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Coins and Power in
Late Iron Age Britain

CONTENTS

FIGURES

TABLES

I

The Middle to Late Iron Age transition

In the Middle Iron Age (*c.* 300–100 BC), many areas of central-southern Britain were dominated by hillforts. This was a pattern which had characterised the landscape for hundreds of years. But around the late second century or early first century, something happened. Many of these sites went out of occupation. The gates of Danebury, Britain's best studied hillfort, were put to the torch, and occupation at the site was scaled down. At around the same time selected sites on the south coast began to receive imports from Gaul and the Mediterranean. Another new arrival was the appearance of gold, absent here since its last appearance in the Late Bronze Age. It came first in the form of imported coin, then as locally manufactured derivatives. Finally new forms of settlements emerged, which we have taken to collectively calling *oppida*, though as we shall see in this book the nature of many of them was very diverse. These are the main changes which along with developments in burial rites have been taken to characterise the transition from the Middle to the Late Iron Age.

The story I wish to tell is of the changes which took place in Britain from the re-establishment of visible links with the continent in the late second century until the annexation of the south-east of Britain by the Roman Emperor Claudius in AD 43. The story is one of the rise to power of a series of dynasties in south-east Britain. Did these emerge gradually from the Middle Iron Age (MIA), or did they represent something fundamentally new? The hillforts of southern Britain were conventionally seen as central places and residences of a warrior elite, in which case the emergence in the Late Iron Age (LIA) of powerful dynasties could be seen as a gradual development arising out of the MIA. Yet recently this picture has been questioned and the world of hillforts is now seen as a far more egalitarian and less hierarchical place, which makes the power shift involved in the rise to dominance of a couple of dynasties over a period of one hundred years or so a far more remarkable event. It is therefore necessary to start with the MIA to paint a picture of a society which was about to change significantly, and that is the aim of this chapter. It will focus on the mid-second to mid-first century BC in central-southern Britain, where our evidence for renewed continental contact begins.

The processes of change in Iron Age Britain: Cunliffe's model
The author who has done the most to frame our narratives of this period is Barry Cunliffe. His *Iron Age Communities in Britain* (Cunliffe 1974) became the standard textbook, and with several revised editions still remains the clearest introduction to later prehistoric Britain. He has also excavated many of the sites which are crucial to

any discussion of central-southern England. However, over the last few years a critique has developed which has questioned some of the aspects of Cunliffe's reconstruction of Iron Age Britain. Yet so far no coherent alternative framework has been composed pulling together the evidence into a convincing narrative of comparable scope. So the best place to start would be to recap the way the Iron Age has generally been perceived, before moving on to question certain aspects of this reconstruction and suggest a few alternative ways of looking at things.

The most prominent landmarks of the southern British downlands in the early part of the first millennium BC were a series of extensive hilltop enclosures (e.g. Bindon Hill). Few have been excavated, but generally they have been conceived as serving large-scale communal activities such as stock control and perhaps occasionally storage; only meagre traces of occupation have been found at them. Complementing these was a series of much smaller, tightly defended sites, or 'residential fortlets', where dense evidence for occupation has been found (e.g. Lidbury and Highdown Camp). These sites existed within a landscape which was increasingly divided up by major linear earthworks. However, both these kinds of site fell into disuse in the sixth century BC as a new type of site emerged: the hillfort.

Throughout the sixth and fifth centuries a large number of hillforts were created and abandoned across the landscape, in what appears to have been a period of instability, until in the fourth century things seemed to settle down with the further enhancement of some of these sites to become 'developed hillforts'. Whilst the detailed chronology of many of these is far from precise, it appears that they had a relatively even spacing, and so perhaps each controlled its own relatively small domain. They were characterised by having a capacity to store agricultural produce beyond the immediate needs of their resident community; providing a focus for lambing and calving activities; having elaborate defensive features well beyond the actual requirements for defence; and also being centres for manufacturing and trade. Cunliffe saw these changes in terms of the coming together of the functions of the earlier hilltop-enclosures and fortlets under the control of a single competitive elite. Possibly this was a consequence of an elite taking over the ownership of land and livestock. He viewed abandonment of the earlier sites and the creation of new settlements on virgin locations as a symbolic act in establishing the new order (Cunliffe 1984:30). The period of upheaval in the sixth and fifth centuries when some hillforts were constructed and rapidly deserted, could represent an unstable phase as this new social order established itself.

