BEYOND THE GODS: BIOGRAPHIES, VALUES AND COSMOLOGIES IN 'CELTIC' ICONOGRAPHY

ZESENTWINTIGSTE KROON-VOORDRACHT
GEHOUDEN VOOR DE
STICHTING NEDERLANDS MUSEUM
VOOR ANTHROPOLOGIE EN PRAEHISTORIE
TE AMSTERDAM OP 2 APRIL 2004
DOOR

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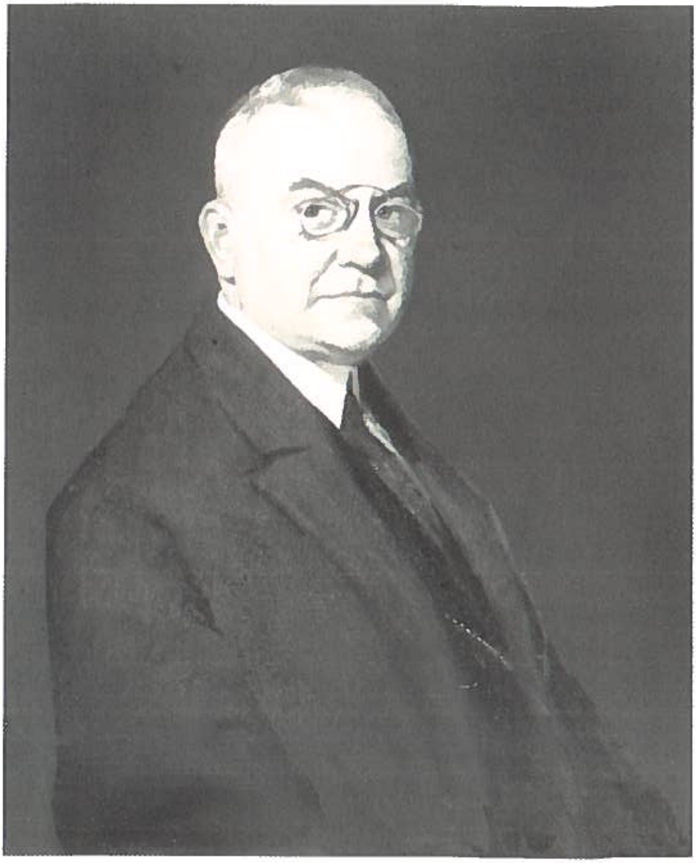


GERRIT HEINRICH KROON
(1868-1945)

MIRANDA ALDHOUSE-GREEN

BEYOND THE GODS: BIOGRAPHIES, VALUES AND COSMOLOGIES IN 'CELTIC' ICONOGRAPHY

The focus of this lecture is an exploration of how images were used in Iron Age and Roman Europe and a challenge to the view that they were essentially passive objects, on the one hand and, on the other, that they should always be interpreted as religious icons. Study of images that are generally taken to be those of Romano-British or Gallo-Roman gods and goddesses reveals that, although some undoubtedly were just that, others may have had socio-symbolic functions that were probably concerned with ritual behaviour, in its broadest sense, but were not *ipso facto* divine. In terms of how such images should be understood, it is important to recognise the centrality of production and context, and the possibility that images, like other artefacts, had life-cycles, biographies and 'flexible intent' (Needham 2001). Good examples of how this worked may be cited in the gendered pairs of Iron Age wooden images from Braak in Schleswig-Holstein (van der Sanden & Capelle 2001, 17; Gebühr 2002, 17) (Figure 1) and from the Wittemoor bog near Oldenberg, in Lower Saxony (Hayen 1987, figs. 91-93; van der Sanden & Capelle 2001, 50, fig. 52; Aldhouse-Green 2000, 19) (Figure 2). The Braak figures, taller than lifesize, were the focus of repeated fire-rituals; the Oldenberg pair was erected on either side of a trackway across the marsh, at a particularly hazardous crossing-point, as if to protect the people using the ford: in a later episode, the crossing-place was deliberately destroyed, wooden objects broken and deposited and the two figures removed from their wooden supports, laid flat on the ground and then the entire assemblage covered with a layer of peat.

Two recent experiences have influenced the nature and perspec-

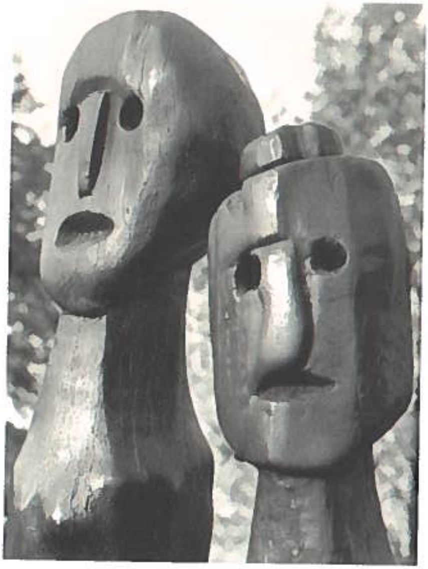
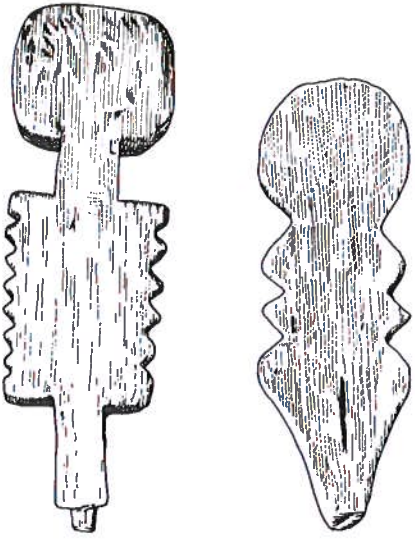


Figure 1.

Gendered pair of Iron Age wooden images from Braak, in Schleswig-Holstein. © Stiftung Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesmuseen, Schloss-Gottorf Archäologisches Landesmuseum Schleswig, Germany. The surviving height of the male figure (left) is 275 cm.

Figure 2.

Gendered pair of Iron Age wooden images from either side of an ancient trackway across the Wittemoor bog at Oldenberg, Lower Saxony. © Paul Jenkins (after van der Sanden & Capelle 2001). Height of female figure (right) 90 cm; height of male figure 105 cm.



tive of this lecture. In September 2003, I visited an exhibition entitled *The Museum of the Mind. Art and Memory in World Cultures*, held in celebration of the British Museum's 250th anniversary. Just inside the entrance, I encountered two arresting wooden images from the Democratic Republic of Congo; they are *nkisi*, and they consist of human figures bristling with nails (Mack 2003, 50-51, fig. 29; Sieber & Walker 1987, 83). *Nkisi* are multi-functional *aides-mémoires*, but a principal role is concerned with oath-taking: on swearing an oath, a person will drive a nail or other blade into the surface of the wood, sometimes smeared with the oath-taker's saliva, or pinning to the image a piece of cloth torn from a garment or a strand of human hair. The images are perceived as containing powerful sacred substances and the oath-nails tap into that power-source: if a nail is removed, the oath is undone; if taken out nefariously, the figure's internal power will be unleashed as an uncontrollable force. Each *nkisi* image is looked after by its own 'operator', whose responsibility it is to memorise every nail and its oath. The second factor was a visit to Chile in the same month, where I encountered a glimpse of a rich indigenous Amerindian Mapuche mythic culture in which shamans, numinous landscapes and ancestral images abound. As late as the twentieth century, people were carving life-size wooden human figures, 'estatua funeraria' called *Che-mamull* (Véliz n.d., 13) to be used in funerary ceremonies and then placed upright by the side of the newly-made grave. It was essential that the rites strictly followed set procedures since a careless funeral could result in the deceased's spirit being trapped by a witch and transformed into an evil spirit whilst, if the ceremony were conducted according to the proper tradition, the dead would become a beneficent ancestor-spirit. The Congolese and Chilean image-rituals are just two instances of a myriad of 'modern' traditions in which icons play an active and changing role in the societies producing and using them.

I have long been interested in ancient ritual, religion and iconography, and have conducted a number of research projects on the material culture of religious beliefs and cult-expression in the 'Celtic' world of north-west Europe during the period of the Iron Age and Roman occupation (Green 1986; 1989; 1992; 1995; 2000; 2001a). Issues of especial interest to me have included expression of the relationship between 'native' Gallo-British and intrusive 'Roman' belief-systems, the vexed question of how far religious perceptions, encoded in the Roman period, obtained in the pre-Roman Iron Age, and the tensions presented by the differences in evidence between the understated ritual material of Iron Age Europe and the image-rich and epigraphy-rich material culture of *romanitas*.

But it was not until 1996 that I began to apply principles of social theory to the iconographic repertoire of ancient Europe and thereby to begin to present new perspectives on the reading and meaning of images produced in the later first millennium BC and the earlier first millennium AD. These new frameworks led me to consider such issues as the relationships between materiality and meaning (whether the choice of wood, stone or metal might have influenced the function of an image and whether colour affected its symbolism); the evidence of wear or breakage for clues as to usage; the presentation of gender; notions of identities, of 'self' and 'other'; and the extent to which iconography might be utilised in order to make statements concerning political acceptance, subversion, resistance and even parody, this last leading to issues of agency and consumption. Some of these ideas are explored in a new volume (Aldhouse-Green 2004); there, I have veered away from any kind of comprehensive evaluation of evidence and, instead, I have tried to use carefully selected representations (which may or may not have strictly religious connotations) and employ them to explore avenues of meaning. I should like, in this lecture, to follow a broadly similar framework, and to discuss ideas triggered by the images chosen but reaching far beyond them.

