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Narrative and Context of Early La Tène Art in Central Europe

Figurative images have a long tradition in European prehistory, dating back to the Paleolithic cave art of France and Spain. Nevertheless, depictions of animals and men are not common in every region and time period – they come to light here and there, often with a very different stylistic expression.[1]

In the second half of the 5th century B. C., one of the characteristics of central European material culture is the so-called La Tène art, sometimes titled early Celtic art,[2] mainly stretching from France to Slovakia and from central Germany to northern Italy. It comprises different ornaments, many of which include floral elements as well as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic depictions often complemented with mythical beasts, showing a combination of human-like and animal-like aspects. All of these images can be found on personal objects, such as pieces of costume, jewelry, weapons, vessels, horse harnesses, wagon parts and more. Today, they are mainly found in graves, a smaller number coming from settlements and, unfortunately, a considerable amount of these finds bear no archaeological context information at all.[3]

The images in question here roughly belong to the timespan between 470/450 BC and 250 BC and are divided in two succeeding but partly overlapping artistic styles: the so-called early style and the Waldalgesheim style. The majority of figural art belongs to the first. Both expressions of art were first analyzed and described by Paul Jacobsthal in 1944[4] and all succeeding work is based on him. The early style is a syncretistic art style, merging influences of the preceding central European culture (the so-called Hallstatt-culture) and Mediterranean aspects of art. Eastern

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[1]   For a short overview see Huth 2003, 11–16.
[2]   For an introduction, see for example Megaw and Megaw 2001; Frey 2007; Müller 2009.
[3]   Bagley 2014, 56–60.
[4]   Jacobsthal 1944.

influences are still debated today[5] and are currently analyzed in an Oxford-based research project.[6] Objects concerned are mainly found from the middle Rhine Region to eastern Austria. The succeeding Waldalgesheim style shows Mediterranean influences again, but reflects central European peculiarities as well, the region of northeastern France probably being of high importance for its development.[7] Objects showing Waldalgesheim style ornamentation stretch farther and cover large parts of central Europe and the adjacent regions.

While the early style shows a wide variety of figurative images, including depictions of birds, mythical beasts, horses, boars, predators and many more as well as anthropomorphic beings, the Waldalgesheim Style knows far less zoomorphic creatures, while focusing on anthropomorphic images.[8] In both styles it is notable that no two pieces look exactly alike. It seems to have been of high importance, that all of the objects in question as well as the art shown on them are individual items, even if the distinctions are sometimes small.

Most of the creatures in question appear alone, and often they are reduced to their head. Especially fibulae, the most common object category decorated with early La Tène art, depict heads of birds or human-like beings.[9] Therefore, the majority of early La Tène pieces are hard to put in a narrative context in the sense of a "semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way" as cited and used by the editors of this volume.[10]

Nevertheless, a number of objects combine different motives, sometimes placed on different parts of the items. A given motive can be doubled in a heraldic way, applying mainly to zoomorphic lyres placed on belt hooks and later extended to sword scabbards.[11] Other motives are combined without a clear connection. The belt hook from Ossarn in Austria (**Fig. 1**) for instance shows pairs of mythical beasts on the plate, and another zoomorphic head on the actual hook.[12] In cases like these, it is difficult to decide if and how the motives stand in relation to each other. Some examples do show clear interdependencies of two or more motives, on the other hand. The belt hook from Glauberg grave 1 in Hesse (**Fig. 2**)[13] for example

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[5]   See for example Guggisberg 1998; Megaw 2005; Frey 1981.

[6]   http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/reader/items/european-celtic-art-in-context-exploring-celtic-art-and-its-eastern-links.html (Dec. 2015).

[7]   Frey 1995; Verger 1987.

[8]   Frey 1996; Bagley 2014.

[9]   Bagley 2014, 76–79.

[10]   Onega Jaén and García Landa 1996, 2–3; cited following the conference homepage https://www.bild-erzaehlung-kontext.uni-freiburg.de/konzeption (Dec. 2015).

[11]   For belt hooks see for example the Castaneda variant, Appler 2002; for the so-called dragon swords, Ginoux 2007.

[12]   Megaw et al. 1989; Frey 2001.

[13]   Kat. Frankfurt 2002, 242–253 Cat. 1.13.

