

The Mediterranean Wine Trade and the Development
and Decline of the Fürstensitze in Iron Age Europe

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Abstract

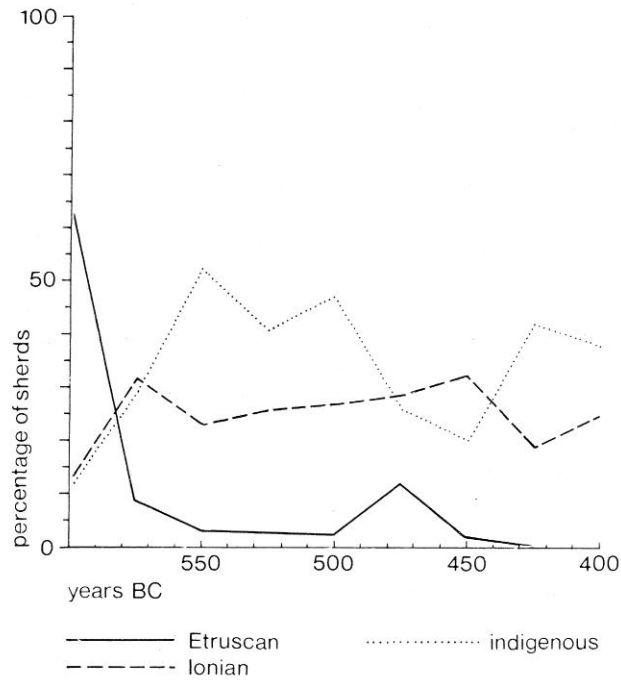
The contact between the Mediterranean world and the peoples of Northern Europe (typically referred to as Celts and Germans) had a variety of aspects and consequences to the cultural development of the various peoples of the region. One aspect of this contact was trade, and one of the items traded was wine, which was the alcoholic beverage of choice in most of the Mediterranean World. This trade contributed to the development of a number of major centers, originally labeled as Fürstensitze (prince's seats) or by Cunliffe (2008) as "seats of nobility" or perhaps even a more neutral principle places, which featured extremely wealthy graves for a period of several generations. Just as the creation of the trade routes by the Greeks city-states and other Mediterranean powers contributed to the development of these places, fluctuations or decline in this trade could contribute to their decline.

The Mediterranean Wine Trade and the Development and Decline of the Fürstensitze in Iron Age Europe

Trade was one of the principle means of the spread of new technology and ideas into the territory of northern Europe. Signs of trade were evident even in Neolithic times with shells, amber and flint being found far from their sources. In the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age periods the trade connections with the Mediterranean world increased dramatically and their impact on the peoples of northern Europe was substantial. Among the principle items of trade from the Mediterranean World which has been found in abundance at Iron Age (and later) sites in northern Europe are items related to the consumption of wine. The items it was shipped in, stored in, mixed in, served from and drunk from are found both in settlement areas (usually in broken fragments) and in burials; usually of elite members of the community.

Beginnings of the Trade

The origins of the wine trade in between the Mediterranean world and the interior and northern Europe are usually attributed to the Etruscans, beginning in c. 625 BC (Dietler, 2008, p. 248), although there is some evidence for the importation of wine and associated items as early as 1200 BC (Wells, 1984, p 102). The data in Table 1 from the minor port of Latara shows that Etruscan sherds dominated from c. 600 BC to c. 580 BC, but were already in decline, being superseded by Ionian imports from Massalia and indigenous wares. The data from another minor port at Le Mont-Garou (also in Table 1) shows Massiliot pottery dominating from c. 550 BC, with Etruscan, Punic and Attic wares all appearing with significantly less frequency and ending c. 325 BC. The leaders of the communities that developed into the Fürstensitze were well positioned to take advantage of this new trade, due to shift in the predominant trade routes in the preceding centuries (see Map 2).



21 The frequency of different ceramic types.

Upper: Latara (Arnal, Majurel & Prades 1974, fig. 134).