MATERIALITY AND MEANING

> *'The images of the gods, grim and rude, were uncouth blocks formed of felled tree trunks. Their mere antiquity and the ghastly hue of their rotten timber struck terror; men feel less awe of deities worshipped under familiar forms; so much does it increase their sense of fear not to know the gods whom they dread...'*
>
> (Lucan *The Pharsalia* III: 399-453; trans Duff 1977, 142-7)

Lucan's account of the carved wooden effigies (Figure 3), encountered lurking in a sacred grove at Massilia by Julius Caesar's army in 48 BC, is significant for it encapsulates in a few words the differences in beliefs and their expression between Roman legionaries and the indigenous populace of southern Gaul (even though nominally part of the Roman empire since the second century BC)[2]. To borrow musical terminology in the understanding of Lucan's narrative, the 'dominant' is wood, the 'tonic' decay[3]: the dynamic nature of organic images and the faceless anonymity of their leprous surfaces represented a cosmology worlds away from the familiar comfort of the stone statues, depicting the Roman pantheon, with known names and recurrent accompanying symbols and identities. The poet's description of the Massiliote images' 'ghastly hue' is otherwise translated as 'rotted to whiteness', and initiates thinking about the significance of colour in ritual and religion (Taylor 2003; Jones & MacGregor eds. 2002; Bradley 2003). Lucan's text is full of colour: elsewhere in this atmospheric passage, he speaks of altars heaped with gory offerings, black water issuing from springs and the sacred grove as a 'place of darkness and cold shade'. Indeed, the images

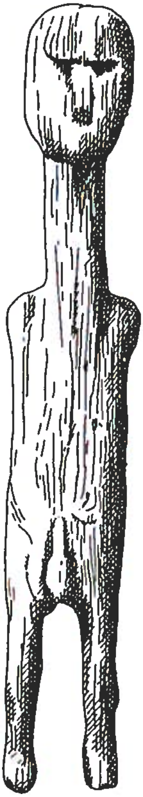


Figure 3.

Iron Age wooden male image from Kingsteignton, Devon (England). © Paul Jenkins. Height 34 cm.

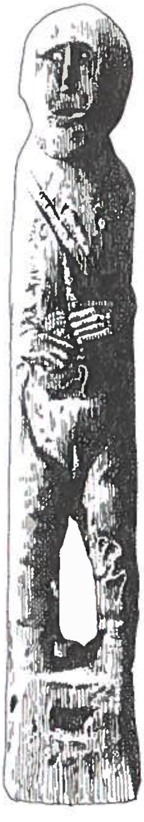


Figure 4.

Iron Age wooden female image, with inlaid quartz eyes, from a bog-deposit at Ballachulish, Argyll (Scotland). © Paul Jenkins (after Piggott 1968). Height c. lifesize.

themselves may once have been painted (van der Sanden & Capelle 2001, 49-52).

At the very beginning of the British Iron Age (*c.* 600 BC), a ceremony took place at Ballachulish, a remote *locus sanctus* in western Scotland. A large wooden figure of a naked woman, carrying some kind of wand or staff, was deposited in a small pool within a bog, weighted down with hurdles, to keep her from floating or from moving away from the appointed spot (Figure 4). She belongs to a small group of wooden images known from watery places in Iron Age Britain and northern Europe, recently subjected to radiocarbon analysis, and found to span a period from the seventh to the first centuries BC (Coles 1990, 315-330; van der Sanden & Capelle 2001, fig. 91). The circumstances of her deposition suggest that the image was perceived as a surrogate human sacrifice: not only was she submerged in a peat-marsh, like so many north European Iron Age bog-bodies, but the pinning down of the Ballachulish figure exactly replicates the treatment of

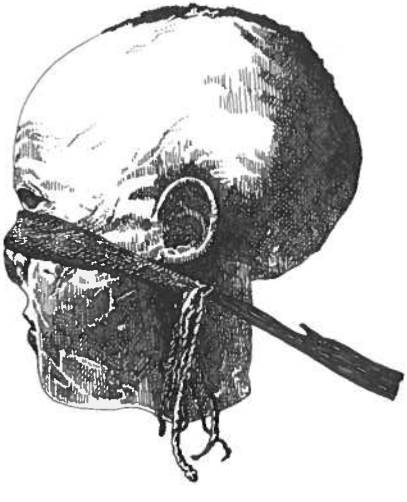


Figure 5.

The head of the Windeby girl, with sprang blindfold in place. © *Paul Jenkins.*

many of these marsh-victims, such as the middle-aged woman from Haraldskaer in Jutland (Aldhouse-Green 2001a, fig. 49; Hvass 1998), who died by strangulation in the early fifth century BC, and the adolescent girl, blindfolded and led out into a bog to drown at Windeby in Schleswig-Holstein some centuries later (Aldhouse-Green 2001a, fig. 50; Gebühr 1979; 2002) (Figure 5). Like these two women, almost certainly sacrificial victims, the Ballachulish wooden statuette was naked, and we may assume that nakedness possessed specific and profound significance in terms of liminality, the analogous boundary-symbolism of the bog-surface and human skin, and – perhaps – the necessary anonymity associated with sacrifice (Hill 2000; Tilley 1999, 257).

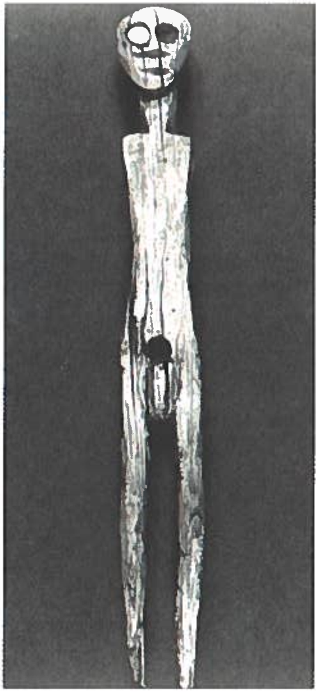


Figure 6.

One of five early Iron Age wooden male figures, with inlaid quartz eyes, found with a wooden model boat in an estuarine deposit at Roos Carr in north-east England. Height c. 35-40cm. © City of Kingston-upon Hull Museum.

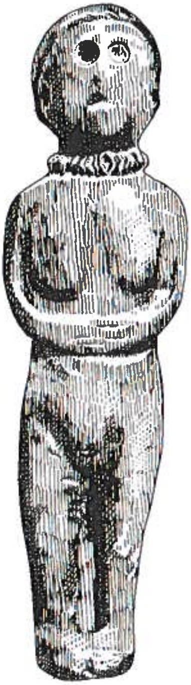
The Ballachulish woman was made of alder, a water-loving tree, and this choice may have contributed to the sanctity of the image. Bryony Coles (1998) has argued convincingly for an association between wood-species selected for carving images and their symbolism. She also draws attention to a feature the Scottish figure shares with other coeval figurines, notably those from Roos Carr in north-east England (Figure 6), namely the discrepant treatment of the face: the left eye is smaller than the right and the left side of the face exhibits signs of deliberate damage. This skewing might have significance in terms of whom the figure was meant to represent. There is some evidence to suggest that such images may have been those of ritualists, even shamans who, in a trance-state while communing with spirit-forces, may show distortion in their physiognomy reflecting the stress and pain caused by crossing over into the supernatural dimension. We know that some of the bog-bodies themselves had undergone psychotropic experiences just prior to their deaths, for hallucinogenic substances, such as ergot, have been found in their stomach contents (van der Sanden 1996; Aldhouse-Green 2001a).

The suggestion that the Ballachulish image may have been a substitute human sacrifice brings us back to Lucan's poem, for surrogacy can only happen in a context of perceived similarity. The choice of wood rather than stone for making images in Iron Age Europe was at least in part due to observation that wood, like flesh, is subject to profound physical changes but, at the same time, that both organic materials behave differently in water (Aldhouse-Green 2000) and are preserved in aquatic contexts. Furthermore, the living nature of trees may have a strong bearing on the symbolism of their products. If we glance at some anthropological analogies, it is clear that, in certain societies, the act of carving and polishing wood both reveals and releases the spirit-force contained within the wood, just as working the wood enhances grain, colour and reflective surfaces; there is a perception that the image pre-exists within the tree and is simply allowed to come into visible being by the act of carving (Saunders & Gray 1996, 801-812; Rival 1998, 1-36). But additionally, the dynamics of decay may be important: in New Guinea, the efficacy of funerary wooden sculptures known as *malanngan* is closely associated with their decomposition and the effigies are destroyed immediately after the death-ceremony, along with the body and the deceased's possessions, even though the image took months to create (Küchler 1992, 94-112; 1997, 39-60; 2001; 2002). For these communities, dissolution serves to set free spirit-forces, in a manner analogous to the pierced Congo *nkisi* figures mentioned at the beginning of this lecture. But while the African images are linked with remembrance, as *aides mémoires*, the *malanngan* are concerned as well with forgetting (Küchler 2001; Williams 2003).