Fig. 1: Belt hook from Herzogenburg-Ossarn, Bezirk St. Pölten, Austria
(Kat. Frankfurt 2002, 194 Abb. 173).

holds a predator with a human-like head between its wide open jaws, forming the narrative of a beast devouring a human-like being. Furthermore, there is a group of motives, often called the Potnia or Despotes Theron,[14] showing a central human-like figure with two accompanying animals or mythical beasts, which will be looked upon in more detail later. Nevertheless, many questions in relation to this group have to remain unanswered, including such basics as to who is shown here and if the pictures stand for a wide spread myth known by the majority of the Central European population of the time. Furthermore, the possibilities of interpretation of Celtic Art do not stand in relation to the complexity of the scene as can be shown by the sword scabbard found in grave 994 from Hallstatt, Austria (**Fig. 3**).[15]

The piece is clearly unique in the region north of the Alps, showing aspects of the so-called Situla Art and the Este region, respectively.[16] The implementation and design on the other hand is clearly rooted in early La Tène culture.[17] The whole length of the scabbard shows complex depictions in four different fields.

[14]   Guggisberg and Stöllner 1996; Guggisberg 2010; Bagley 2013.
[15]   Egg et al. 2006.
[16]   For the Situla Art see for example Huth 2003; Frey 2005a; Turk 2005; Kern 2009; for influences from the Este region on early La Tène Art see Frey 2004.
[17]   Frey 2004, 190.

Fig. 2: Belt hook from Glauberg grave 1, Wetteraukreis, Germany © Keltenwelt am Glauberg
(Photo: Pavel Odvody).

The one in the point of the scabbard is partly damaged by corrosion of the sword, but a fight between two persons, and watched by a third is clearly discernible. The latter figure shows aspects of a mythical being, its lower body having floral elements, while it seems to pull on the leg of one of the combatants. The second field shows a pair of two human-like figures, holding a spoked wheel between them. The central part displays a scene depicting warriors, three of them footmen carrying spears and shields, followed by four armored horsemen bearing spears as well. Beneath the first horse lies another combatant, speared by the one sitting on the second horse. The act of wounding or even killing a human being is shown neither north of the Alps nor in Situla Art or the northern part of Italy; it stands alone in the whole region.[18] The last field again depicts two men holding a spoked wheel, showing only minor differences to its counterpart – for example in the ornamentation of the clothing.

These images are of high importance to iron age archaeology – they show one possibility of how early La Tène warriors were armed and armored, how men were dressed and how they wore their hair as well as how their horses were bridled and much more.[19] Nevertheless, many questions concerning the interpretation of the

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[18]   Frey 2004, 196.
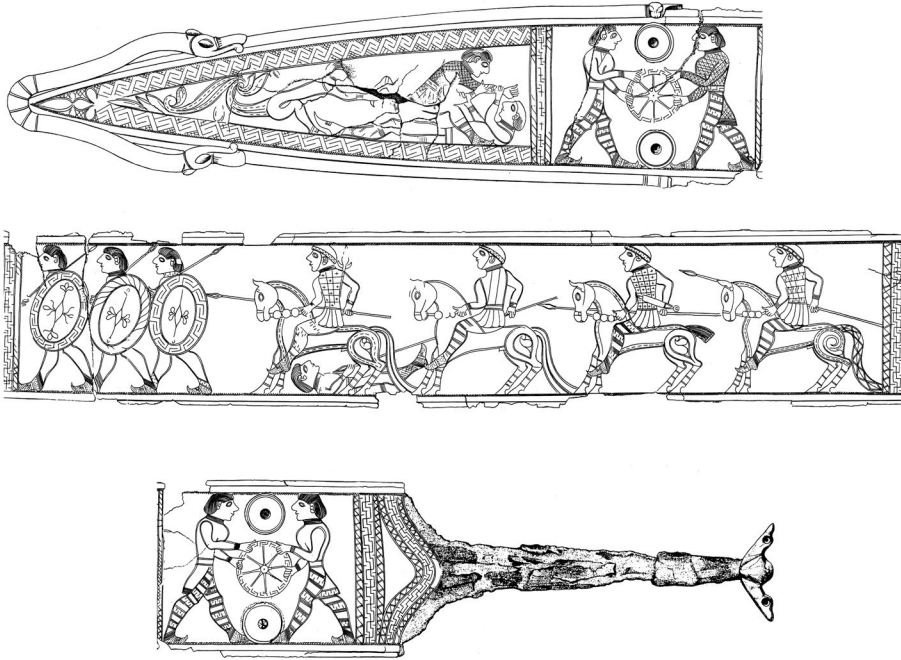[19]   Frey 2004, 190–196.

