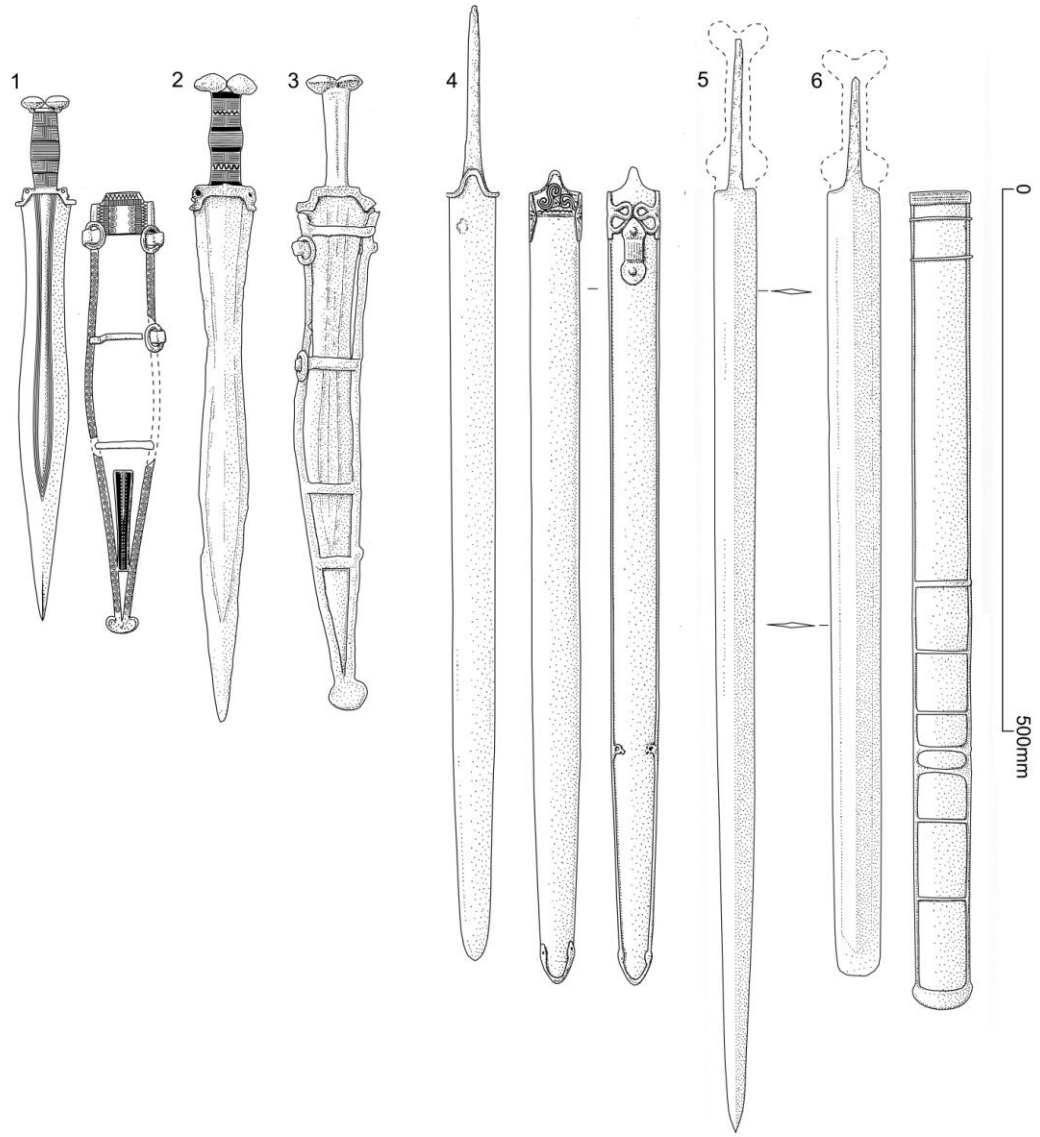

Figure 30.2. Iron Age swords. Left: Spanish pre-Roman Iron Age weapons (1) Altillo del Cerropozo, Guadalajara; (2) Monreal de Ariza, Zaragoza; (3) Osma, Soria); (4) One of the swords, and both sides of its scabbard, from La Tène, third century BC. Right: restorations of late pre-Roman Iron Age weapons from Port Nidau, Switzerland, respectively optimised for thrusting (5) and slashing (6). (Drawings by Simon James).