Lower: Le Mont-Garou (Arcelin, Arcelin-Pradelle & Gasco 1982, fig. 52)

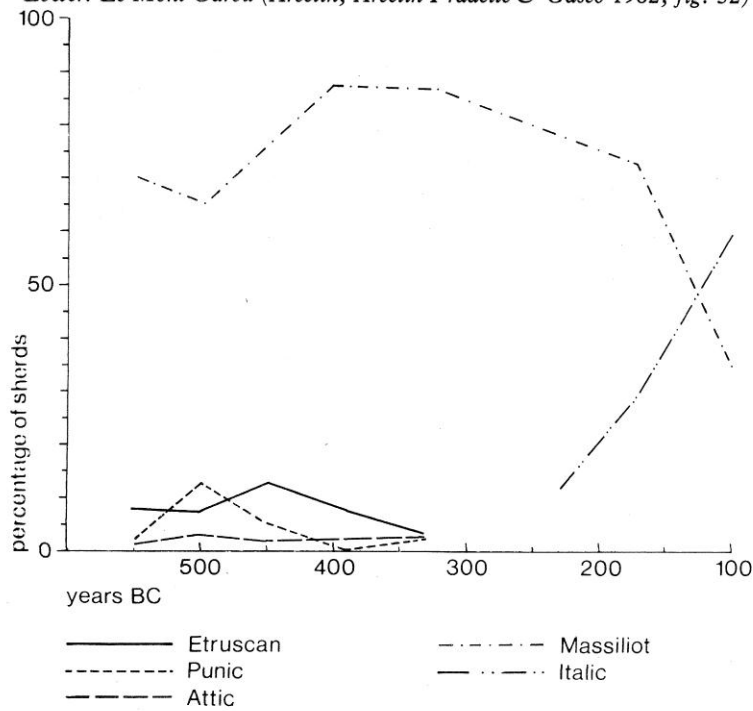
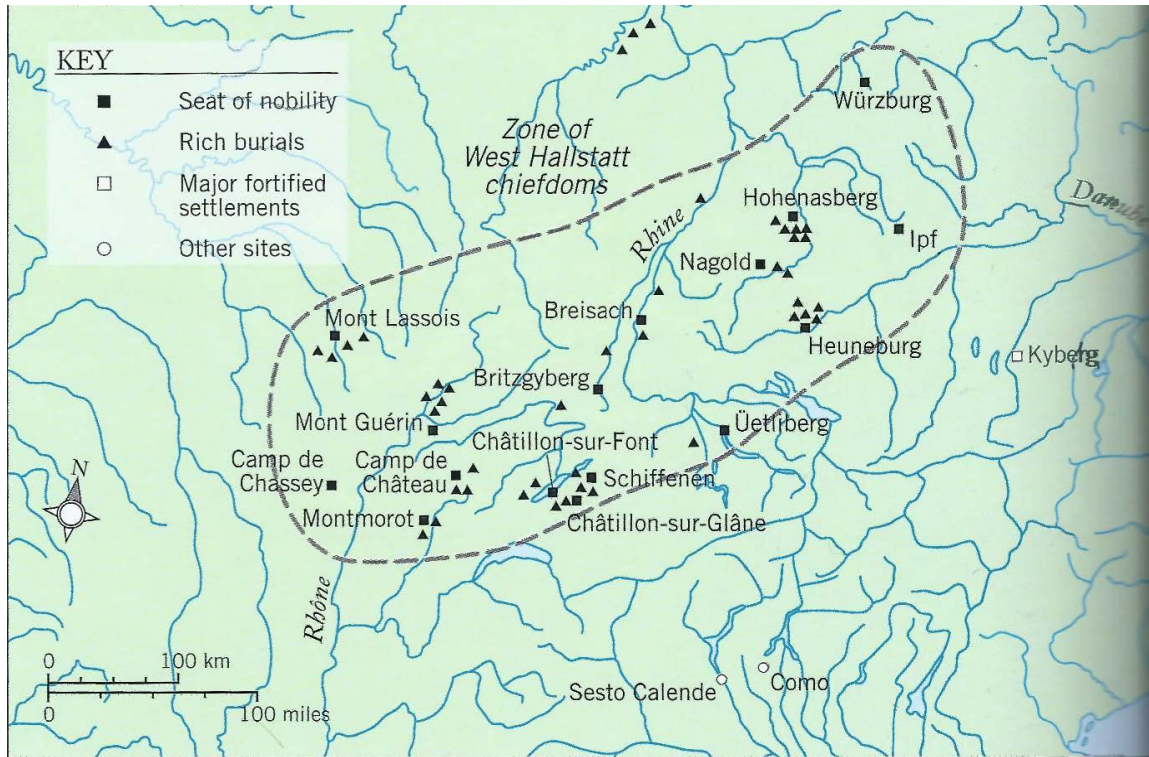
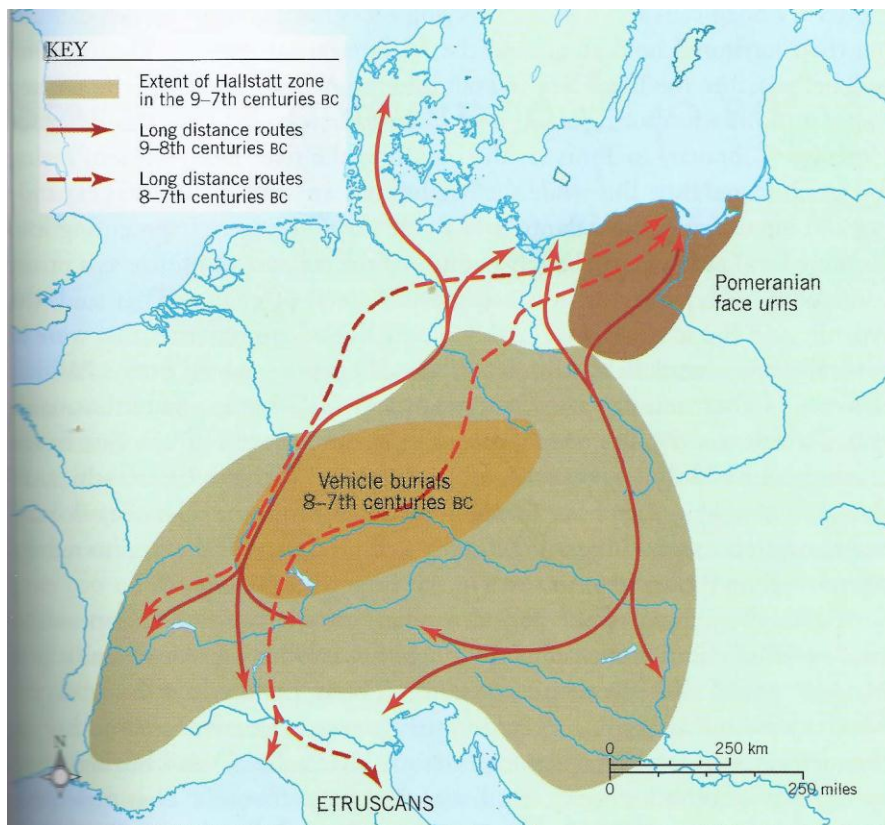