Fig. 3: Sword scabbard from Hallstatt grave 994, Bezirk Gmunden, Austria (Egg et al. 2006, Beil. 1).

scenes have to remain unanswered, especially in relation to the wheel carriers and the combatants in the point of the scabbard. While L. Pauli saw the first as a mis-interpretation of a fistfight as it is often shown on situlae,[20] M. Egg, M. Hauschild und M. Schönfelder reject this idea.[21] In contrast, they point to the Gundestrup cauldron, a silver vessel of considerable size found in a bog near Gundestrup in Jutland, Denmark.[22] On one of the plates, a male bust and a second male figure shown with its whole body hold a spoked wheel between them (**Fig. 4**). It must be indicated though, that the age of the Gundestrup cauldron is very hard to discern, as is its origin. Nevertheless, it is certain that the object is much younger and a few centuries probably lie between the vessel and the sword. A comparison of the two objects therefore should be handled with care. The Gundestrup cauldron most probably shows mythical and religious scenes, in the case of the plaque in question here, potentially depicting a god attributed by a wheel.[23] The same might be true for the scabbard from Hallstatt as well, but has to remain open in the last consequence.

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[20]   Die Kelten in Mitteleuropa 1980, 261.
[21]   Egg et al. 2006, 198.
[22]   Hachmann 1990; Nielsen et al. 2005.
[23]   Egg et al. 2006, 198.

Fig. 4: The Gundestrup cauldron, Kommune Vesthimmerland, Denmark (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/; CC-BY-SA, Roberto Fortuna Kira Ursem, The National Museum of Denmark; https://natmus.dk/digitale-samlinger/).

Not only the wheel carriers propose a conundrum, the central field showing the warriors causes difficulties in its interpretation as well. The possibly dead body underneath the first horse indicates that what is shown is not a parade but a combat scene. Egg, Hauschild and Schönfelder argue for the cavalry chasing the infantry, who are fleeing after the loss of one of their fellows. Concerning the interpretation they write:

> Offen bleibt, ob damit ein Ereignis aus dem Leben des im Grab 994 bestatteten Kriegers festgehalten wurde oder ob ein Ereignis aus mythischer Vergangenheit damit gemeint war, wobei die Autoren letzteres für wahrscheinlicher halten.[24]

Of course, questions like who is depicted, in which circumstances the scene has to be put etc. must remain open as well. In relation to the image shown in the point of the scabbard, it remains to be stated that the appearance of a hybrid creature suggests a mythological background without giving further clues to its understanding. What's more, it has to remain unclear, if the pictures shown on the Hallstatt scabbard could be fully interpreted by its contemporary observers. Understanding figural art is based on the same background knowledge. If a mythical scene is shown, it has to be known by all its viewers in order to interpret it correctly. If this is the case, interpreting art is a much easier task, if there are regulations regarding how and with what kind of attributes things or people are shown.

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[24] Translates to: It remains open, if an event in the life of the warrior buried in grave 994 is depicted here or if an incidence of the mythological past is meant, whereby the authors consider the latter more plausible. Egg et al. 2006, 198.

In the case of the early style in general no such regularities can be identified today in respect to the depictions themselves, safe the fact that the limited range of motives hint to them being carefully chosen. However, the constant relation of some pictures with the media they are shown on, for example the birds being mainly displayed on fibulae or the anthropomorphic heads being part of fibulae and rings such as neck rings, arm rings and anklets as well as their regular usage by different gender and socially based groups clearly demonstrate, that the pieces in question do not stand for an *art pour l'art* but served for the communication and distinction within the local society.[25]