Great regional variations in repertoires of combat equipment reflect differential access to materials and technical knowhow, cultural differences or ideological choices. For example, the late pre-Roman Iron Age peoples of the western Baltic and Scandinavia appear rarely to have possessed anything like the sophisticated swords and armour seen in contemporary Gaul, perhaps an expression of relative material poverty. Conversely, from the late pre-Roman Iron Age, like Gaul much of Britain has produced much elaborate weaponry, including mail shirts, but notably few helmets; this might perhaps represent a cultural disinclination among the islanders to fight helmeted. As explored below, functional practicality and protection could be trumped by ideological considerations like notions of masculine prowess and display.

The predominantly foot-combat culture of most of Europe contrasted strongly with modes of armed violence among the primarily pastoralist Steppe peoples. In the mid-first millennium BC these lands were home to groups the Greeks called Scythians, and during the late pre-Roman Iron Age and Roman Iron Age to Sarmatian groups, whose styles of fighting were closely integrated with those of the Asiatic steppe lands as far as China. Here ecology, economy, and sheer distances resulted in mounted combat becoming the norm, with corresponding technological differences from further west. Lances and swords indicate the importance of close-quarter fighting, but the compound or composite bow, today more often associated with later peoples such as the Huns and Mongols, was also already important in the late pre-Roman Iron Age (Fig. 30.3). Primacy of lance and bow, both two-handed weapons, explains the apparent lack of use of shields on the Steppe; however, by the Roman Iron Age iron helmets and mail body armour were introduced (Goroncharovski 2006), probably supplementing earlier defences made of organic materials.

Conflicts amongst the steppe peoples, between them and the sophisticated armies of the Hellenistic world, and then with their similarly-equipped southern neighbours the Arsacids (Parthians) of Mesopotamia and Iran, were likely responsible for key refinements of equestrian steppe combat and collective warfare in the last centuries BC. These involved combinations of horse-archers and lance-wielding cavalry with both man and horse encased in armour. This mounted combat tradition, which Roman legions found very hard to cope with, depended not just on weapons but also on equestrian equipment; and it evolved long before the introduction of stirrups. Only in the 1980s did we begin to understand Roman Iron Age horse-harness, especially saddles. Archaeological finds of Roman saddle fragments were reconstructed to reveal a four-pommel design which, modern experimentation with replicas shows, provides a very secure seat for wielding weapons (Connolly and Van Driel-Murray 1991; Fig. 30.3). This very effective riding technology probably originated on the Eurasian steppe during the last millennium BC.

In many areas of western Europe, too, the horse played roles in combat during the Iron Age, initially pulling chariots (Rebay-Salisbury, Chapter 00). By the late pre-Roman Iron Age mounted fighting was an established and developing tradition, notably in Iberia, Gaul, and parts of Germany, probably independent developments enhanced by adoption of the four-pommel saddle from the Steppe via regions like Thrace. Here equestrian skills were especially highly developed, under strong influence from nearby 'Scythian' and then Sarmatian groups. A Chinese-made jade belt slide from a sword scabbard deposited in early Roman times in a Thracian tomb at Chatalka in Bulgaria (Werner 1994) attests the immense reach of these (probably down-the-line) connections. The four-pommel saddle probably entered Roman use via Thracian, Gaulish, or Parthian auxiliaries. Steppe mounted-combat culture literally based on this saddle was also so effective that Imperial Rome subsequently adopted horse-archers and armoured lancers on a substantial scale.