Table 1: Pottery Sherd Frequency Chart from Cunliffe, 1988, p. 47



Map 1: Locations of the Fürstensitze from Cunliffe, 2008 p. 310



Map 2: Changes in Trade Routes in Hallstatt Period from Cunliffe, 2008, p. 315

Sources

There were a number of competing Mediterranean cultures that all wanted access to the resources of the interior and northern Europe. That wine and its related materials was a significant part of what was traded from the Mediterranean is well documented throughout northern Europe at this time. What the Mediterranean powers were wanting in return is has usually been assumed to have been raw materials such as wood, ores, tar, etc. and slaves, none of which leaves anything identifiable to be found, except in the case of sunken ships bearing such cargo.

Etruscan. The Etruscans were a native culture of northern Italy and as such had an early advantage in developing trade routes with the interior of Europe via the Alpine passes and along the coast into southern Gaul. As shown in Map #2, the earlier trade routes of the 9th-8th centuries BC primarily led towards areas that were under Etruscan control or influence. Their uniquely formed wares, such as the beaked flagon and black bucchero pottery, have been found in many sites in central Europe dating to the Hallstatt and La Tène periods, with large concentrations in Pomerania, along the Moselle and Marne rivers and in Bohemia. Local imitations of these wares were also prominent and the style of the urn burials in Pomerania may be linked to extensive contacts with the Etruscans as well (Cunliffe, 2008, pp. 356-357, p. 301). They were a source not only of their own materials, but also transported Greek wares such as Attic pottery for trade. Hence the foundation of Greek colonies such as Massalia, which directly competed with them led to changes in their trade patterns, with them opening (or reopening) routes through the eastern Alpine passes connecting to their settlements in the Po valley in northern Italy (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 314).