In the case of the scabbard from Hallstatt, the depictions can only be seen when getting close to the object itself. Therefore, a discussion of the shown scenery could best be conceivable in a small group of people, giving the owner the possibility to explain his view of the depicted. On the other hand, Celtic Art might not have been meant to be completely interpretable for all observers from the beginning on. Therewith, it may be a way of distinction between the 'knowing', possibly part of a social elite, and the rest of the community. What's more, if the images mainly have apotropaic meaning, as it is discussed within iron age archaeology, its central role would be to protect and strengthen its bearer.[26] Of course, the depictions would still reflect parts of the believe and worldview of at least segments of the contemporary society. But scenic images would be unnecessary to evoke the agency of the objects and their art in this case. Vincent Megaw highlights the diversity of the depictions with many of them showing mythical beasts combining different aspects of living creatures. Maybe this diversity is one of the rules in Celtic Art. Maybe the "shape-changing" aspect, as he calls it, leads to the center of the central European iron age worldview with humans, mythical creatures and animals being able to change their form and abilities on a regular basis.[27]

Returning to the motives and groups of motives of early La Tène art, the Central European Potnia or Despotes Theron mentioned above, consists of a central human-like figure accompanied by two or more animals or hybrid creatures in most cases. In some examples, the central figure grasps its escorts in an authoritative air. Other pieces show the central figure reduced to its head, or the whole group of motives without any physical contact.[28] Open-work belt hooks from the alpine region regularly show these images,[29] but it is also known from different

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[25]   Bagley 2014.

[26]   For the discussion of different aspects of the religious and mythological interpretation of early La Tène art see Bagley 2014, 54–56.

[27]   Megaw and Megaw 2001, 19–23.

[28]   Bagley 2013, 64–70.

[29]   For an overview see Bagley 2016.

objects throughout Central Europe. One example can be found on the rim of the beak snouted jug or Schnabelkanne found in grave 1 from the Glauberg in (**Fig. 5**).[30] While this piece as well as the belt hooks mentioned above show the central figure with its whole body, many pieces from Central Europe reduce the image to its head which is a characteristic phenomenon of early La Tène art, as can be seen in the examples of the Röhrenkanne from Waldalgesheim,[31] the belt hook from Stupava[32] or the golden bracelet from Rodenbach.[33]

The motive is well known in many different parts of the Old World, dating back to the 6th millennium in the Near East and up to Christian Times in Central Europe.[34] While it is comparable in its structure and setup, a considerable variety in detail can be shown: The central figure may be male or female for instance. While the male variant dominates in the Near East (but female depictions are known as well),[35] ancient Greek examples prefer a female variant, sometimes shown with wings and therewith a hybrid creature itself.[36] Throughout the Old World, the Despotes Theron is accompanied by different animals and hybrid beings on a regional level,[37] sometimes added by local variants and taking regional aspects of culture into account, such as depicting dolphins on Crete or horses around the city of Argos.[38] Throughout the Old World, the meaning of the Despotes Theron shows a wide diversity of possibilities, ranging from the portrayal of a social elite, heroes, human and godlike companions, demigods or gods.[39] On a regular basis, the Despotes Theron appears in the surroundings of a male elite. The Potnia Theron is believed to be linked with different Gods – Astarte in the Near East and Artemis in the Mediterranean.[40] For Iron Age Italy, many questions have to remain unanswered, but Helle Damgaard Andersen points to a relation of the motive to a cult of ancestors and a female nature deity.[41] These examples show that a comparison of the images throughout the Old World is of particular interest, but mainly reflects the high variability in the meaning of these pictures. They are modified every time they are put to use and can represent many different aspects of religious, mythological

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[30]   Das Rätsel der Kelten vom Kat. Frankfurt 2002, 242 Cat. 1.1.
[31]   Joachim 1995.
[32]   Čambal 2012.
[33]   Engels 1972.
[34]   Counts and Arnold 2010a.
[35]   Costello 2010.
[36]   See for example the Hydria from Grächwil – a Greek bronze jug found in Grächwil, Switzerland: Lüscher 2002.
[37]   See the different examples in Counts and Arnold 2010a.
[38]   Crete examples: Crowley 2010; Greek examples: Langdon 2010.
[39]   Counts and Arnold 2010b, 19.
[40]   Damgaard Andersen 1992/93.
[41]   Damgaard Andersen 1992/93, 98–102.