Despite regional differences and change over time, Iron Age European weapon technologies shared certain fundamentals. In contrast to modern pyrotechnic weaponry, which injures through blast-waves and heat as much as direct impact of metal, most Iron Age arms worked by concentrating kinetic energy derived from human (sometimes supplemented by horse) muscle-power into sharpened metal points or edges shot, thrown, thrust, or swung

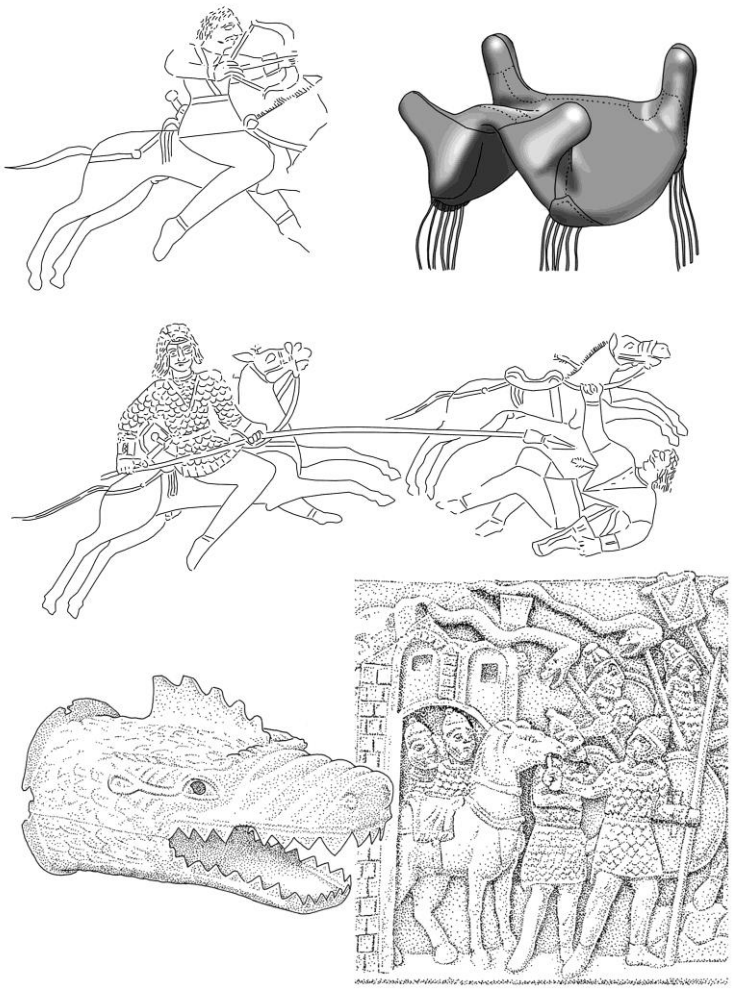

Figure 30.3 Top left and centre: Steppe equestrian combat with bow and lance: engraved figures from the Kosika cup (c. 50 BC–AD 50, scale unknown; after Treister 1998). Top right: reconstruction of Roman saddle design, probably of Steppe origin. Bottom left: head of a Roman draco from Niederbieber, Germany, and bottom right: perhaps some of the Sarmatian troops who introduced such windsock standards to Roman service, on the Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki, Greece. (Drawings by Simon James)

directly against human bodies (James 2010). This was intended to inflict sharp-force trauma to incapacitate or kill the victim, through direct disruption of muscle, nerve and bone, or blood loss and shock. If such weapon-blows could not be escaped by flight or evaded by dodging (and the Greeks inculcated agility in combat through dance), then effects of impacts could be mitigated through parrying or deflecting with a shield. For some people, in some places at some times, helmets and armour offered additional protection to the body, but this was a trade-off: armour required major investment of resources to make and maintain, and was heavy and potentially debilitating to wear, especially in hot weather. Nevertheless, it offered the prospect of absorbing some of the energy of otherwise deadly blows, and a chance of converting potentially lethal sharp-force impacts into perhaps more survivable blunt-force injuries, by dispersing their energy over a larger area. However, design and especially embellishment of much Iron Age weaponry indicates that it also had other, perhaps equally effective modes of operation involving no physical contact with the foe at all, working on the mind as much as the body.