Carthaginian. The Carthaginians were based out of a former Phoenician colony in North Africa (Carthage), and had taken control of other Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean as well as founding a number of their own, especially along the southern coast of Spain. They were not major players in the trade with northern Europe, but their interactions with the other participants in this trade could have a significant impact in the development of the trade (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 16).

Greek. The Greeks had previously had contact with the western Mediterranean in the Mycenaean period (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 253), but they began their colonization efforts in the western Mediterranean at about the same time as the Phoenicians, the late 8th century BC, but initially confined their efforts to southern Italy and Sicily, unlike the Phoenicians, who colonized North Africa, southern Spain, Sardinia and even ventured into the Atlantic both north and south of the Straits of Gibraltar (Osborne, 2009, pp. 98-100; Kuhrt, 1995, p. 409; Cunliffe, 2008, pp. 293-294). At this point the Etruscans were still principle middlemen for Greek goods going to the North.

This changed with the foundation of Massalia by the Phoceans in c. 600 BC, directly challenging established Etruscan routes (Cunliffe, 2008, pp. 294-296). From this point the Greek trade came to be the most dominant in the area. This also corresponded with the growth in trade, but coinage was not involved and the principle item which appears to have been traded from Massalia in exchange for the raw materials from the north appears to have been wine and its associated materials (Goudineau, 1983, p. 77).

Importance of the Feast

Feasting was a prominent feature of the prehistoric cultures of Europe dating back to at least the Bronze Age Urnfield culture. A significant feature of the feasting was drinking, with

elaborate vessels used in its consumption, which may have been of ceremonial significance (Arnold, 1999, p. 71; Davidson, 1988, p. 41). The locally produced and consumed beverages of choice were wheaten beer and mead, but the introduction of imported wine and its associated paraphernalia added a new dimension to the resources available for the elites who sponsored the feasting. The ability to store imported wine for use at special feasting occasions was also of importance to those who could control access to it (Arnold, 1999, p. 74).

The increased wealth available to the leaders of the Fürstensitze due to their control of riverine routes used for the trade with the Mediterranean would allow them to have greater displays at their feasts (and funerals) and give greater bounty to their supporters. This would allow the leaders of the places that controlled the trade to achieve a greater status due to their ability to sponsor more, greater and bigger feasts than their less fortunate neighbors, who may have been plunged into penury trying to ‘keep up with the Joneses’, as the sponsorship of these major events took a substantial portion of the resources of the sponsor’s region and were often a source of competition among neighboring groups (Jennings, Antrobus, Atencio, Glavich, Johnson, Loffler & Luu, 2005, pp. 275-276, Arnold, 1999, p. 73).

Evidence of the Impact of the Trade

Some enterprising Etruscan or Greek trader must have early on recognized that wine was a commodity which could be traded with the elites of northern Europe in return for the raw materials and slaves which were desired in the Mediterranean world. Otherwise there would have been a one-sided exchange with precious metals and similar resources going north in exchange for the raw materials. This would lead to a situation such as with the China Trade of the 18th and early 19th centuries AD, where goods were exported from China, but China was not

buying anything from the West, so the money just kept going one way until someone hit upon selling opium to the Chinese, which quickly changed the balance of trade (Booth, 1996, p.112).

Heuneburg

The Heuneburg, located near the source of the Danube, perhaps the largest of the Fürstensitze sites, is around 100 ha in size. It is sometimes thought to be the city referred to by Herodotus as Pyrene, which he located in the territory of the Celts near the source of the Danube/Ister River. It has five major burial mounds near it, including Hohmichele, one of the largest tumuli in Central Europe. Unfortunately, they were, for the most part, not intact, although they did still have some of the grave goods (Fernandex-Gotz & Krausse, 2012; Cunliffe, 2008, p. 310).

As with all the sites, Heuneburg was a fortified site (as noted in the burg/berg suffix) situated along a river such that it could control access and dominate trade in the area. It had already been in use during the Bronze Age and was well situated to participate in trade along the Danube as well as from the Rhône Valley in Gaul and the Po Valley in northern Italy (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 310).