Fig. 5: A probable Despotes Theron on the rim of the jug from Glauberg grave 1, Wetteraukreis, Germany © Keltenwelt am Glauberg (Photo: Pavel Odvody).

and social life. For the early La Tène pieces this means that they still are difficult to interpret and may even have different connotations within the regions north of the Alps.

In order to discern the meaning of figurative images, History of Art as a scientific field usually draws on Erwin Panofsky's Iconography and Iconology.[42] He himself describes the approach in three strata:

The first step is called the pre-iconographical description and looks for the primary or natural subject matter.[43] Motives like animals, humans or human-like beings, plants, objects and so on are described and named. Furthermore, emotions and atmosphere of the picture can be included in this description. But Erwin Panofsky makes a clear point here, arguing that personal experience and empirical knowledge are of high importance in this respect.[44] In case of pictures produced by foreign cultures, this empirical knowledge might not exist, leading to problems in the description of what is shown. This problem is not limited to the description and interpretation of images but affects our communication and handling of objects as a whole;[45] it is plainly seen in relation to the pictures of the early La Tène Iron Age.

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[42] For one of the central texts see Panofsky 1955.
[43] Panofsky 1955, 28.
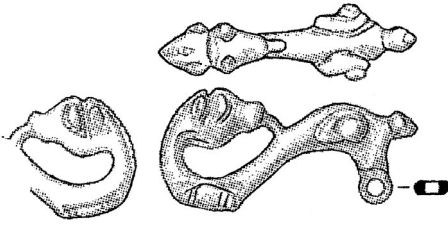[44] Panofsky 1955, 33–34.
[45] Norman 2013.

Fig. 6: Fibula with zoomorphic representations from Dürrnberg grave 195#2, Berzirk Hallein, Austria (Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015, 169 Nr. 17).

This holds especially true for a row of zoomorphic creatures, which cannot be classified further (**Fig. 6**). Even the line between anthropomorphic and zoomorphic depictions is sometimes fluid and therewith evaluated differently by diverging viewers. Furthermore, it is unclear, if it was of importance for the early La Tène observer to identify the shown being more precisely, say as a duck or a bear, or if the 'presence' of a living creature in itself was enough to serve the purpose. On the other hand, most of the pictures are finely made and do show details that allow for an assignment.

Panofsky's second step is called iconography and looks for the conventional subject matter. Attributes, arrangements, gestures etc. are analyzed in order to identify what is shown using the knowledge of societal conventions. Erwin Panofsky uses the example of a male figure holding a knife to signify Saint Bartholomew.[46] He is recognized because his story is known and the knife functions as an attribute and a sign for this specific person. In prehistoric archaeology worldviews and conventions can only be grasped through their material deposit, as a result of societal habits, rituals, burial customs and so on. While early La Tène art features several elements that could easily function as attributes, this does not help us in interpreting the image in question. A good example is the so-called Blattkrone or leaf crown.[47] It consists of two leaf like elements placed on the left and right side of the head of mainly male figures, many of them further characterized by a beard (**Fig. 7**). It might be an attribute of supernatural beings, gods, heroes, a social elite or a combination of these. Hair, beard and dress might play an important role in this respect as well, as Martin A. Guggisberg mentions.[48] But in the end, neither of these aspects can be interpreted without a doubt.

In case of the Potnia and Despotes Theron the arrangement of figures and their gestures is crucial for their designation. It is a well-known subject throughout the Old World, but the comparison of its probable meaning in different cultures with known written sources shows, that one image can hold many different denotations

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[46]   Panofsky 1955, 28–29.
[47]   Bagley 2014, 213–219.
[48]   Guggisberg 2000, 180.

through time and space. This leaves us with hints of its possible interpretation within the European Iron Age, but without certain assertion.

In his last step, the iconology, Erwin Panofsky tries to analyze the image as a symptom of its societal background – as a result of personal aspects of the artist as well as the society that he is living in.[49] Panofsky looks for different layers of meaning, considering its religious and political background as well. But this procedure has led to critique within art history too.[50] It has been stated, that written sources are overrated while the work of art in itself is not regarded high enough. These points were especially stressed in relation to abstract art, when a subject in the sense of the above-mentioned examples is absent.