A key element in the creation and consumption of wooden images is transformation. Lucan stresses this element in his allusion to the Massilian statues encountered by Caesar's soldiers. The sacred site of *Fontes Sequanae* near Dijon in Burgundy reinforces such a notion, for here, at a spring-sanctuary, there appears to be a link between the discrepant distribution of images made from wood and stone and the transformative experience of pilgrims worshipping at the shrine of the water-goddess Sequana. The shrine was monumentalised in the first century AD, under Roman occupation: the stone-built temple-precinct was erected on a series of low cliff-terraces above boggy low ground, the whole area punctuated by natural springs (Deyts 1983; 1994; Aldhouse-Green 1999). Within the boundary of the temple-complex a number of stone carvings representing the pilgrims and anatomical votives were clustered on the two upper terraces and along a path interpreted as a processional way through the shrine to the highest, and most sacred, point where the cult-image of Sequana stood. But a large assemblage of wooden figures was grouped around the spring-fed pool at the base of the cliff, outside the temple-boundary. I suspect that the inside-outside distribution of these images is spiritually significant for, although it could be argued that the wooden material was only preserved because of its immersion in the water, it is striking that no stone images have been recorded as being located here. It used to be understood that the wooden images dated to an earlier horizon than those of stone, but recent study has found the majority of the wooden carvings to be synchronous with the stone figures, so there has to be another explanation. Drawing on analogies from Malagasy (Parker Pearson & Ramilisonina 1998, 308-326; Bloch 1995, 212-215) and certain Indian Hindu traditions (Uchiyamada 1998, 177-196; Foulston 2002), it is possible to construct a model of interpretation for the relationship between wood and stone at *Fontes Sequanae* (Aldhouse-Green 2001b, 61-71). Sequana's devotees were pilgrims, seeking physical and spiritual healing, perhaps enlightenment, and central to the concept of pilgrimage is the notion of the journey and the changing state of being as the worshippers draw closer to the divine presence. It may be that the wooden figures represent the 'raw' pilgrim, the outsider, the excluded and profane but that, once pilgrims crossed the threshold into sacred space, they were gradually transformed and enlightened, perhaps even possessed by the goddess, and that such transfiguration was presented in terms of transference to imaging in stone, with its connotations of permanence and durability, from the unstable impermanence of wood. Possible credence is lent to this model in so far as, whilst the wooden carvings represent sick pilgrims, those of stone depict people in the act of offering: fruit, purses of money and animals, as if to express vows fulfilled and thanksgiving.

Figure 7.

Copper-alloy female figurine, from late pre-Roman Iron Age deposits, beneath the foundations of a Romano-British temple at Henley Wood, Somerset, south-west England. © Paul Jenkins. Height 7.5cm.



BIOGRAPHY & USE: TWO CASE-STUDIES

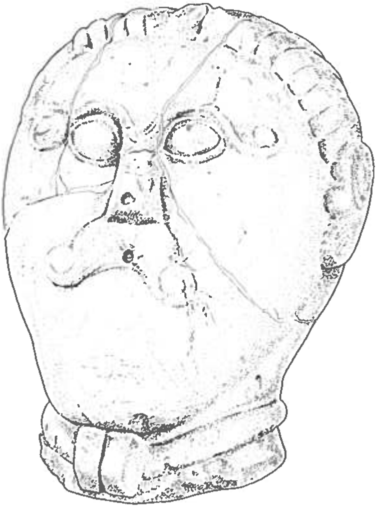
The perception of images as active, flexible and dynamic artefacts that had biographies (whose meaning may have changed within their period of circulation), were handled, used over time and deposited, can be illustrated with reference to a bronze figurine of a woman from a sacred site at Henley Wood in Somerset (Henig in Watts & Leach 1996, 131-133; Henig 1984, 225) (Figure 7). The image can be viewed as a protagonist in a drama, a theatrical performance with several acts and a finale; we should not even assume that the final curtain came down when the object was deliberately interred, for the intention may have been to disinter it and re-use it in an episode of 'rebirth'. The statuette was found during excavations of a Romano-British shrine, under the floor of the temple-building and its location was interpreted at the time of discovery as involving 'deliberate concealment implying continued respect and veneration even when the temple was abandoned or destroyed'. The writers of the report on the site go on to say 'such an object will probably have been venerated for many decades – perhaps centuries – at Henley Wood'. The built sanctuary was established in the later first or earlier second century AD; the statuette clearly pre-dates the structure and the inference is that it belongs to a late Iron Age pre-building phase of a *locus sanctus*, along with associated pre-Roman material, including coins, pottery and jewellery.

But what of the figure herself and the ideas that she represents? Apart from her archaeological context, she has features of intrinsic significance: she is naked, except for a twisted torc and round her head is a plaited *sprang* or headband, similar to that used to blindfold the young female drowned at Windeby but also closely analogous to the headgear depicted on late Iron Age stone images from Alesia (Deyts 1976, no. 1) and the group from Paule (Deyts 1999, 25-26), both of whom also wear torcs. The long, pendulous breasts suggest maturity and childbearing; her eyes were originally inlaid with glass, which would have caused them to glitter in the light, as if alive. We have further clues as to the Henley figurine's use: far from being simply placed in a niche within a shrine, there is evidence that she was both carried and repeatedly handled (rubbed, kissed or caressed), for a socket between her feet implies that she was mounted on a stand or staff, probably for processional carriage, and there are signs of wear-polish, particularly on the face. This kind of handling-wear has been noted on other statuettes, far removed from our arena of study, notably on some Upper Palaeolithic figures from places like the Grimaldi caves on the French-Italian border (Mussi *et al.* 2000, 110).

The figurine from the sacred site of Henley Wood is imbued with multiple facets and layers of meaning: the intrinsic elements in her presentation (maturity, femininity, nakedness, the torc and headband) are themselves significant, in terms of how we should 'read' her. We have already explored issues of nudity, in discussion of the Ballachulish image; we can infer – from Classical texts, sepulchral material and other imagery (Aldhouse-Green 2004) – that torcs were associated with high status in European Iron Age society; the headband may also be meaningful, either as a badge of rank or as a symbol of control: I have explored elsewhere (2005a) the notion that plaiting or otherwise managing hair may have been a potent motif in ancient iconography. But the context of the figure broadens the avenues of meaning: her deposition may be associated with memory, past and the ancestors, longevity and continued reverence; the use-wear indicates that she was an active artefact, used repeatedly in ritual events, and the concentration of handling on the face opens up pathways of exploration, in terms of how heads and faces were symbolised. Indeed, the special treatment of her face resonates with a substantive body of archaeological and documentary evidence for the veneration of the head in the European Iron Age generally. It can be seen, then, that the little statuette may be have been redolent with a range of meanings that – maybe – changed over time and were read in different ways by different individuals. Perhaps most important of these concerned her physicality, on the one hand and, on the other, her association with ancestral memories. But before we leave the Henley Wood statuette, we need to pose the question as to her identity. It is not known to which deity or deities the temple was dedicated, and it is presumptuous, although tempting, to assume that this statuette represents the cult-image of a nameless goddess. Indeed, this may be the correct interpretation, but we should entertain alternative views, too. She may represent a person rather than a divinity; she might equally be a pilgrim or a priestess: her careful burial may incline us towards the latter; the

Figure 8.

Ragstone Iron Age male head found in a ritual pit at Mšecké Žehrovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic. © Anne Leaver. Height 23.5 cm.



interment of the human remains of ritualists in sacred ground is well-documented for 'modern' traditional societies, such as the Dinka of the southern Sudan (Bourdillon 1980, 19).

The second image is from the Czech Republic and dates to the third-second century BC. This is the frequently-illustrated 'Celtic' head from Mšecké Žehrovice in Bohemia, that has been described (Megaw & Megaw 1998) as 'ranking among the best known antiquities of later prehistoric Europe' (Figure 8). But, despite its press-coverage, several issues concerning this discovery, both in terms of intrinsic features and context, have been virtually ignored in the literature, yet each has a considerable bearing on its meaning. The male head is made of ragstone, and the objects found associated with it date its deposition, though not necessarily its manufacture, to the second century BC. The head has clearly been broken off a larger monument, perhaps a pillar-stone. Seen from its full frontal perspective, it is a dramatic object;

at *c.* 23cm high, it is virtually life-size, and its most striking elements are the elaborately curling moustache and eyebrows and a massive buffer torc around the neck. Beneath the nose is a small hole, probably deliberately made, that could have functioned as an aperture for libations of liquor or oil. But the hair is the most interesting feature of all for, although, when seen from the front, it appears in 'typically Celtic' *en brosse* style, the side and rear views indicate that the hair does not cover the cranium but is only present as a narrow halo framing the top of the head; most of the skull is without hair (Megaw & Megaw 1998, fig. 1b-d). In discussing this peculiarity, Natalie Venclová has suggested (1999) that the style could depict something analogous to a tonsure, indicating, perhaps, that the individual represented was a priest. This is quite possible, but the moustache speaks of a 'big man', expressive of what has been termed 'hegemonic masculinity' (Foxhall 1994, 133-146), namely the symbolism of men who are at the peak of their physical prowess and authority, mature individuals, perhaps elders of their communities but not yet enfeebled by old age. The power and essential maleness of this Bohemian head is concentrated in the presentation of the moustache[4]. Other imagery from Iron Age Europe picks up this theme: one of the closest parallels is the small bronze mount, once attached to a wooden flagon, from a tomb at the site of the Dürrnberg bei Hallein in Austria (Megaw & Megaw 1989, 74, fig. 81), in the form of a human head with a great moustache and a beard bifurcated to resemble a second moustache. Essentially similar, though belonging to early Roman Britain, is the flamboyant relief-carved male head from the pediment of the temple to Sulis Minerva at Bath in south-west England (Cunliffe & Fulford 1982, nos. 32-37, pl. 10; Aldhouse-Green 2004, fig. 8.3) whose eyebrows, hair, beard and moustache merge in a glorious riot of spikes and swirls.