Over one hundred sherds of Attic pottery have been recovered from the graves and settlement areas at The Heuneburg, most dating from c. 540-480 BC. (Wells, 1984, pp. 111-112) A major piece of evidence for close contact with the Mediterranean world is the fact that its fortification walls (as well as the fortifications of the lower settlement) were rebuilt in a Mediterranean style using mud-brick (a most unsuitable material for temperate Europe). This could only have been accomplished by an architect/engineer extremely familiar with the technology and systems used in the Mediterranean (Cunliffe, 2008, pp. 310-312; Fernandex-Gotz & Krausse, 2012). This was all made possible by the burgeoning of the trade with the

Mediterranean region, which seems to have consisted primarily of the Mediterranean peoples sending wine and associated items in return for the raw materials they needed at home.

Hohenasperg

A site just to the north of the Heuneburg, Hohenasperg, has six major burial mounds, two of which (Hochdorf and Grafenbühl) contained burials which still had much of their goods intact, in fact Hochdorf was apparently not plundered. The evidence from these burials shows evidence of diplomatic gifts (the ornate couches upon which the men were buried, among other items) as well as items both local and imported related to feasting and drinking. The burial at Hochdorf contained a set nine of drinking horns as well as imported wares for serving food and drink and a large cauldron, intended for the mixing of wine, which was apparently used locally for mixing mead, from pollen traces found inside it (King, 1990, p. 15).

The intact burial at Hochdorf from c. 550 BC indicates just how wealthy these rulers were, with his golden shoe adornments, gold rings, imported bronze couch, and other local and imported finery (at least he didn't sport a golden penis sheath like the elite burial from Varna, Bulgaria from c. 4000 BC shown on p. 156 of Cunliffe, 2008). The later Grafenbühl burial also had an elaborate couch on which the man's body was placed. Both of these couches are thought to have been of Mediterranean manufacture and to have been imported, likely as diplomatic gifts (Wells, 2012, p. 207).

Because of their proximity to each other it is often felt that Hohenasperg and Heuneburg may have been in competition with each other and perhaps even in conflict with each other (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 32). That there was a threat of conflict, either from the other Fürstensitze, invading Germans, such as the Cimbri and Teutones of c. 100 BC or other local marauders is

evidenced by the need for elaborate fortifications at each of the sites, and especially with the use of the Mediterranean type fortifications at Heuneburg

Mont Lassois/Vix

Mont Lassois in Burgundy, France has four rich burials associated with it and was a major center for routes going up the Rhône and Saône Rivers towards the Seine, Marne and Moselle Rivers. Being perhaps the first link in contact from Massalia at the mouth of the Rhône going to northern Europe, it was well placed to become a wealthy center.

The most noted burial at Mont Lassois is that referred to as the “Vix Princess”. This grave was no longer apparent on the surface, as the mound that covered it had entirely eroded. Perhaps this happened in antiquity, as the grave was undisturbed, unlike the others in its vicinity, whose mounds had survived. The woman, aged about 35 who was buried there c. 480 BC is one of the richest female burials in prehistoric northern Europe, as she had all the usual accoutrements of a female burial, but many of them and with great ornamentation. The greatest feature of her burial, however, was the enormous (290 gallon capacity) bronze Vix Krater. This is the largest bronze Greek vessel ever found and corresponds with a passage in Herodotus that says that a similar sized krater was made as a diplomatic gift from Sparta to Croesus of Lydia in c. 550 BC. Other imported feasting and drinking wares from the Greek and Etruscan worlds were also found in her tomb (Wells, 2004, pp. 205-206).

Adaptations

As previously noted, not all the wine-drinking implements were eventually used for wine-drinking (ex. Hochdorf Cauldron). One possible explanation for this is found in the much later Anglo-Saxon poem, Beowulf. In it the king’s hall is referred to as both a mead hall and a wine hall, with both beverages being served, depending on the type of feast being given, a

welcoming feast or a victory feast (Froyd, 2009, p. 187). The peoples of northern Europe adapted and adopted the imported wares and drink, eventually making their own versions of the Greek and Etruscan items used for consuming wine, although wine itself was not made north of Massilia until Roman times (Dietler, 2008, p. 256; Arnold, 2004, p. 179).

Changes in Mediterranean Situation

Beginning shortly after 500 BC a number of events affected the consumers of goods provided by the Fürstensitze centers. The Greeks became immersed in a prolonged war with the Persians, followed shortly thereafter by wars amongst themselves as well as a war with the Etruscans and also the Carthaginians. All of this would have a negative impact on demand for goods from northern Europe. War is never good for trade.