Although European Prehistory knows no written sources, there is a lot of data and information to collect on the context and usage of early La Tène art. It starts with the question of which motives are used and which ones are omitted, paired with the study of how the given subjects are shown. In a second step the possible combinations of two or more motives have to be looked upon, followed by the question of how the image relates to the object it is shown on. This is of special interest, because, as mentioned above, most of the given pieces are personal objects. Their form can assess a first glance on the usage and meaning of the objects: torques (Celtic neck rings), bracelets, fibulae, belt hooks, horse harnesses or jugs to pour beverages. Asking for the people using these objects, prehistoric archaeology must turn to the context, the archaeological feature, as in the case of early Celtic art predominantly represented by graves.[51] Here, the objects are connected to individuals equipped with them – at least in the context of their burials. These can be analyzed on different scales and with different questions in mind. Modern paleoanthropology uses the mortal remains of the interred to study their age, sex, sicknesses, kinship, diet and origin.[52] Unfortunately, not all of these aspects can be analyzed for every relevant grave; and in the past, the majority of the finds were not probed at all. From the archaeological point of view, the grave goods can give hints to societal conventions on gender and social standing, bearing some restrictions in mind.[53] The archaeological context will only stand for trends in societal agreements, for example in the case of gender-related costume or grave goods, or objects and practices constricted to specific social groups. Based on strictly archaeological methods, a single grave can never be attributed to a social group or sex with complete assurance – there always is the possibility of deviation for reasons that are unknown to us.

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[49]   Panofsky 1955, 30–32.
[50]   For an overview and further literature see Eberlein 2003.
[51]   Bagley 2014, 56–60.
[52]   Grupe et al. 2015.
[53]   For a discussion on possibilities and restrictions on gender-related archaeology see for example Burmeister 2000; Müller 2005; Fries 2005; Gramsch 2010.

Fig. 7: So-called Blattkrone or leaf crown shown on the statue from Glauberg, Wetteraukreis, Germany © Keltenwelt am Glauberg (Photo: Pavel Odvody).

Bearing all these points in mind, early La Tène art holds a couple of very interesting observations: First of all, the selection of motives shows a striking pattern. Beasts of everyday life such as cattle, sheep, goats and swine along with game such as cervids are shown in very few examples or even not at all, while birds, hybrid creatures of different form, predators and anthropomorphic beings are presented on a regular basis. Obviously, artists and bearers of early La Tène art made a clear choice in the representation of the motives. Birds with straight or slightly upraised beaks, which

might represent water birds, stand in a long tradition in Central Europe, reaching back to the Bronze Age,[54] and there are many examples of anthropomorphic pictures in the preceding centuries as well.[55] But birds with downward bent beaks and hybrid or mythical beasts are a new phenomenon for the early La Tène Iron Age.

In relation to the combination of motives, only a few examples stand out, one of which is the pairing of birds and human-like beings. The clearest example here is the group of the so-called Potnia or Despotes Theron, which has already been mentioned several times.

Especially interesting concerning the usage of these images is their relation to the objects on which they appear. In fact, there seem to be rules regarding the image and its medium.[56] While birds are mainly restricted to fibulae, anthropomorphic beings are regularly shown on jewelry such as torques, bracelets or anklets. Lyre motives with zoomorphic heads, a special form of the hybrid beasts, are often associated with belt hooks or belt pieces. While mythical beasts as a whole are not easy to relate to a specific group of objects, it is noticeable that they are regularly shown on masterpieces of early Celtic art, including bronze jugs or jewelry made of bronze and gold. Therefore, it can be stated that while figural art of the early La Tène Iron Age may show no conventions as described by Panofsky in their form, they seem to follow social conventions in relation to the motif and it's medium, therewith linking pictures to groups of people.