The circumstances of deposition feed into the 'package of significance' with which the Bohemian Iron Age head was invested.

The sculpture was, almost certainly deliberately, smashed into five pieces in antiquity and interred in a pit with some sherds of pottery, one or two other artefacts and the burned remains of horses, cattle and pigs. But only four of the five fragments were recovered during excavation, and the fifth piece (if, indeed, only one sherd is missing) was never found (and neither was the rest of the sculpture). If the breakage was purposeful, it follows that the removal and separate disposal of one part of the head might fit into the same framework of treatment, in which damage was inflicted and any kind of 'reincorporation' impossible. This interpretation, together with the artistic treatment of the head, leads to all sorts of exciting possibilities about the meaning both of the head itself and the apparent last episode in its life-story. The token burial of a single bone, perhaps as an act of ancestral devotion and remembrance, is well-documented during the Iron Age, for instance at Danebury in Hampshire, where disused grain silos were the repositories of complete human burials, partial bodies and individual bones (Cunliffe 1986, 161-165). But at Mšecké Žehrovice, the converse appears to have taken place, and it may be that an ancestral relic of the sculpture was kept, for whatever purpose, while the rest underwent a symbolic burial. Conversely, if the head was looted by foreign raiders, and if it represented a big man, holy man or deity of a rival community, it might have been deemed appropriate to smash the head and retain one fragment, in order to make sure its power could not be turned on its captors. It is worth mentioning the deliberate absence of parts of human bodies at some of the 'war-sanctuaries' of middle Iron Age Gaul, such as Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Brunaux 2000a; Cadoux 1984; du Lesley 2000), where the heads of prisoners were removed and disposed of outside the shrine, whilst the bodies were strung up as battle-trophies before the long-bones were fashioned into a series of 'bone-houses' or ossuaries. If we return to the notion, arising from the intrinsic features of the carved head, namely that it represents a 'big man' or a religious leader, the final deposition of the head in a pit, with what may be sacrificial debris, broken and with a piece removed, may be related to insult, honour, a desire to disempower a dangerous spirit or some other ritual purpose. We have only to recall the toppling and subsequent abuse of the gigantic statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad following his fall in 2003 (Goldenberg 2003, 1) to find a framework for 'contempt damage', and it might be that the individual represented by the head (whether god, ruler or ritualist) was being dishonoured both by the severing of his head from his body, the smashing of the latter and, finally, by the removal of one part of it.

But there may be alternative frameworks for interpreting the disposal of the Bohemian head. In his discussion of the Iron Age chalk figurines from East Yorkshire, Ian Stead (1988) cites Stahl's work on the use of figurines by South American shamanistic communities (Stahl 1986), which alludes to the smashing of figurines to disperse their spiritual energy once a ritual event was over. In his survey of shamanism, Piers Vitebsky (1995) alludes to a recurrent perception that, in order for a shaman to be initiated, he or she must first undergo a ritual dissolution or dismemberment before being reborn as a 'two-spirit' person, able to negotiate with supernatural forces on behalf of the community. Whilst it would be folly indeed to make direct linkages between the ritual behaviour of 'modern' traditional societies and the symbolic action behind the disposal of an Iron Age head from Bohemia, it is salutary nonetheless to point to analogies, if simply to draw attention to the wide range of perceptions that may lie behind the 'end-product' of this broken object. But the 'biography' of the carving indicates very clearly that it underwent several stages of activity between its production and deposition.

'EDENIC DISCOURSES': RECUSANCY, REVISIONISM & RETRO-IDEOLOGIES

The term 'edenic discourse' is used by Alcida Ramos (1994) in discussion of resistant indigenous responses to intrusive Catholicism in Brazil. It refers to retrospective visions of a golden age, and the reassertion of old ways of thinking about and enacting the sacred. One of the problems facing scholars of Romano-British iconography is that 'it appears to erupt, fully-fledged, into the material culture of Britannia with little, if any, Iron Age ancestry, yet – like Gallo-Roman cult-iconography – it contains symbols and motifs that are alien to the mainstream repertoire of Rome' (Green 1998, 17-30; Aldhouse-Green 2005b). Given that the introduction of *romanitas* to Britain, Gaul and other western provinces resulted in the intrusion of 'disruptive technologies' of epigraphy and large-scale adoption of iconography, it is nonetheless possible to identify motifs within the latter that speak of a conscious revisionism or even recusancy that may be interpreted as a deliberate attempt at reasserting or adhering to old cosmological perceptions and a desire to incorporate an ancestral presence within new modes of cult-expression.

A group of Romano-British images from the British Cotswolds may exemplify this kind of conscious retrospection. All depict human images generally accepted as female and each figure is accompanied by a large cylindrical vessel, probably a wooden stave bucket, that closely resembles those deposited in later Iron Age graves in south-east England and northern Gaul. I want to concentrate on one carving, found at Lemington in Gloucestershire (Figure 9), and almost certainly originally from the great villa-complex at Chedworth (Henig 1993, fig. 94; Aldhouse-Green 2003, 105, fig. 17). On this sculpture, an individual clad in a long garment is represented, her right hand held over an object that has been alternatively identified as an altar and a bucket;

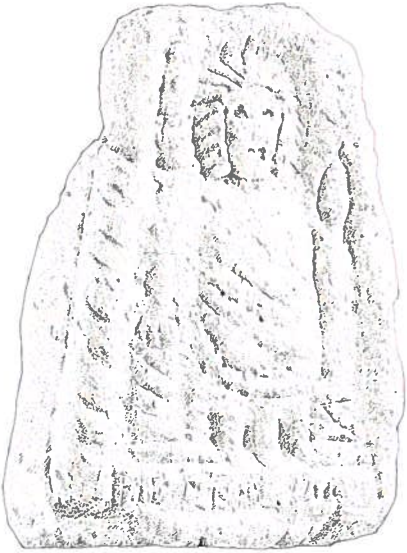


Figure 9.

Romano-British stone relief depicting ?female figure, from Lemington, near Chedworth, Gloucestershire, south-west England. © Anne Leaver. Height 26 cm.

interestingly, she bears a spear, point upwards, in her *left* hand. The figure bears a generic resemblance to others from the region, including a pair of figures carved on a small plaque from Bath (Cunliffe & Fulford 1982, pl 11), of whom the female is accompanied by a bucket and a staff, and a relief-plaque from Roman Gloucester (Figure 10) (Henig 1993, fig. 78), again of a woman accompanied by a male, and associated with a clearly-depicted metal-bound stave-bucket, over which she holds an offering-plate, and a staff surmounted by a curiously-shaped sceptre-head (the male's winged hat, cockerel and caduceus identify him as Mercury). To revert to the Lemington figure, if she has been correctly identified as female, her possession of a spear is interesting, and calls to mind certain late Iron Age Gallic coins bearing images of weapon-bearing women, some of whom carry spears or swords in their left hands (Duval 1987, 60-61; Deyts 1992, 19; Gruel 1989, 152; Aldhouse-Green 2003). If the gender of the carving has been

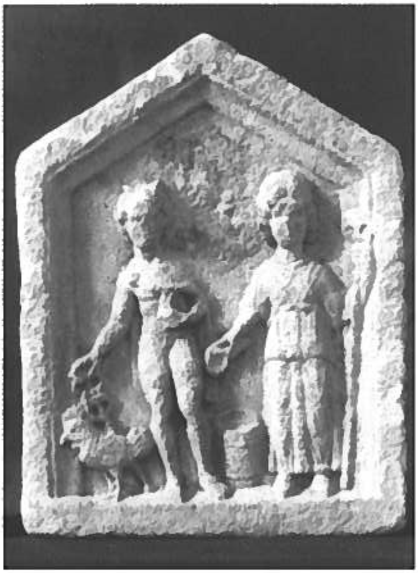


Figure 10.

Gabled stone tablet with relief-carving of female with bucket, patera and staff, accompanied by Mercury, from Gloucester, south-west England. © Gloucester City Museum. Height 57 cm.

correctly identified, she inverts 'realities' on two counts, particularly in terms of Roman values: Roman women did not fight, although – if we are to believe Tacitus (*Annales* XIV, 34; *Germania* XVIII-XX) and his fellows – British and German women did. Furthermore, we can assume that, in antiquity, the proportion of left- to right-handed people was roughly comparable with the present (i.e. 10%), and so the Lemington figure and her pre-Roman antecedents contradict this 'norm'. There is one further aspect of the carving to which reference should be made, namely the style. The sculptor chose to work the stone according to a model that presented the human form within a paradigm of extreme schematism, in direct contrast to the mimetic realism of Classical iconography (we know that Cotswold craftspeople could and did produce carvings that would not have been out of place in Roman Italy or southern Gaul). Yet the Lemington image probably comes from a prosperous and (to judge by its mosaic pavements) sophisticated Roman farming-estate. So we need to ask whether the Lemington figure, perhaps, belonged to a servant who deliberately chose a form of ritual expression different from that of his or her master. (We see a similar situation in a late Roman house at Caerwent which – although probably the possession of a Christian – produced a remarkably non-Christian stone carving of a severed head, in true Gallo-British tradition (Boon 1976, 163-173; Brewer 1986, 37, no. 53, pl. 20): once again, it is perhaps best-explained as the property of a hireling; its find-spot, at the bottom of the garden, may have reflected the house-owner's banishment of ancestral pagan ritual as far from the dwelling as possible). The Lemington carving incorporates a variety of symbols that seem to take a backward glance at the past: the 'warrior-woman' motif is one, the left-handedness is another, but the most important is the bucket, for this motif relates not only to the custom of placing vessels like this in high-status late Iron Age tombs but also to a whole package of symbolism associated with collective feasting and, perhaps, the preparation and consumption of healing or mind-altering substances (Arnold 1999, 2001).