One of the most prominent features of the Early and Middle Iron Age was the creation of a large number of storage pits. From the sixth century onwards many were found at Danebury, and within them various kinds of votive offerings:

> The implication seems to be that a development in the belief-system was taking place, quite possibly associated with intensified production, which might in turn be linked to the enhanced value of corn as a commodity for social control. Thus the model which would seem to contain the evidence is one which sees land holding/corn production as the medium for the

manipulation of power, in contrast to the farmstead wherein lay individual power.
(Cunliffe 1995a:98-9)

From the fourth century the grain storage pits at Danebury were supplemented by a large number of four- and six-post structures, significantly enhancing the site's storage capacity. This seems to suggest a further intensification in the productive systems, the rise in storage capacity being matched by an increase in the deposition of discarded material. But why?

> The simplest approach would be to regard it as the logical development of the model which sees the manipulation of agrarian surplus as the means by which the power of the elite was maintained. If agrarian products were concentrated in the fort, through the mechanisms of tribute and clientage obligation it would have been necessary to recycle the surplus in a manner which generated new products for redistribution down the social hierarchy.
> (Cunliffe 1995a:99)

This form of social organisation appears to have had a remarkable degree of success in reproducing itself over several hundred years. Occasionally certain hillforts were created and abandoned, but by and large this way for society to organise itself continued relatively unchanged. However, within this hypothetical reconstruction of society lay several factors which potentially jeopardised that stability: population increase and decline in soil fertility. As intensification took place so the potential holding capacity of the land was approached. The chalk downs of southern Britain had only a relatively thin soil and such intensive use could not be sustained for very long without significant alterations in agrarian management. The archaeological evidence suggests a rise in the importance of sheep, possibly in an attempt to improve the soil with new manuring practices; however, even the teeth of the sheep suggest that the quality of the pasture was deteriorating. Danebury had seen steady growth and intensification, but there comes a point when limits are reached and resources get harder to obtain from the locality, thereby creating potential stress. Perhaps these concerns and shortages were one factor behind the increase in propitiatory rites carried out within the hillfort in the later period. Perhaps also the stress revealed itself in increased raiding as competition for limited resources increased. The end of the classic hillfort phase at Danebury saw the destruction of the entranceway by fire and pits filled with slingstones.

Hillforts, in this reconstruction, can be considered as central places where an elite controlled and redistributed resources. This kind of picture was thought to fit in well with the classical conception of 'celtic society' which was based around clientship:

> An aristocrat would formalise a relationship with a peasant farming family, usually by investing with them a number of his own cattle. They would maintain the herd on their own land and pay a tithe, usually in the form of produce. This simple economic system had embedded social relationships within it: on the one hand the aristocrat had a vested interest in the safety of

> his client, while the client could be called upon to serve his patron when the
> need arose. Thus an aristocrat with a large number of cattle to invest was able
> to acquire a considerable surplus of consumables, which he could dispense at
> feasts, in this way gaining status, while at the same time he could call upon an
> army of followers, whenever he wished to lead an expedition or to stake a
> claim. The greater his following the greater his status – and the more chance
> he had of acquiring further loot in the raid . . . it meant that warfare, at least
> on a raiding level, remained endemic.
> (Cunliffe 1988:89)

These, therefore, were the internal stresses which the hillfort-dominated landscape of central-southern Britain faced in the late second century BC, according to conventional wisdom. Yet around 100 BC a series of rapid and substantial changes took place. While many of the non-hillfort settlements continued in occupation (e.g. Gussage All Saints), many of the hillforts did not, or else they underwent significant change (Cunliffe 1995a:100). From hillforts collectively serving many of the functions of the community, there appears to be a trend towards centres with discrete roles. Specialist centres developed which articulated exchange relations with Gaul, most obviously at Hengistbury Head. Extremely well defended 'farmsteads' appeared such as Suddern Farm, continuing the tradition of excessive defensive display from the hillforts. Specialist production sites emerged (Droitwich, Glastonbury), and finally over the next century a series of disparate sites which have been labelled *oppida* appeared, which were classically conceived as trading sites and perhaps elite residences. This is our Late Iron Age landscape.