Going on, the archaeological analyses of early La Tène graves in many examples has made clear that there are some conventions in relation to gender and social status. While graves of male individuals include weapons such as swords and spears on a regular basis, females are often associated with ring ensembles consisting of neck-, arm-, leg- or finger rings. Single rings as well as golden sets are open to both sexes and show no gender relation. Furthermore, a social elite seems to be identifiable through their graves. The characteristics of these graves are still debated, but according to Rudolf Echt, objects made out of gold as well as metal vessels seem to be of high importance in this respect.[57] The latter may either be imported from the Mediterranean or produced north of the Alps. Nevertheless, all of the graves including weapons, jewelry, horse harnesses or wagon parts and so on can be associated with groups of a higher social standing. Within these groups, the depictions of anthropomorphic beings were most often related to women; lyre motives with zoomorphic heads have a tendency to appear in male surroundings and the highest ranking individuals seem to have had a special interest in hybrid or mythical beasts,

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54   Lang 2002; Kossack 1999.
55   For examples see Reichenberger 2000; Huth 2003.
56   For an overview see Bagley 2014.
57   Echt 1999, 255–257.

which can be connected to Mediterranean images of the time.[58] In this respect, images as well as the objects they are shown on have a high potential to be used in social discourse in the sense of their being a possibly prestigious object.[59] While the aspects of social status, gender and possibly age are of importance in the usage of early La Tène art throughout Central Europe, there are some regional differences in style as well as utilization.[60]

Next to these facets of meaning, the pieces of art in question might hint to at least two different trends in religious or mythological worldviews. On the one hand, there is a social elite, using the new motif of the mythological or hybrid beasts, the image having its roots in the Mediterranean, and therewith showing their wide-ranging contacts, in many cases further emphasized by imported goods such as vessels in the chiefly graves. These contacts might have led to a stimulus of new religious beliefs,[61] represented by the images in question. These were obviously not simply transferred to the region north of the Alps. The depictions were adjusted to local needs and beliefs, as Rudolf Echt was able to demonstrate in the case of the Reinheim arm ring.[62] The image shows aspects of different Mediterranean goddesses combined in one figure while its style clearly shows central European taste. On the other hand, it seems that the majority of the early La Tène society used the 'new' medium of figural art as well, but mainly drawing on more traditional motives like birds, horses or anthropomorphic beings.[63]

Summing up, it has to be stated that early La Tène figural art primarily consists of single motives shown on different objects. While there clearly are favoured images, the individuality of each and every piece seems to have been of the highest importance – no two depictions look exactly alike. The majority of these images show specific animals like birds, horses, predators and boars or anthropomorphic beings (may they be gods, heroes or humans), but there is a considerable group of objects bearing a creature that is difficult to name in modern terms. In these cases, it is questionable if a classification was needed by the Iron Age society at all, or if the depiction of a living creature alone was sufficient for the purpose in mind. As most of the objects were worn directly on the body, it has been discussed if these things were used as amulets, probably with an apotropaic meaning.[64] Furthermore, there is one aspect of early Celtic art, which J. V. S. Megaw has termed the "shape changing" element.[65]

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[58] Bagley 2014, 255–264.
[59] See Bagley and Schumann 2013 on status and prestige in the Central European Iron Age.
[60] Bagley 2014.
[61] Echt 2004; Frey 2005b.
[62] Echt 2000.
[63] Bagley 2014, 270–274.
[64] See for example Binding 1993; Warneke 1999.
[65] Megaw and Megaw 2001, 20–23.

It comprises figural as well as ornamental parts of the styles in question and seems to represent an aspect of the early La Tène worldview, with nature having no firm categories, but flowing from one form to the other and changing in accordance to perspective and context.[66]

Narrative images are scarce in early La Tène art. Scenic depictions as shown on the sword scabbard in grave 994 from Hallstatt are extremely rare. They are of high interest, as not only the single motives but also the shown actions can be analyzed. Nevertheless, even a narrative scene cannot lead to a clear interpretation on its own as has been shown for the case of the sword scabbard. In order to do this, a vast knowledge of societal conventions, worldviews and religious life is required. The comparison of the images in question with examples from other regions from which we have more information, in this case mainly the Mediterranean, as was shown using the example of the so called Potnia or Despotes Theron, can lead to new ideas and clues, but will clearly render no single interpretation.

However, the scientific validity of early La Tène art does not come to an end here. The handling and usage of the images and their media give many interesting hints to the structure and way of life in the early La Tène society. The archaeological context is of highest importance in this respect, as it is the product of societal conventions, reflecting wide-ranging aspects of social structure, economy and worldviews.

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[66] This relates to the so-called Cheshire-Cat Phenomenon as well, first described by Jacobsthal 1944; for an overview see Lenerz-de Wilde 1982, Megaw 1969; Megaw 1970.

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