Conflict/Competition between Greeks and Etruscans

The foundation of Massilia, in a region already being exploited by the Etruscans, was a direct challenge to them and led to direct competition and eventually conflict between the Greeks and Etruscans. For a time after the foundation of Massalia the two powers coexisted in the area, with the Etruscans supplying most of the wine consumed by the earliest residents in the new Greek colony (Dietler, 2008, p. 249). Within a few decades, by c. 550 BC, Greek imports (as represented by pottery remains) came to dominate at Gallic sites, with a significant portion being made in Massalia itself (Graham, 1982a, p. 140).

Greek expansion in Corsica by Phocaeen refugees was opposed by the Etruscans and Carthaginians, who, though defeated in a naval battle at Alalia in c. 540 BC, still forced the colonists to move to southern Italy due to their naval losses, so it was a Pyrrhic victory for the Greeks (Graham, 1982a, p. 142). Tensions continued to be to be high between the Greek colonies and the Etruscans, with the Etruscans progressively losing market share in the West

Mediterranean region. After the naval battles off Himera and Cumae in 474 BC the Etruscans were essentially cut off from trade with Massalia and the western routes and the older coastal Etruscan cities went into decline (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 23).

This led to Etruscan expansion into the Po Valley and founding of new centers there and the opening/reopening of routes across the Alps into Central Europe, bypassing at least some of the Fürstensitze sites. Expansion into the Po Valley gave the Etruscans continued access to resources from Northern Europe, albeit by a different route, access to trade with the cities of Greece by way of Adriatic ports, and control of an area which was capable of producing valuable food resources (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 23). Although some trade with southern Gaul continued into the 4th century BC (Dietler, 2008, p. 248), the focus of the Etruscan trade now shifted to the eastern routes and this may have had an impact on the Fürstensitze sites, which were dependent on trade.

Conflict/Competition between Greeks and Carthaginians

Although the Greeks and Carthaginians were for the most part exploiting different parts of the West Mediterranean (Italy and Gaul for the Greeks, North Africa and Spain for the Carthaginians) they came into conflict over the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, where they both established colonies. In this conflict the Western Greeks of Sicily and their allies (the Greeks of the homeland were otherwise occupied with fighting the Persians) managed to defeat the Carthaginians in c. 470 BC, achieving control of Sicily (Osborne, 2009, pp. 326-327), but this conflict could also have had an adverse impact on the steady flow of trade with the north as commercial vessels would not be safe in an area where naval conflict was taking place.

The Persian War

Demand for goods from the Greek homeland would doubtless be impacted by the Persian invasions of 490 and 480 BC. A goal of the fleets of Persia and its allies would doubtless be to cut off supply lines to the mainland Greek cities from the Black Sea and Western Mediterranean. The destruction of cities such as Athens in this conflict would doubtless have had an impact on the demand of goods from Northern Europe, especially as there was a possibility that Carthage was in some way allied with the Persians, perhaps in part because the cities of Phoenicia, of which Carthage was a former colony, provided much of the naval power for the Persians (Osborne, 2009, p. 327)

The Peloponnesian War

Following the eventual Greek victory over the Persians (at least in mainland Greece) there followed a struggle between rival alliances of Greek cities led by Athens and Sparta known as the Peloponnesian War, which would also have continued the impact on trade. This protracted period of conflict lasted from 431 to 404 BC and was followed by the subsequent Corinthian War between the same primary protagonists from 395-387. With Persian involvement on first one side and then the other in both these conflicts maritime trade would have been impacted to a significant extent by these conflicts (Osborne, 2008, pp. 45-46).

Possible Impact on the Fürstensitze Sites

The Fürstensitze sites had prospered greatly due to the trade that was directed through the areas of their control. With the disruptions caused by conflict between the various groups which constituted the market for their goods, as well as being the suppliers of their wine, there would be an impact in the prosperity of these sites. During times of prosperity these leaders had increased the expectations of their followers using the wealth derived from the trade they were controlling to have great feasts with quantities of wine and gifts being given. When demand for

the goods for which they received payment in wine and other exotica declined or in some cases was rerouted to bypass the areas of their control they would no longer be able to meet the expectations that had grown over the several generations of prosperity and would begin to lose the loyalty of their followers (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 35).