DOMINATION, APPROPRIATION & RESISTANCE

The concept of 'edenic discourse' is closely related to broader issues concerning colonialism and syncretism, both important considerations when observing religious interaction between Romans and Gallo-Britons in the post-conquest period. The nature of syncretism is dependent on context and on the nature of both parties in the syncretistic dialogue. Scholars of syncretism in 'modern' societies draw attention to the basic premise of inequality between the colonisers and the colonised, and the 'pervasive nature of domination' (Bond & Gilliam 1994, 8). But, despite the – perhaps violently – dislocative nature of *romanitas* in Britain and Gaul (Webster 2003), colonial models need to acknowledge the factor of numerical asymmetry, inevitably weighted in favour of the dominated population. To be successful, syncretism requires the presence of a certain level of equivalence between the systems involved, in order to serve as 'conduits for integration' (Shaw & Stewart 1994, 16). Even more crucial is the recognition that religious synthesis is symbiotically bound up with ideologies of power, with agency and notions of identity. Syncretism may be driven from the top down or from the bottom up; it may be officially imposed by those technically in charge, but it can work equally effectively from beneath, and can be appropriated by subject populations, for whom orthodoxy can be skilfully inverted and subverted within such 'safe' environments as festivals, where the party line may be mocked and challenged (Miller 1995, 67), as well as more overtly, by religious officials, such as the Druids in Gaul and Britain during the first century AD (Webster 1999, 1-20).

Iconography is able to display syncretism, resistance and appropriation in action. In AD 26, during the reign of Tiberius, a guild of boatmen working on the river Seine in Paris set up a great stone monument in honour of Jupiter (Duval 1961, 197-199). The stones of the carved pillar, found in 1711 on the site of Nôtre Dame, have recently been the subject of an extensive cleaning and restoration programme (Saragoza 2003), thus greatly enhancing their study. Although the monument is dedicated to a Roman state god, and much of its iconography belongs to a Classical divine repertoire, certain of its imagery and epigraphy relates to a pantheon foreign to Rome. Two juxtaposed surfaces of a single stone depict cognate and related scenes, perhaps episodes in a lost Gallic mythic narrative or, alternatively, the result of post-conquest Gallic constructions within a newly created Gallo-Roman religious system (Woolf 1998, 215; *contra* Brunaux 2000b, 19-21). One scene (Figure 11), identified by an inscription as 'Tarvostrigaranus' consists of a bull standing in front of a deciduous tree

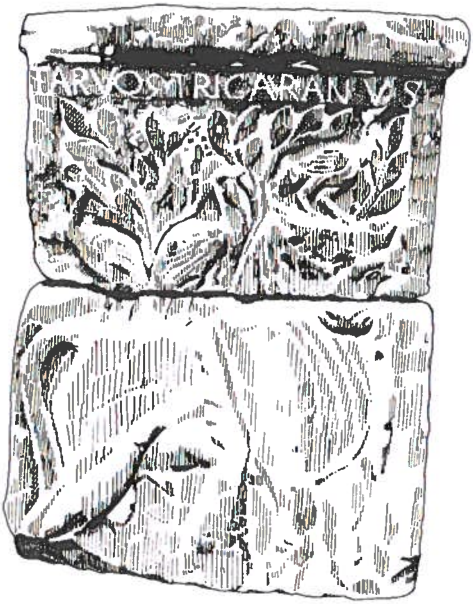


Figure 11.

Part of early Gallo-Roman stone pillar, depicting Tarvostrigaranus, from Paris. © *Paul Jenkins. Height 108 cm.*

(a willow or lime), on whose back and head perch three egrets or cranes (as stated on the epigraphy: *C.I.L.* XIII, no. 3026; Espérandieu 1911, no. 3133). The second surface displays a similar tree, clearly meant as a connecting signifier, apparently attacked by a mature, bearded man clad in a short tunic but bare-chested, with a chopper (Espérandieu 1911, no. 3134); above the carving is the word 'Esus' (a Gaulish title, meaning 'lord'). Closely analogous to the imagery on this monument is a broadly contemporary relief-carving from Trier (Figure 12), set up by a citizen of the Mediomatrici called Indus and dedicated to Mercury: it, too, depicts a woodcutter with a willow or lime tree, and emerging from its foliage are three cranes and the head of a bull (Espérandieu 1915, no. 4929; Schindler 1977, 32, Abb. 91; Wightman 1985, 178). Like the *Nautes Parisiacae* of the Seine, Indus may have been a river-trader, working on the Rhine boats.

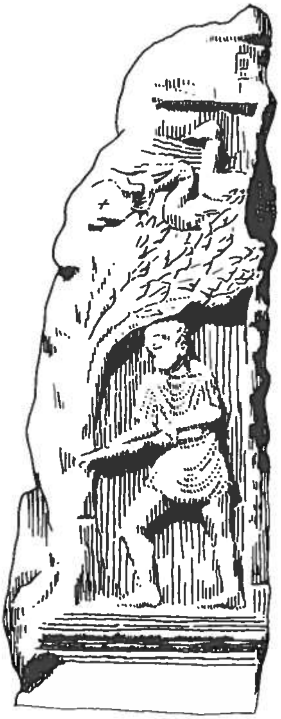


Figure 12.

Gallo-Roman relief carving of a man pollarding a willow or lime tree, with a bull's head and three cranes or egrets in the branches, from Trier. © Paul Jenkins. Height of stone 2m.

Both these monuments are familiar and well-documented, but it is still possible to discern new aspects of their meaning. The imagery on the stones from Paris and Trier resemble each other so closely that it would be perverse not to consider them as belonging to a shared pattern of expression, a common cosmology or mythology. But the iconography may tell us something about relationships between *romanitas* and *gallitas* that may be especially pertinent to the early Roman period in Gaul, when one would expect there to be ongoing power-negotiations between the old and new ideologies. It is possible that part of the imagery on both monuments was designed to subvert the overt acceptance of Roman imperialism, not only by using Gaulish names but by manipulating the iconography itself so that it presented other vocabularies to the native population. The scenes on both stones appear to depict men cutting down trees, but closer inspection reveals that what instead may be happening is pollarding and, if that is so, then it is possible to read the imagery from two contradictory angles: pollarding signals control, the negating of rampant, disordered growth, and this may be taken as a gesture of *romanitas*; but when certain trees – particularly limes – are pollarded, however severely, they exhibit fast and vigorous regrowth, and this could be taken to convey a message of returning self-determination. I suspect that, if we are reading these stones correctly, the tensions arising from such ambiguity of interpretation were intentional, that a shifting tableau of meaning was presented wherein synthesis was in a state of constant and fluctuating instability, perhaps within an oscillating framework of resistance and acceptance, albeit within what van der Veer (1994) has termed a 'discourse of tolerance'.

The zoomorphic symbolism on the stones from Paris and Trier adds to the complexity of their iconology. The bull is depicted on the *Nautes* monument as emphatically male, a strong, muscular animal that epitomises fertility, empowerment and the duality of danger and domestication. The birds have been identified as egrets or cranes, and 'trigaranus' means 'three-craned': egrets enjoy a symbiotic relationship with cattle, ridding their hides of parasites (I have observed this in action in the Camargue); cranes are migrating birds and may have possessed seasonal symbolism; Hesiod comments:

> *The crane returning every year, cries out From the clouds above, and when you hear her voice, know that she means the time has come to plough, The time of chilly rains...*
>
> (*Works & Days*: trans. Wender 1979, 73)

They also possess idiosyncratic, human-like, characteristics, in so far as they are long-lived (with a lifespan of forty years or more), they have 'voices' and they dance: the symbolism of crane-depictions and their skeletal remains at Neolithic Çatalhöyük in central Anatolia suggests that people dressed up in crane-costumes to perform imitative ritual dances (Russell & McGowan 2003). Additionally, the iconography at Trier and Paris exhibits triplism, a form of cult-expression that is endemic to Gallo-British imagery and that must have belonged to persistent and powerful indigenous systems of perception whose detailed significance must remain opaque to us but, on analogy with a number of traditional religious systems, was perhaps associated with a world view akin to a three-tiered cosmos (Vitebsky 1995, 15-18; Bradley 2000, 28-32).