A striking example of this is furnished by a sword from a third- or second-century BC grave (K3) in the cemetery at Kirkburn, East Yorkshire (Stead 1991: 66–70, 224–5). The sword is fused into its scabbard, but the general size and form of the weapon, and details from X-rays, reveal a two-edged blade with a long point, potentially capable of slashing but probably optimized for close-quarters thrusting. This functional interpretation looks to be confirmed by the gorgeous decoration of hilt and scabbard, specifically the red glass detail inlaid into the polished iron and copper alloy. This appears to simulate, symbolize, and celebrate the tip of the sword covered in gore, and the bloodied hand of its (by implication) victorious wielder. Here was a weapon designed to impress and intimidate while sheathed, as well as – as much as? instead of? – when drawn in anger.

Similarly, Gallic helmets were sometimes gorgeously embellished, and frequently sported crest-holders. Crests, e.g. of feathers or metal, had little practical function, although characteristic forms could identify leaders or contingents. Their more general purpose was to exaggerate the apparent size of the wearer to intimidate antagonists, like the arched back and raised fur of an aggressively posturing cat. Such material observations, suggesting conscious attempts to undermine the opponent or intended victim psychologically – and also to boost the wearer's own sense of size and power – are consistent with Classical descriptions of Gallic champions strutting, boasting, and seeking to belittle (sic) and demoralize their foes before actual fighting started (Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.29.3).

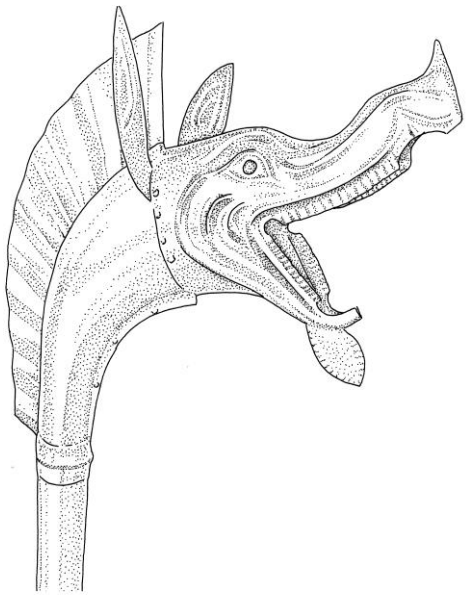

Figure 30.4 Reconstruction of a Gallic war trumpet (carnyx), one of several found at Tintignac, France. (Drawing by Simon James)

The Gauls also used fearsome-looking animal-headed war-trumpets, or *carnyces*, to whip their own side into a battle-frenzy and to intimidate the enemy (Fig. 30.4). Similarly, Sarmatian 'dragon'-headed windsock standards, doubtless valuable for marshalling contingents, also had a powerful impact on the enemy, as the Sarmatian riders charged in with hissing, writhing monsters flying above their heads. The Romans adopted such *dracones* for their own cavalry (Fig. 30.3). Trumpets and standards were psychological weapons.

Emphasis on armed display and posturing, intended to challenge but also to intimidate in advance (perhaps often instead) of actually inflicting blows with weapons, brings us to the role of fear. Threat of the use of weapons may often have been at least as important in influencing people's behaviour as the consequences of actual explosions of armed violence. Such equipment exemplifies 'technologies of enchantment' (Gell 1992). Gell proposed that artefacts were less about aesthetics and meanings than about mediating social action, through the effects they had on those who encountered them, a perspective applied to the study of 'Celtic art', much of which appears on arms (Gosden and Hill 2008; Garrow and Gosden 2012). 'Enchantment', a term connoting seductive fascination, but equally encompassing loss of willpower and terror, seems especially appropriate to portable artefacts intended for the theatre of combat and killing – including fortifications.

Fortified places and their functions

As with Iron Age weaponry, across Europe fortified sites varied greatly in numbers and kind, with substantial areas and eras apparently lacking them; and where they existed, they undoubtedly operated in psychological and ideological as well as practical ways.

