



Book Reviews

IDENTITY AND POWER: THE TRANSFORMATION OF IRON AGE SOCIETIES IN NORTHEAST GAUL BY M FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ

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The Middle Rhine-Moselle region of western Germany and Luxembourg has long been a key area for the study of Iron Age Europe. Few general accounts of the period fail to refer to the sumptuous 5th-century-BC burials of the Hunsrück-Eifel culture, or the impressive late Iron Age oppidum on the Titelberg. Recent programmes of excavation and research have greatly added to our knowledge of the region, but until now an accessible, up-to-date overview has been lacking. Manuel Fernández-Götz's important new book not only provides such a synthesis, but also makes a notable contribution to debates on the archaeology of identity.

The book is divided into three distinct sections. The first of these (Chapter 2) provides a critical discussion of current theoretical approaches to the study of identity, drawing on both archaeological and anthropological sources. It is emphasised that identity is not an inherent quality, but must be constantly created and renegotiated. It is not simply a matter of ideology, but also of practice: one is what one does. Another tenet is that while we can distinguish various identity categories such as gender, age, social status and ethnicity, the intersection and interaction between these is crucially important. Fernández-Götz also rightly stresses that identity is inseparably entwined with power relations, a point too often overlooked.

The second section of the book (Chapter 3) presents an overview of socio-political organisation and ethnicity in temperate Gaul during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. This section is based primarily on literary sources and later Gallo-Roman epigraphy, and by the author's own admission owes a strong debt to previous work by Nico Roymans (1990). Four nested socio-political levels are envisaged. The smallest unit of society was the household, several of which together formed an extended family group. A number of extended families made up a 'sub-ethnic community' (*pagus*), and these in turn combined to form 'ethnic communities' (*civitates*) that were simultaneously political units. Central to maintaining this system were clientship relations, operating at varying levels from ties between individuals to those between entire *civitates*. This chapter also offers a briefer discussion of larger 'macro-ethnic' categories such as the Belgae or the Gauls, which are argued to have had a real existence, even if their relevance was restricted to particular spheres of activity such as religion or warfare. Some readers may balk at the primacy given to written evidence in this section, but the treatment of the sources is careful and critical.

Archaeological evidence comes to the fore in the third and longest section of the book (Chapters 4–9), which discusses social developments in northeast Gaul from the 6th century BC to the decades immediately following the Roman conquest. Though it is primarily concerned with the Middle Rhine-Moselle region, neighbouring areas are also considered. The aim is to present a long-term narrative examining cycles of political centralisation and decentralisation, and the reconfiguration of identities over time.

Chapter 4 deals with the 6th to 5th centuries BC, inevitably focusing on the rich burials of the so-called Hunsrück-Eifel culture. A problem with using these burials to investigate identity is that bone rarely survives in the harsh soils of the region, so that ascription of sex must rest on grave

goods. Most sumptuous burials are 'male', though the occurrence of 'female' examples suggests that some women could wield political and ritual authority. The appearance of elite burials is linked to political centralisation, also evinced by the development of hillforts. It is argued that the first small hillforts with local significance appeared in the late 6th to early 5th centuries BC, contemporary with the earliest elite graves, while larger collective centres arose in the course of the 5th century, when sumptuous burial reached its peak. Demographic growth leading to greater 'social density' is argued to have played an important role in driving these changes. For this reviewer, the neat sequence presented here is not entirely convincing, given that our knowledge of the dating and function of almost all of the hillforts in question is poor to non-existent.

Chapter 5 covers the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, traditionally viewed as a period of reduced social hierarchy, reflected in a marked decline in rich burials and in barrow building in general. Recorded settlement numbers also fall, and Fernández-Götz argues that pollen evidence shows a reduction in population levels. He suggests that sections of the population chose to migrate to other regions, partly in response to a worsening climate but also perhaps as a social safety valve in order to reduce social tension and curb inequality.

The re-emergence of social hierarchy during the late 2nd to 1st centuries BC is considered in Chapters 6 and 7. Key here is the appearance of the fortified central places known as oppida, which in this region occupy prominent hilltop locations. Recent excavations at a number of these sites have produced spectacular results, showing that in each case a zone for ritual and public activities was set apart from the settlement area. It is unfortunate that the investigations at the Titelberg, Otzenhausen and Kastel-Staad as yet have only interim publications, while the important monograph on the settlement zone of the Martberg oppidum (Nickel 2013) is not cited here, presumably appearing too late to be incorporated. This caveat aside, Fernández-Götz is surely right to conclude that the origins of the oppida lay in religious and political gatherings; economic factors were not the prime mover. This is argued to have been bound up with a process of ethnogenesis. Each oppidum served as the central place of a *pagus*, and the six or seven *pagi* in the Middle Rhine-Moselle region together made up the ethnic group recorded in the literary sources as the Treveri. Other changes at this time include the reappearance of sumptuous burials, though these were spatially separated from the oppida, suggesting that the elite may have resided in rural settlements. The shift to greater centralisation and hierarchisation is put down to 'complex endogenous causes', including demographic growth favoured by a more favourable climate and improved agricultural technology.

Chapter 8 compares late Iron Age social formations in the Middle Rhine-Moselle region with those in neighbouring areas. A particular contrast is drawn with the Lower Rhine, which shows markedly less evidence for centralisation or strong social hierarchy. This chapter also discusses the varying ways in which ethnic identity could be expressed in different parts of northeast Gaul. While acknowledging the complexity of the issue, Fernández-Götz suggests that certain elements of material culture – such as particular types of coin – can be regarded as 'ethnic markers' of individual *civitates*. Chapter 9 briefly discusses the impact of Romanisation on identity, tracing developments up to the Batavian revolt of AD 69–70.

The book is well written, and the author's ability to integrate the archaeological evidence with his theoretical discourse on identity and power is impressive. That said, more could perhaps have been done to put into practice the multi-level perspective on identity advocated in the opening theoretical discussion. Ultimately we learn rather more about high-level socio-political organisation and the expression of elite identity than about what it meant to be an ordinary woman, man or child in Iron Age Gaul. It is notable that the discussions of funerary practice in the Hunsrück-Eifel culture and the late Iron Age both focus mainly on rich graves. This reflects the research priorities of the previous work that the book relies on, but an opportunity was

perhaps missed here to explore how identities may have been subtly expressed in the more modest funerary rites of the non-elite. The book also has very little to say about the household groups that form the basal units of the posited model of socio-political organisation. It is true that our knowledge of rural Iron Age settlement within the Middle Rhine-Moselle region is fairly poor, due partly to subsequent geomorphological changes and partly to the disproportionate research focus on barrows and oppida. Domestic structures are though known within the oppida, and many neighbouring areas of northeast Gaul have excellent settlement records for both the earlier and late Iron Age. Examination of the size and layout of domestic units and their associated material culture could have shed light on the composition and social role of household groups, and the expression of identity within them.

Overall, however, Manuel Fernández-Götz's book is an elegant synthesis that satisfyingly integrates data and theory. As well as presenting an important regional sequence, the book provides some acute insights into interpretative issues of much wider significance. It should be read by everyone with an interest in the European Iron Age.

References

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