Notions of appropriation and negotiation may be further explored with reference to two Romano-British cult- images, one from the great healing shrine to Sulis Minerva at Bath, the other from deep in a well at Emberton, Buckinghamshire. In terms of its visible structure, the physical form of the temple to Sulis, and the nature of the cult-activity there, was heavily reliant upon *romanitas* (Cunliffe 1995; Cunliffe & Davenport 1985). The sacred buildings and the baths were quite clearly the result of a Roman programme of monumentalisation, and it is not even certain that Sulis had a shrine in the pre-Roman Iron Age (on analogy with the situation at other Romano-British temples, such as Harlow in Essex (Haselgrove 1989) the handful of Iron Age coins could have been the result of later depositional activity). The majority of the iconographical representations, set up by anxious or grateful pilgrims, display predominantly Classical stylistic traits, and none more than the great gilded bronze head of Sulis Minerva herself (Figure 13), hacked from the body in antiquity, presumably as a deliberate act of iconoclastic sacrilege (Cunliffe & Fulford 1982, no. 26, pl. 7). But how should we interpret the triple image

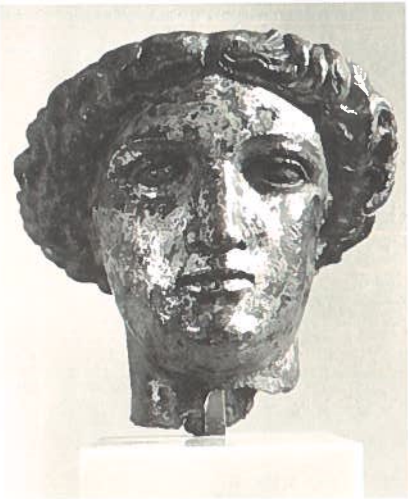


Figure 13.

Gilded copper-alloy head of Sulis Minerva, from the Romano-British healing spring-sanctuary at Bath, south-west England. © Roman Baths Museum, Bath. Height 24.8 cm.

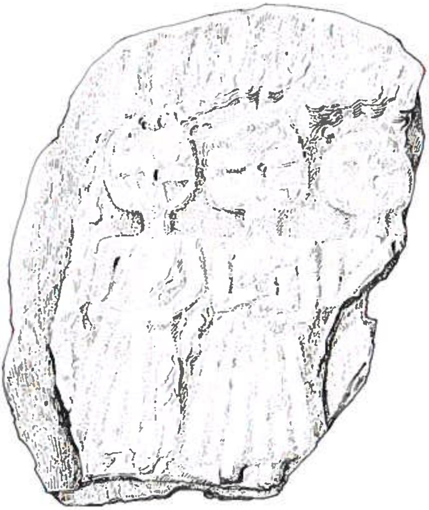


Figure 14.

Schist tablet with relief-carving of three females, from Roman Bath. © Anne Leaver. Height 24 cm.

(Figure 14), carved on a small schist tablet? Depicted are three – probably female – figures, clad in long robes, their heads overlarge and their bodies exhibiting a severely schematised, minimalist representational form (closely resembling the image from Lemington). They are usually taken to be mother-goddesses, who are frequently depicted as three women, in Britain and Gaul (Green 1989, 190-205; Barnard 1985, 237-43; Thevenot 1968, 165-199) and, since multiple female deities, known epigraphically as the *Suleviae* are recorded as being venerated at Bath, the figures on the schist plaque could be identified with these goddesses. But, viewed from a perspective of possible appropriation and resistance on the part of the native British population, it is at least possible that these images could represent an alternative version of Sulis, a 'subversive' representation that found a voice with local people through the familiar Gallo-British paradigm of schematism, triplism and exaggeration (of the head).

The image from Emberton (Figure 15) (Henig 1993, no. 78; Green 1986, 98, fig. 47) exhibits features that equally speak of resistance and negotiation between coloniser and colonised. Like the figures from Lemington and Bath (and many others from the Cotswolds and elsewhere in Britain), this relief-carving was produced to a strictly schematic formula in which somatic realism gave way to an almost geometric form, visually akin to the Cubism of Braque and Picasso (Gombrich 1987, 238-42; 1999, 259-61) but with a fundamental difference. According to Gombrich (1987, 238), Cubism represented 'the most radical attempt to stamp out ambiguity and to enforce one reading of the picture', whilst the schematic sculpture of Roman Britain appears to epitomise the opposite, the use of minimalism to introduce ambiguity, ambivalence and instability. The Emberton figure provides points of reference that should help to identify it: it carries a *caduceus* and wears a *petasos*, so it should represent Mercury. But close scrutiny of the latter raises doubt as to the nature of the excrescences on

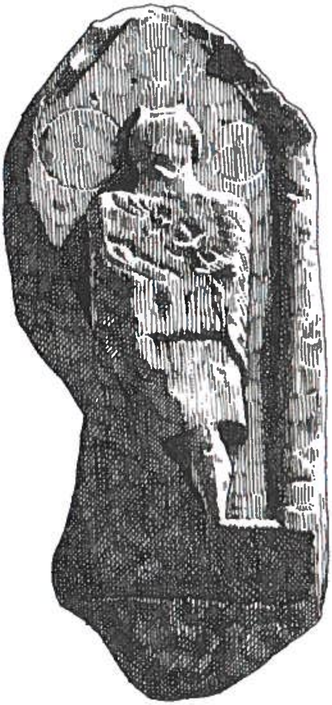


Figure 15.

Stone tablet with relief-carving of 'Mercury', with horns/wings on his head, from a Romano-British well at Emberton, Buckinghamshire. © Paul Jenkins. Height 33 cm.

the head, as to whether the 'wings' may instead (or also) be horns. Indeed, it is unnecessary to make a choice between wings or horns, for the intention of the artist may have been to produce an open-ended motif, capable of multiple interpretations and differing rules of engagement, depending on the consumer's perspective. Oscillation between wings and horns is by no means confined to Emberton, but is clearly discernible at the great temple to Mercury at Uley in Gloucestershire, where at least one of the several images depicting him is horned rather than winged (Woodward & Leach 1993, 98, fig. 83).

If they are simply rendered, horns and small head-wings may look indistinguishable one from the other, yet the two motifs are worlds apart in terms of genesis and meaning : horns on human images operate within a symbolic system of cross-species imagery that has its particular homeland within the cosmologies of Britain and Gaul, whilst the *petasos* motif belongs to the Classical Hermes-Mercury mythic art-form in which the god's wings symbolise his function as a divine herald (even though the notion of a flying deity may have originally derived inspiration from much older shamanistic perceptions, in which 'two-spirit' persons 'flew' between worlds to negotiate with the spirits). What I suggest we are witnessing at Emberton (and at Uley) is a subtle shift of visual and conceptual values, resulting in appropriation or subversion of a Graeco-Roman form for British consumption. But, by employing a schematic formula, the artist has 'covered his back' by leaving the way open to counter-interpretation: the horns can be wings and the wings horns.

Before we leave the Emberton carving, we should consider its context and biography: it was discovered deep in a Roman well, but it must once have been placed in a public or private sanctuary and have been an object of veneration. So it is interesting to speculate on the nature of its deposition, and whether its interment represents desecration by hostile adherents to a different religious system (a fate that may also have befallen the statue of Sulis Minerva at Bath) or, instead, constituted an act of worship by devotees. It may even be that the altar was placed in the well as an act of closure following the clearance of a shrine[5], whatever the reason for that act may have been.

WEIRD COUNTRIES[6]: VISIONS, DREAMS AND MONSTERS

A recurrent theme pervading a great deal of Iron Age and Roman period imagery in western Europe is what, in a modern art context, might be termed surrealism, the twisting and manipulation of human or animal representations so as to introduce elements of unreality. We have observed this already in the overlarge heads on the triple figures from Bath, and similar emphases can be identified on many cognate images. In this section of my presentation, I want to draw attention to other expressions of surreality in Gallo-British iconography, particularly those whose mixed human and animal elements were perhaps associated with transformation and shape-shifting, and to tender suggestions as to the symbolic framework within which they might be interpreted. Hybrids transgress boundaries and are apt forms to present thresholds and liminality; thus, in Classical mythology, strange monsters, such as centaurs, chimaeras and sphinxes, occupied edgy places, at the limits of the 'safe' known world and beyond (King 1995; McCall 1995). One of the questions we should ask of hybrid imagery is whether 'true' monsters are being represented or whether we might sometimes be seeing people dressed up in animal costume, such as occurs in a number of 'modern' shamanistic systems (Jolly 2002). But in discussing ritual behaviour among certain north-western American Indian communities of Vancouver Island, Dale Idiens (2000, 110) reminds us that, in a sense, such division is meaningless, for in many of these cosmologies, the ritualist who has donned a bird-costume or an animal-mask 'becomes' that creature during the course of his or her encounter with the spirits. The intentional representation of people in the guise of beasts is surely indicated in the wonderful pair of opposed pantomime horses on the late Iron Age bucket from Aylesford in Kent (Stead 1971; 1976; 1985, 8).

A group of clay antefixes from the Roman legionary fortress at Caerleon in south Wales depicts an idiosyncratic motif, namely human heads with cat-ears and fur between them (Boon 1984; Green 1984; Aldhouse-Green & Aldhouse-Green 2004). Despite their context, they are unlikely to have represented any kind of *romanitas* but rather to have been expressions of some indigenous

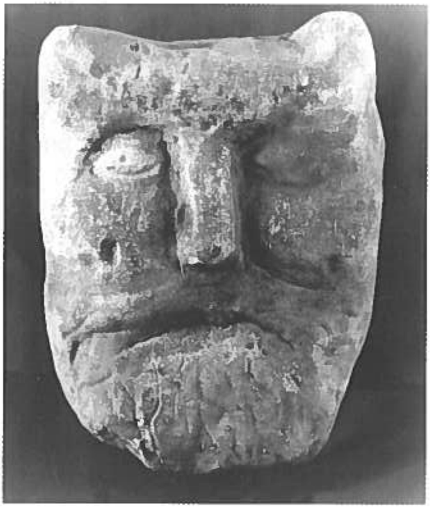


Figure 16.