The term 'fortification' applied to many Iron Age sites presupposes a military function, but there is good reason to conclude that, across much of Britain for example, substantial bank-and-ditch earthworks around smaller later Iron Age settlements were about protecting livestock from predators, animal or human, and so were 'secured' rather than fortified. That even huge earthwork enclosures need not be military is epitomized by Tara and other Iron Age 'royal' sites of Ireland where the enclosures have the ditch inside the bank, and so were not practically defensible. Here other potential functions of massive enclosures come to the fore: of separation and privileging of internal space, and of impressing with power other than military. As mentioned above, in Britain especially, much recent discourse on those Iron Age sites with one or more ditches to the outside of one or more massive embankments, which we conventionally call 'hillforts', has emphasized their likely symbolic, social, cosmological, and other roles while, more controversially, playing down their potentially violent implications.

The shift of focus onto internal social dynamics – the community who built the site, and lived in or around it – as being critical in motivating construction of defensible enceintes of hillforts or indeed *oppida* is a key advance. However, I think questionable conclusions have been drawn, largely due to a continued tendency to 'pacify the past'. Social competition, conflict, coercion, and domination may well have been factors as significant as bonding, cohesion, and willing collaboration in 'building communities', even amongst relatively egalitarian Iron Age societies such as those envisaged by J. D. Hill (2006). The internal political purpose of constructing and maintaining ramparts and gates could then have been more about imposing social control than developing and expressing community. In practical terms most of the time, enceintes likely served to hinder small-scale infiltration (e.g. raiding/theft by outsiders or outcasts), but equally deterred unsanctioned movement out of such places. Topographical location of hillforts also facilitated surveillance of surrounding

lands – and not just for signs of foreign incursion. Many enceintes, then, may well have been more about social regulation of the home community than communal defence. However, the overtly defensible form of such sites indicates at least ideological framing of their rationale in terms of external threat.

Take, for example, the late Hallstatt defences at the Heuneburg, overlooking the Danube in southern Germany (Krausse et al. 2016). Here a hilltop enceinte exceptionally boasted projecting towers; these, and the plastered mudbrick from which they were built, imitate Mediterranean (or Middle Eastern?) urban defences, whose towers exposed attackers to projectiles from three directions. Yet the Heuneburg towers are unnecessarily closely spaced and – crucially – were built only on the sides facing a substantial lower town and sprawling 'suburbs'. This suggests the towers' purpose was more visual impact on – and domination of? – the home community than practical defence. However, the lower town was itself walled and possessed a massive gate, expressing exclusion of outsiders, if not fear and perhaps real danger, of attack – matters strongly implicit in Sharples' (2010) picture of a mosaic of xenophobic Wessex polities.

It would today be simplistic and naïve to seek to explain the vastness and complexity of the gates and ramparts of Maiden Castle hillfort primarily in tactical terms of fields of 'fire' for defending slingers, even if such observations fit the facts (Wheeler 1943: 49–51). It is equally doubtless that such massive undertakings were meant to work on human minds, through enchantment akin to the impact of splendid helmets with towering crests: impressing the resident population within and around, whether with their own collective effort or the authority of the dominant. At the same time, the earthworks sought also to overawe would-be attackers. Similar intertwining of ideological, symbolic and practical, tactical motivations may be seen at British hillfort gates. The preferential eastern orientation of main entrances of many British hillforts plausibly has a cosmological explanation;yet gate design was still necessarily largely driven by practical considerations, of surveillance and regulation of movement of people and livestock, of communal security – and at least at some times in some places, a need for military vigilance. The elaboration of Danebury's eastern gate makes sense in tactical defensive terms, and it seems ultimately to have been attacked (Cunliffe 2003: 66–8).

However, 'poliorcetics', sophisticated siegecraft using complex engineering (machines, ramps, mining), was apparently unknown in Iron Age Europe. Originating in the Middle East, it was developed by Greeks (who invented torsion artillery) and perfected by the Romans who introduced it to the transalpine world. Only wealthy states possessed the means to acquire and sustain such military capabilities, which demanded vast resources and technical expertise. Most Iron Age enceintes were created in a world in which the plausible dangers were mass assault with simple ladders (escalade), surprise attack on open gates, or treachery (which brings us back to internal dynamics).