Internal stresses may have been a factor in weakening the existing system, but external agency has also been invoked to try and explain these changes. In Cunliffe's view this included the arrival of Mediterranean goods. In the late second century BC, Hengistbury Head began to receive larger quantities of imported material than had been seen hitherto in Britain for generations. This was seen as a consequence of the Roman transformation of southern Gaul into a full Roman province, and the consequent increase in Roman trading activity, procuring raw materials in the form of metals and slaves in exchange for wine, amongst other items. This was a form of core–periphery model which dominated discussion of the Late Iron Age in the 1980s and early 1990s.

> It may be that access to a new range of prestige goods provided the elite with
> a mode of display which replaced raiding as a means of establishing and
> maintaining prowess. The symbols of that system – the hillforts – could then
> be abandoned and the function of redistribution could be transferred to more
> convenient locations on route nodes where major land routes crossed rivers.
> The enclosed *oppida* which developed in these valley sites are thus explained.
> (Cunliffe 1991:544)

From here on the development of south-east Britain has been related to ever-growing closer contact with the Roman world. The indirect contact along the south

coast was disrupted by the Caesarean conquest of Gaul in the 50s BC and Caesar's visits to Britain. Thereafter routes focusing upon the Thames estuary developed and significantly increased in importance in the very late first century BC.

This is a very brief outline of the principal changes, combined with some of the ideas which have attempted to explain the transformations taking place in southern Britain in the Middle to Late Iron Age. Nonetheless, over the last decade a critique has developed within Iron Age studies that has challenged many of these notions. Indeed whilst I have used Cunliffe's narrative as an example, his writings over the last decade have themselves continually been modified and his latest work in the 'Danebury environs project', and in the Anglo-French research initiative looking at links between Armorica, the Channel Islands and southern Britain, has opened the way for a series of significant reinterpretations to be made, which we shall come to presently. But this exercise has provided us with an introductory framework which we can now seek to sustain or modify as our evidence takes us.

Aspects of the critique of the existing model
This kind of framework has been the subject of critical review, and below a few aspects of this which have a bearing on the Middle to Late Iron Age will be addressed.

One practice which has been criticised is the use of generalised models relating to the social structure and organisation of 'the celts'. What had happened was that the literary evidence from an extremely diverse range of sources was collated to construct an image of a 'celtic society' with a shared language, temperament and social structure. This form of society was viewed as dominating much of temperate Europe until its conquest by Rome; only in Wales, Scotland and Ireland did celtic society survive and struggle through into the Medieval period. This construct was used by many to colour the archaeological evidence from Iron Age Britain and the continent. This practice went back a long way, but the archaeological diversity of 'celtic societies' led some to wonder whether it was justifiable (cf. Collis 1985; Hill 1993). Also the literary sources used ranged over a thousand years and a thousand miles, from northern Italy in the fourth century BC to early Medieval Ireland. Whilst the use of such literary evidence and analogy should not totally disappear, the critique insisted that the archaeological evidence must take primacy, and any use of analogy be treated far more critically and carefully. The trend now is to explicitly explore cultural diversity across Europe in order to counteract the weight of generations of archaeological literature creating a mythical image of a unified 'celtic culture' (e.g. Cumberpatch and Hill (eds.) 1994).