Romano-British stone carving of human head with cats' ears, from Doncaster, Yorkshire. © Doncaster City Museum. Height c. 20 cm.

Silurian apotropaic symbolism. In 2002, a further Romano-British cat-eared head (Figure 16) was discovered, at Doncaster in Yorkshire (Aldhouse-Green 2004, fig. 6.12; Peter Robinson pers. comm.); he is bearded, with a long drooping moustache, and his feline ears are clearly visible. The British images bear a strong resemblance to a group of carved heads from a Roman cemetery in Istria, on display in the archaeological museum at Zagreb in Croatia, at least one of which not only has cat-ears but also a pair of human ones beneath, and a pair of bull-horns. All these carvings have something else in common, namely the asymmetry of the faces, particularly around the eyes, a feature noted earlier in discussion of Iron Age wooden figurines and present, too, on Romano-British heads such as the one from Caerwent (Boon 1976). The combination of facial distortion and zoomorphism in human representations resonates strongly with the appearance of shamans, in the midst of trance-experience, when undergoing 'soul-journeys' in pursuit of communication with spirit-beings (Vitebsky 1995; Price 2001; Lewis-Williams 2002).

Therianthropic representations are endemic to the repertoire of Gallo-British sculptors and bronzesmiths of both Iron Age and Roman periods. I draw attention to just two from Britain, a horned male figure from Maryport (Cumbria) on the western edge of Hadrian's Wall (Green 1986, fig. 55), and an antlered image from Cirencester in the Cotswolds. The little red sandstone relief sculpture from Maryport displays the schematic formula familiar to us from study of the images from Bath and Emberton. At first glance, it is a very simply-executed figure, but both its intrinsic features and its context deserve some attention, for – although the carving comes from a Roman fort – the image is packed with 'counter-Roman' motifs, in so far as it depicts a naked, unashamedly ithyphallic, horned warrior, and surely no craftsman would have depicted either a Roman soldier or a Roman god in this guise. Horned human representations are relatively common in the sculptural repertoire of northern Britain (Ross 1961; 1967, 127-167), but it is worth interrogating this kind of imagery, given the strong and persistent Roman military presence here and the wide availability of sculptors trained in the *mores* of Classical mimetic tradition. There are several ways of 'reading' the Maryport image. It could be that British craftsmen and patrons were constructing alternative models for the divine world (if so, their presentations were accepted within the milieu of a Roman fort), or we can turn this on its head and argue that we might be witnessing Roman satire at work, and the depiction of a parody of British barbarism. This kind of mockery or imaging of 'others' is clearly present on monuments such as Trajan's column (Le Bohec 1994; Settis *et al.* 1988; Ferris 1994; 2003), where the Dacians are depicted according to a 'grammar of contempt', shaggy-haired, unkempt in dress and sometimes shown bound or kneeling, or with their hair grasped by a Roman soldier. What is more, we should call to mind the comments of Classical authors, like Herodian ,who described the Britons as people who habitually wallowed naked in the mud that blanketed their land, their skin covered in tattoos (Herodian *History* III. 14, 67). Whether or not the Maryport warrior depicted a divinity and irrespective of whether or not it was made by and for a British consumer, its depiction might likewise have acted as a focus for parody and mockery of British barbarism, when viewed from a Roman perspective, even if it was revered as a sacred object by Britons.

Transformative imagery in Britain and Gaul is at its most complex in the depiction of antlered human figures. This type of motif is of especial interest in so far as its genesis can be traced back into the pre-Roman Iron Age ancestry of Gallo-Roman iconography, being present – for instance – in the seventh to fourth centuries BC at Val Camonica in northern Italy, on the Gundestrup Cauldron, made in the second or early first century BC and on a silver coin from the British midlands minted in about AD 20 (Priuli 1988, 78, nos. 134, 136-7; 1996, 29, fig. 51; Kaul 1991, 21, pl. 15; Olmsted 1979, pl. 2a; Boon 1982). Although comparatively common in Gallo-Roman imagery, the antlered human motif is very rare in Britain, but it is present on a small limestone plaque from Cirencester (Henig 1993, no. 93; Green 1989, 93, fig. 39), which depicts a seated figure, antlers sprouting from its head and its legs replaced by the sinuous forms of two ram-horned serpents that rear up, mouths agape, to flank the figure's head (Figure 17). The juxtaposition of the two motifs – antlered human and ram-headed serpent – belongs to a recurrent pattern of associated symbolism, which occurs on the Gundestrup cauldron, at Camonica, and on a host of Gallo-Roman images from eastern Gaul, where – as at Cirencester – the snakes are paired (Aldhouse-Green 2001c).

These therianthropes contain complex symbolism, but arguably of greatest interest is the presence of doubled transference (human/stag and snake/ram), and the contiguity of wilderness

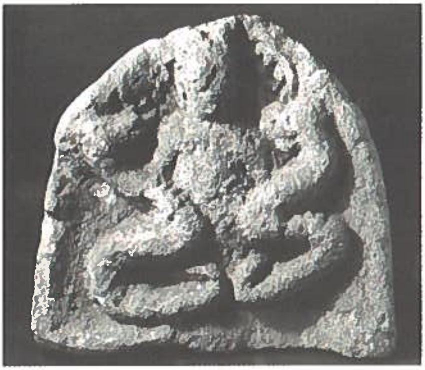


Figure 17.

Stone tablet carved in relief with an image of a hybrid human-animal figure, with antlers, and its legs replaced by ram-headed serpents, from Roman Cirencester. © *Corinium Museum. Height 23 cm.*

and order, culture and nature. If we take the stag-human motif first, it is interesting that therianthropic imagery is associated most commonly with hunting societies whilst, in agricultural communities, there is a greater disjunction between humans and beasts (Bradley 2001, 261-63; Ingold 2000), perhaps because the relationship between the two species is more hierarchical and unequal. It is also significant that in imagery that presents a mixture of human and animal, the zoomorphic element generally relates to the creatures that have the most impact on the communities depicting them: thus, in southern African San tradition, the eland is the centre of the economy and also of San symbolism, and it is the motif of the eland-human that dominates their rock-art (Lewis-Williams 1995). So can we make any kind of analogy with the imagery at Camonica, Gundestrup or Roman Cirencester? The theme of red deer is central to Bronze Age and Iron Age Camunian rock-art, and in antiquity the valley, deep in the mountains, would have formed a natural corridor for the movement of game. So here, at least, the crucial role of the deer in the hunt may have influenced the veneration and 'humanisation' of these creatures[8]. But we may seek other explanations for a close link between stags and people in their life-experience, for there seems to have been an ambiguity in attitudes, in so far as there is evidence from Neolithic and Iron Age settlements in Britain and elsewhere, that deer were herded as well as hunted (Sharples 2000; Parker Pearson *et al.* 1999; Jones 1998) and sometimes allowed to live in closer proximity to farms than would have been practical, given the capacity of these animals to destroy crops: in prehistoric Orkney, there is recurrent evidence for this tolerance and for the careful curation of deer bones and antlers, despite the paucity of butchered remains. The special regard for deer shows itself, too, in Iron Age Wessex, where of the many bone and antler 'weaving-combs' found on settlement sites, only those made of antler were decorated (Hill 1995, 108; and pers. comm.).

It is possible that the ambiguous attitude to deer suggested for some Iron Age communities affected the way that antlers were woven into trans-species imagery in both this and subsequent Gallo-British periods. Their perceived liminality may have lent itself to the representation of persons who occupied symbolic boundary positions in their communities, perhaps the ritualists, who had to straddle the worlds of people and the supernatural. In support of this notion, attention should be drawn to the evidence for antler-headdresses in late Iron Age and Roman contexts: ten red-deer skull-caps, antlers attached and pierced, as if to be worn, are recorded from the late pre-Roman sanctuary of Digeon (Somme) in northern Gaul (Meniel 1987, 89-100), and a similar find comes from a Romano-British pit at Hook's Cross in Hertfordshire (Aldhouse-Green 2001c, fig. 7.9; Tony Rook pers. comm.). Indeed, it may be that we should take another glance at the antlered iconography from places like Gundestrup (Kaul 1991, pl. 15) and Reims (Espérandieu 1913, no. 3653), with a view to their possible interpretation as dressed-up people. This might be the best explanation, too, for images like the bronze figurine from Autun (Deyts 1992, 45) and the stone image from Sommerécourt (Haute Marne) (Espérandieu 1915, no. 4839) that display sockets for the insertion of antlers, perhaps in seasonal rituals, and for the curious bronze statuettes of antlered females from Gaul (Boucher 1976, nos. 317-318). In all deer – except reindeer – only stags bear antlers, and many Gallo-Roman antlered images (Reims and Autun, for example) are clearly masculine, with beards. The female antlered figurines clearly exhibit a gender-twist, and this may support their identification as shamanic figures, for in many societies, shamans traditionally cross-dress and even live out their lives in the opposite gender (Jacobs *et al.* 1997; Vitebsky 1995, 93; Aldhouse-Green 2001d; Roscoe 1996, 329-371; 1998).