In such circumstances, even simple circuits could have been militarily effective, deterring large-scale attack by making it difficult and potentially very costly. I suggest equally significantly, what we know historically, or can infer from archaeology of masculine ideologies across Iron Age Europe, suggests aggressors and also defenders preferred to avoid fighting across fortifications – or in many regions refrain from creating them at all. On

the Steppe especially, the cultural centrality of the horse generally rendered fortifications superfluous. For both single combat and collective warfare, Iron Age societies widely exhibited a strong cultural preference, and material equipment, for face-to-face fighting rather than defending walls.

The Samnite peoples of southern Italy offer a good protohistorical example. They had hillforts but, it seems, did not expect them to withstand large-scale attack. In 293 BC, before they had developed sophisticated siege capabilities, the Romans faced fierce resistance when they advanced to assault Saepinum. The Samnites, who according to Livy habitually defended their settlements with their right arms in preference to walls, attacked the approaching legions in the open field and, even once forced back inside Saepinum's defences, sought to keep the invaders at bay by aggressive sorties rather than passively from the ramparts (Livy *History of Rome* 10.45; Salmon 1967: 30, fn3).

Defenders, then, often opted to fight far from their own walls even if they possessed them, while attackers preferred not to have to throw themselves against fortifications. Even after becoming expert military engineers, Romans exhibited a bloodthirsty preference for sword combat, lauding open battle over costly and potentially less glorious sieges.

Where they existed, Iron Age fortifications may have been built because in most circumstances they proved effective enough, in creating areas of sanctuary from endemic risk and episodic reality of serious 'brigandage' or war in the local landscape. Yet no fortification is invulnerable, and it may be that Iron Age defended sites actually suffered successful attack more often than we have hitherto realized, because archaeological evidence for carnage can be surprisingly ephemeral.

Fin Cop: a case of war and massacre?

Excavations at Fin Cop hillfort in the Derbyshire Peak District of England (Waddington 2012) provide a recent case study in the identification of Iron Age conflict through archaeological evidence from a hillfort, which suggests that the material 'stigmata' of ancient violence may be very subtle indeed. They may reside not even on the bones of the dead, but be detectable only in patterns in other data, in this case in interment of multiple bodies, demography of the group, and the way they had been buried. These enigmatic traces, taken together, suggest a long-forgotten Iron Age atrocity.

Stratigraphy and radiocarbon dating indicate that the earthwork perimeter of Fin Cop was a new foundation of the middle Iron Age. Stone from a rock-cut ditch was used to build a rampart 3–4 m high, around the end of the fifth century BC. A second outer rampart was subsequently started, but still far from complete when the circuit was deliberately slighted and the site abandoned, probably in the second half of the fourth century BC (Waddington 2012: 223–4). Widely-spaced trenches across the rampart ditch have so far produced 15 bodies buried in its fill (ibid: 214–17, 231). The known distribution and density of bodies (roughly a corpse per metre of ditch) implies several hundred along its length. Those recovered so far have been identified as adult women, babies, and one adolescent, possibly

male. No adult males have been encountered, a curious fact unlikely to be statistical fluke, although males might perhaps lie concentrated in the unexcavated stretches of ditch. Equally curiously, the corpses lay not in graves dug into the ditch fill, but were interleaved within layers of a deliberate single-phase demolition of the hillfort rampart. The bodies were apparently placed – or thrust – into the ditch from the outside while the rampart material was being thrown back in from the inside: i.e. their burials were apparently simultaneous, and contemporaneous with – indeed integral to – destruction of the hillfort (ibid: 226).

What happened here? If the Fin Cop community was destroyed and its settlement ritually abandoned as a result of some epidemic, where are the adult males? Their apparent absence forms part of a chain of argument leading to an even grimmer alternative: that we are dealing here with violent extirpation of an entire community and its central and symbolic place. The skeletons recovered so far have revealed no gross violent trauma that could have been the cause of death (Waddington 2012: 226). However, as we saw, many lethal wounds leave no skeletal trace. The Fin Cop dead could have been strangled or had their throats cut. The argument for a massacre as an act of war, with simultaneous slighting of the fort indicating the intention was obliteration not conquest (ibid: 224–6, 228–9), is largely circumstantial, but is cumulative and compelling.