Decline of the Fürstensitze Sites and Population Movements

The Fürstensitze sites appear to have gone into decline towards the beginning of the 5th century, which corresponds with the beginning of the period of intense conflict in the Mediterranean region. The trade decline significantly at this period and the route through Massilia began to lose importance, with the eastern Etruscan route gaining importance (King, 1990, p. 17). The prestige-goods economy they had developed collapsed when they were no longer able to supply a sufficient quantity of these goods to their underlings, some of whom may have been the leaders of the peripheral groups which later developed into the La Tène culture and who may have taken control of some of the remaining trade at this time, further weakening the Hallstatt elites at the Fürstensitze sites (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 354).

Subsequent to the decline of the Fürstensitze sites there was an expansion of the area of influence of the succeeding La Tène culture, with the occupation of much of the Po Valley, attacks on cities in Italy and incursions into Greece and an attack on the sanctuary at Delphi (Cunliffe, 2008, pp. 258-360; Cary & Scullard, 1975, pp. 72-73; Malin-Boyce, pp. 149-150). Some of this was attributed by ancient historians to a desire for wine, which may have become in shorter supply due to a decrease in trade (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 36). Several of these accounts also attribute the migration to overpopulation, perhaps related to the Hallstatt leaders no longer being able to provide for their people due to the decreased trade activity in their centers (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 36).

In the End There Can Be Only One

Gradually the Romans took control of the entire Mediterranean basin and eventually much of Northern Europe as well. The cities of the Etruscan heartland (the Po Valley had already been lost to Celtic incursion) were absorbed by Rome in the 3rd century BC (Carey & Scullard, 1975, p. 73, p. 93). Both Carthage and Greece fell to the Romans in 146 BC, leaving Rome as the only remaining market for imported goods from the area formerly controlled by the Fürstensitze sites (which by now were mostly abandoned) (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 61; Cunliffe, 2008, p. 318). With Caesar's conquest of Gaul in 58-52 BC and the expansion under the subsequent Roman Empire, Rome came to control much of the area in which the Fürstensitze had been located.

Conclusion

The Fürstensitze had developed in a time of increased trade and prosperity and had declined when that trade and prosperity dwindled or was redirected. That trade, which was predominantly in wine and related items on the Mediterranean side, which played a significant role in their development and continued existence, also played a great role their ultimate decline as conflict and change in the area that demanded their goods. The consequences of the conflicts amongst the Greeks, Etruscans and Carthaginians directly contributed to the collapse of the prestige goods economy of the Fürstensitze, which was based on conspicuous consumption of imported prestige goods (Cunliffe, 1988, p. 35).

Chronology

- c. 800-450 BC Hallstatt Period/Culture
- c. 700 BC Heuneburg settlement thrives/fortified
- 600 BC Massalia founded as colony of Phocaea
- c. 530 BC Burial of “Hochdorf Chieftain”
- c. 500 BC Burial of “Lady of Vix”
- c. 500 BC Heuneburg fortifications abandoned
- c. 492-449 BC Persian Wars (Athens & Sparta vs. Persian Empire)
- c. 470 BC Etruscan contact with Massalia curtailed by Greek naval victories
- c. 450-50 BC La Tène Period/Culture
- 431-404 BC Peloponnesian War (Sparta vs. Athens)
- c. 396 BC N. Italy occupied by “Celtic” Peoples, now referred to as Cisalpine Gaul
- 395-387 BC Corinthian War (Athens, et al. & Persian Empire (at first) vs. Sparta & Persian Empire (later))
- 387 BC Gallic attack on Rome
- 337 BC Phillip II of Macedon unifies most of Greece in League of Corinth
- 336-323 BC Alexander the Great
- 279 BC Gallic attack on Greece, alleged plundering of Delphi (Gold of Tolosa)
- 113 BC Cimbri & Teutones arrive in Northern Italy, defeat Carbo
- 105 BC Cimbri & Teutones defeat Mallius and Caepio at Arausio
- 101 BC Marius and Sulla finally defeat the Cimbri & Teutones
- c. 100 BC Marcomanni settle in the Main River valley
- c. 50 BC Oppida of Manching destroyed
- c. 9 BC Marcomanni migrate to Bohemia
- 43 AD Roman Emperor Claudius invades Britain

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