The transformative symbolism with which these antlered figures were invested was frequently reinforced by the associated motif of the ram-horned snake, which repeats the paired opposition of culture/nature in the coupling of wild and domestic animals. The Cirencester figure relates closely to analogous imagery in Roman Gaul, but it takes the linkage between the antlered being and the accompanying serpents further in so far as the snakes have replaced the legs of the former, thus making a complex and indivisible motif the elements of each of which serve to reinforce the other. As dangerous creatures of the wilderness, snakes embody 'otherness', not only in their oppositional relationship to humans but in their literal 'groundedness' and consonant ability to penetrate beneath the earth and into tiny crevices in rocks. Their flexible chain-mail like scales[9], their regular habit of sloughing their skins (a clear metaphor for transition and rebirth analogous to the seasonal growth and shedding of antlers) and their exhibition of somatic tension (between straightness and curvature), embody notions of boundaries and thresholds and they may thus have been potent and highly relevant expressions of transference between worlds. If the interpretation of antlered images as those of 'shamans' has any value, these monstrous serpents may be identified as animal-helpers, creatures that – by reason of their physical or symbolic characteristics – were able to aid the shaman in bridging gulfs between earth- and spirit-dimensions.

One of the features of the antlered images just discussed is their recurrently seated, cross-legged position, a symbolic element so persistent that this so-called 'Buddhic posture' has to be closely associated with the identity and meaning of the images so depicted. It is tempting to extend the tentative identification of these beings as shamans still further, in so far as some traditional shamans regularly adopt such a position when undergoing trance-experience, particularly when the altered state of consciousness is induced by means of psychotropic substances (Vitebsky 1995, 8-9; Bott 1987, 182-204). Similar positions are adopted by the stone images, probably of gods or priests, associated with severed heads from the 'Celto-Ligurian' sanctuaries in the Lower Rhône Valley, such as Entremont and Roquepertuse (Benoit 1969). But seated position can also be associated with humiliation and defeat: witness the little Romano-British bronze amulet in the form of a crouched, bound (indeed hog-tied) figure from Brough-under Stainmore in northern England (Green 1978, 48, pl. 138; Aldhouse-Green 2004, fig. 2.3), an image that resonates with seated prisoners-of-war on Roman imperialist iconography, like depictions of subjugated kneeling or seated Dacians on Trajan's Column (Le Bohec 1994; Settis *et al.* 1988; Ferris 2003) and Caledonians on the Antonine Wall in Scotland (Ferris 1994; Keppie & Arnold 1984, no. 68, pl. 21).

The motif of the low-status individual as a seated or kneeling, figure can, perhaps, be traced back into Iron Age Europe. In the fifth century BC, a high-ranking individual was interred, with some ceremony and with rich grave-furniture, at Glauberg in Hessen. The burial produced two very different male images: a monumental stone carving of a warrior probably once stood on top of the tumulus raised over the tomb, and may represent the deceased; the second is a tiny bronze figure of another warrior, decorating a wine-flagon, shown seated cross-legged (Frey 1996/97, figs. 17, 20; 1998; Lontcho 2000, 4-8; Aldhouse-Green 2004, figs. 1.9; 2.1). Although both images are depicted wearing body-armour, the stone warrior has a shield, while the bronze flagon-figure has neither shield nor weapon and sits with hands on knees, in a position that could be read as a motif of subjugation, particularly in relation to the standing stone warrior. Another, almost identically-positioned bronze figurine, dated to the fourth century BC (Guichard & Perrin 2000, no. 28; Aldhouse-Green 2001a, 131, fig. 53) comes from the Iron Age levels at La Bauve (Seine-et-Marne), a sacred site that developed into a Gallo-Roman sanctuary. The stance of this figure has been likened to the position of the curious later Iron Age interments from Acy-Romance (Ardennes), where the bodies of young men, inhumed without grave-goods – and perhaps victims of human sacrifice after capture in battle – were first placed seated in boxes, dried out in desiccation pits, and then their mummified corpses re-interred around the edge of what has been identified as a *locus sanctus* (Lambot 1998; 2000). These burials are in marked contrast to a series of coeval high-status and sumptuously furnished cremation graves from the site, some of which contained ritual equipment.

Apart from the idiosyncratic 'lotus-position' of certain images, it is possible to identify another significant stance, that of dancers. The hoard of ritual objects from Neuvy-en-Sullias (Loiret), deposited at around the time of the Roman conquest of Gaul, originally came from a pre-Roman shrine: it contains a unique group of bronze figurines, including animals and a set of male and female dancers and ?singers (Figures 18 and 19) (Pobé & Roubier 1961, figs. 47-51). Pairs of dancers engaged in ritual combat decorate the bronze funerary couch of the Hallstatt chieftain buried with a fine array of feasting-equipment in about 530 BC at Hochdorf near Stuttgart (Planck *et al.* 1985, 148, Abb. 167). These

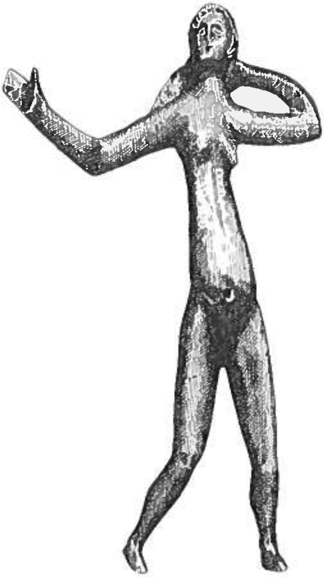


Figure 18.

Copper-alloy figurine of a female dancer, from a Roman conquest date deposit of religious images at Neuvy-en-Sullias, Loiret (France). © Paul Jenkins. Height 14 cm.

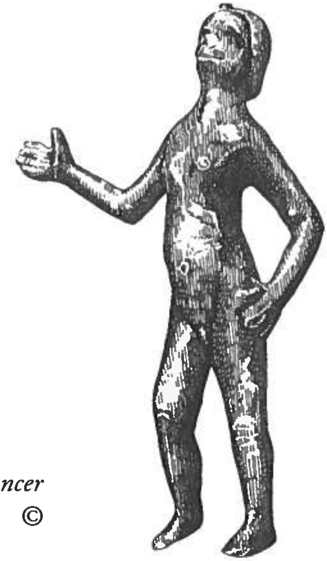


Figure 19.

Copper-alloy figurine of a male dancer or singer, from Neuvy-en-Sullias. © Paul Jenkins. Height 13 cm.

figures serve as a reminder of images as objects that sometimes reflected both action and sound; and it is thus relevant to point to others that depicted Iron Age musicians, such as the six-fingered flautist from Pauvrelay-Paulmy (Lemaistre 1999, 83) and the lyre-player from Paule (Menez 1999, 25, fig. 1), almost certainly representing cult-officials and the enactment of ceremonial events, perhaps even the notion of 'theosony' (the sound of the gods)[10].

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE GODS

Images are made to think with: to change minds or reinforce ideas. For me, they are one of the most articulate forms of material culture, for they reflect identities, notions of selves and others, earth-worlds and the 'ensouled' domain of spirits. The results of my research have, I hope, shown that images made in European antiquity were not simply produced to represent people's perceptions of what the gods looked like but were used, as well, as active artefacts, with different purposes and meanings. Study of images enables us – quite literally – to confront the communities responsible for their production and consumption. In order to gain any depth of understanding of how images worked, we need to exercise caution in ascribing unilinear, theocentric interpretations to depictions of humans and animals. Comparisons with image-use among numerous 'traditional' societies, both in the present and the immediate past, indicate the investment of images with a host of complex meanings and values.

Ancient images may have had several functions and multifarious episodes of use. Their colour, texture and material contributed to their significance; their durability or capacity to rot away fed into their matrix of meaning; and we should think about them not simply as things to see but also as objects to be touched, smelt or even heard. Their physical characteristics – whether associated with gender, style, somatic position or elements of divergence from life-copying representation – were carefully expressed so as to engage the consumer in an open-ended, interactive relationship that might be concerned with encountering the divine (perhaps sometimes through trance-experience), with social or political subversion, expressions of status or other objectifications of being. Images, then, can take us a long way beyond the gods.

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1 I am grateful to Routledge for permitting me to publish in this paper some of the ideas explored more fully in this volume, in advance of its publication.

2 It is currently fashionable amongst Iron Age and Roman scholars, at any rate in Britain, to approach the testimony of Classical writers with total scepticism (for instance Haselgrove 2003, 13-15). This is well-founded, to an extent but, whether or not their descriptions of barbarian Europe are accurate, they nonetheless present a useful window on the concepts and ideas of their own times.

3 Dr Tim Taylor (Department of Music, Cardiff University pers. comm.).

4 Chris Tilley (1994, 118-127) has pointed to the importance of the moustache as a symbol of male authority and power in Melanesian imagery.

5 Analogous to the deliberate clearance of certain north Gaulish shrines, such as Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise) in the late Iron Age: Brunaux 1988; 1996.

6 The term 'the weird country' is borrowed from the title of a lecture given by John Waddell at the CBA Wales Autumn meeting in Wrexham, October 18th, 2003.

7 I am indebted to Peter Robinson of Doncaster Museum for drawing this head to my attention and for allowing me to publish it.

8 On analogy with reindeer/caribou-hunting communities, where the hunted animals' spirits are revered and propitiated so that the herds will survive and always return: Loring 1997, 185-220; Aronsson 1991, 5.

9 In studying mythic traditions in the Caucasus Mountains, David Hunt (2004) has pointed to analogies made in this context between snake-scales and chain-mail, the impenetrability and thus immortality symbolised by both.

10 Borrowed from a term invented by the Irish singer Nóirín ni Ríain (BBC 2003).

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