Perhaps what happened was something like this: the community centred on Fin Cop was one of many in the region, each of the scale of some hundreds to a thousand or more individuals. For unknown reasons, during the fifth century BC violent conflict, up to the scale of war between communities, become a threat prompting construction of a number of defensible sites in the area, including Fin Cop. A generation or two later the decision further to strengthen the defences may indicate increasing risk or occurrence of conflict, and perhaps itself precipitated pre-emptive attack from a neighbouring group before work could be completed. Bodies of adult males are absent from the site because they went to confront the attackers in open battle, to keep them away from the unfinished and perhaps vulnerable hillfort, and/or because, as among Romans and Gauls, prevailing combat culture decreed open-field confrontation. However, they were defeated, all slain in fighting and ensuing rout, captured and killed or made fugitives. Following this, the victors rounded up all the women and children at Fin Cop itself. The community was then practically and symbolically obliterated, by annihilating the rest of the population and their central place in a combined act of slaughter and physical destruction, as Waddington has argued.

We may, then, have at Fin Cop testimony of a calculated act not just of war, but of small-scale genocide. This is, of course, a lurid and horrifying scenario, yet there are parallels, e.g. the Native American mass grave at Crow Creek, South Dakota, c. AD 1325 (Zimmerman 1997). The people of Crow Creek were, like the similar-scale Fin Cop community seventeen centuries earlier, in the process of enhancing their settlement defences when they were attacked. The remains recovered attest massacre, accompanied by widespread mutilation, of apparently the entire 500-hundred-strong population – except for young female adults who are underrepresented in the mass grave (ibid: 84.)

Perhaps at Fin Cop too, along with loot and livestock, the conquerors also spared the young females, making this rather a case of ‘ethnocide’, i.e. destruction of a self-identifying group, distinct from genocide in that there were biological survivors forcibly absorbed into another

group. An even larger-scale example of just such an atrocity as that envisaged at Fin Cop is described in the Bible (*Book of Numbers* 31: 7–18, King James Version): the obliteration of the Midianites by the Israelites:

'And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian… And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire… And Moses said unto them, 'Have ye saved all the women alive? … Now … kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.'

The historicity of this appalling account may be questioned, yet it was already current among the Jews, taken to be true, and regarded as a just, divinely sanctioned act by the time the archaeologically-attested events at Fin Cop unfolded.

Armed violence in Iron Age Europe

How can we make sense of the fragmentary, often enigmatic, yet sometimes lurid evidence for carnage and combat culture in Iron Age Europe? Can development of large armies, at least, be attributed to a 'violent edge of empire effect', responses to the encroachment of Roman imperialism? This certainly looks to be a major factor during the Roman Iron Age. For example, the defeated army, apparently comprising men from Norway and Sweden, whose equipment was buried at Illerup around AD 200 (above), included many Roman-made sword blades, likely attesting Roman political interference in the North. Generations of fighting against, and indeed for, Rome appears to have led some Germanic groups to develop quite sophisticated armies with distinct tactical components. When a Frankish army faced a Roman force at Strasbourg in AD 357, its right wing attempted flanking tactics (Ammianus Marcellinus *History* 16.12). This wing was commanded by a king with the Graeco-Roman name Serapio, his father having spent years in Roman Gaul where he learnt the mysteries of Greek religion (ibid. 16.12.26) – and perhaps also Roman tactics?

Yet, as we have seen, there is extensive evidence that northern Iron Age Europeans were fighting and sometimes massacring each other long before Rome impinged on their world. The likely dynamics of armed violence within and between societies through the Iron Age might be understood through cross-cultural comparison with better-attested analogous contexts, from wider anthropology, and not least from one corner of the Iron Age world itself: Italy, in transition to history.

The anthropology of recent 'honour cultures', classically based on studies of Mediterranean pastoral and rural societies (Péristiany 1966), provides analogies for Iron Age Europeans. Those living in small-scale societies without large-scale collective institutions live in conditions of chronic insecurity, and must depend on their own physical capacities, plus family and personal allies, for security of their lives and livelihoods. This often requires a

capacity for violence: at least credible deterrent threat based on skill with weapons. Personal reputation for fighting prowess can become vital to social standing; conflict may arise from competition within groups (duelling, feuding) as much as between them (which may or may not deserve the label 'war'). From the later Bronze Age dedicated combat weapons, not least swords, became more common in Europe. Through the ensuing millennium sword designs remained generally double-edged, also providing a pertinent metaphor: armed violence could protect or give advantage, while also threatening self-inflicted injuries to a community through internecine strife. Increasing elaboration of material culture of armed violence as means of deterrence or active aggression ran in tandem with development of social codes to seek to limit mayhem; development of 'honour cultures' codified the prestige of masculine courage and aggression, while at same time providing rules of engagement and means of negotiating conflict.

Danger of internal conflict was one of several major driving forces (including demographic expansion) in the creation of larger, more complex polities, e.g. during Italy's Iron Age, generating fora for non-violent competition and conflict resolution – in the case of archaic Rome, the literal, original forum. Many of the diverse peoples of Iron Age Italy seem to have become dominated by armed and violent aristocrat-led 'clans', prone to fighting each other as much as outsiders (Terrenato 2001; Motta and Terrenato 2006; Terrenato 2007). A major function of the Italian city-states and ethnic leagues developing from the eighth century BC was collective regulation of internal conflict, facilitating competition for prestige through non-violent means (i.e. religious, political, and economic activities). These institutions also sought to control armed violence, in part by religious and legal sanctions, but largely through channelling masculine aggression into less internally disruptive ends: war against outsiders. Capacity for armed violence thus remained central to Italian masculinity, values shared by Greeks and Samnites as well as Latins and Etruscans. Personal honour and social standing increasingly derived from performance in war on behalf of the community (McDonnell 2006). The peoples of Iron Age Italy thus evolved in parallel from baseline chronic insecurity towards a different, binary system: of 'peace' and 'war', both collective enterprises requiring organization and maintenance. Nevertheless, Italian polities were often unstable; civil strife could still be as dangerous as foreign wars.

As it turned out, one city-state, Rome, developed a unique talent for alliance building in tandem with its military capacities (Eckstein 2006), facilitating peaceful integration of Italy's multi-ethnic societies through diverting and harnessing their armed aggression in the now-traditional way: directing it outwards. The vast imperial power which then proceeded to conquer much of Europe was a product as much of earlier Italian Iron Age traditions of armed violence as of the special qualities of the Roman Republic (James 2011: 53–63).

Much of the rest of Iron Age Europe probably followed similar trajectories, albeit of varying speed and degree. The large polities of late pre-Roman Iron Age Transalpine Gaul, as depicted in the pages of Caesar's *Gallic War*, exhibited characteristics strikingly similar to those of archaic Italy: armed masculinity, aristocratic regimes prone to internal instability, and propensity for external war. The preceding centuries had seen a number of large-scale Gaulish plunder-raids into Italy and, less spectacular but perhaps more important, many Gauls, alongside Celtiberians, Thracians and others, serving Mediterranean powers as mercenaries (Szabó 1991). Thus Gaulish societies usefully neutralized armed and dangerous

young males by exporting them, either to die abroad or return rich – as it turns out, bringing new ideas like coinage (Wells 1999: 46–7, 54) and perhaps political ideas facilitating larger polities. During the Roman Iron Age, Germans and Sarmatians would also become mercenaries or recruits in Roman service. Late Roman hiring of entire 'barbarian' armies simply marked the culmination of a long tradition of mercenary service.

However, until the Roman era, many more distant European societies remained small-scale in organization, still with patterns of violence likely reflecting tensions within society as much as external raiding and war, as Giles envisages for society in later Iron Age East Yorkshire. Here the gorgeous weapons in graves, and the injuries they inflicted on the bodies, probably reflect intragroup duelling more than warfare (Giles 2012: 107, 235–8).

Later Iron Age Europeans, then, were by no means simply victims reacting as best they could to imperialist aggression. Many were willing and active participants in martial interactions with the Classical Mediterranean world, contacts which reshaped, redirected and perhaps intensified pre-existing violent practices. Development of large-scale armies and warfare were the reverse of the coin of development of civil society emergent in various parts of Europe during the Iron Age.

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