When the first ten years of excavation at Danebury were published (Cunliffe 1984b), the site was interpreted as being a central place from which a social elite ruled; the scale of the defences supported the notion of raiding and endemic warfare which filled the classical depictions of 'celtic society'. However, removed from a reliance upon the literary sources, the prompt publication of this data led to a series of alternative reconstructions of the evidence. For example Stopford (1987) thought

that Danebury could be interpreted as being a seasonal communal gathering point where specific activities took place which bound together disparate individual households. Hill (1996), on the other hand, questioned the very notion that there was any evidence for an 'elite' resident in the hillfort; examining some of the non-hillfort sites in the vicinity, he questioned whether there was any significant difference between hillfort and non-hillfort sites in anything other than sheer size. Generally it seemed that opinion was moving towards viewing the Middle Iron Age as having a far less ranked society than was once believed. Cunliffe tacitly considered these possibilities in one of the later Danebury volumes where he conceded that a broader-based leadership might exist, but nonetheless he chose to retain the idea of a residential elite (Cunliffe 1995a:89-101).

So do we have evidence for 'an elite' in Middle Iron Age hillforts? The problem is that archaeologically the evidence for a hierarchy of buildings within Danebury is absent. Around the edge of the hillfort were a series of roundhouses, perhaps forming small individual compounds. Cunliffe (1995a:89) calculated that there was space for about 22 in all. Nonetheless none was marked out by architectural features or material culture as being particularly different from the others. Admittedly only 57 per cent of the interior area had been excavated and so a 'chieftain's house' might have lain undetected. But equally Danebury is the largest-scale hillfort excavation to have taken place, and if clear evidence for ranking is not present here then we must consider the possibility that the representation of hillforts as residences of 'the elite' is by no means clear cut.

Another issue which has been questioned is the interpretation of the defences of hillforts as indicative of a 'warrior society'. Whilst the role of display and status has never been in much doubt surrounding these earthworks, a view that this role was perhaps far more significant has been suggested by Collis (1996). For example, at Bury Wood Camp, the size of the ditches clearly decreased as one got away from the entrance. The same feature recurs on some other smaller defensive sites in Wessex, such as Gussage All Saints (Wainwright 1979) or Oswelbury (Collis 1970; 1996:88). Other aspects of certain defences also seem peculiar. At some of the smaller sites in Wessex such as Mitchelldever Wood, Oswelbury (Phase 1) and Hurstbourne Tarrant, the ditch appears to be on the inside of the bank instead of the outside, which is hardly a defensive measure. Since the evidence for banks is generally poor on ploughed-out sites this may have been the case at many others as well (Collis 1996:88). A possible parallel for this kind of enclosure comes from the royal sites in Ireland: Navan, Tara and Dun Ailinne (Raftery 1996).

A further idea which has been challenged is the notion that a small number of imports from Gaul and the classical world could lead to such profound changes in the settlement system and social structure. Haselgrove had been one of the key authors to promote the core–periphery model of Iron Age Britain (Haselgrove 1984b), and yet he has subsequently drawn back from this aspect of the model. Working in northern France, he attempted to quantify the number of Dressel 1 amphorae arriving in the territory of the Remi and Suessiones in north-east Gaul. He concluded

that there really were very few arriving there each year, and these must surely have exceeded the numbers going to more distant Britain in the early first century BC (Haselgrove 1996b:173).

Each of these revisionist ideas has its merits, but they have yet to be worked into a comprehensive, coherent narrative which describes and attempts to explain the process of change in MIA–LIA Britain. It is certain aspects of the later period I want to try to deal with here. So what consequences does this critique have for the MIA–LIA transition? The perception of a less hierarchical MIA has significant implications for the Later Period. This study deals with Britain from the late second century BC to the Claudian annexation of AD 43. By the end of this period a large paramount kingdom had developed within the south-east, dominated by Cunobelin. Traditional accounts have explained this as being the consequence of military expansion and conquest, fitting neatly into the old idea of a celtic warrior society. Prestige goods from the Roman world enhanced Cunobelin and his predecessors' ability to attract followers and maintain their dominant positions until they died. When hillforts were viewed as the home of local tribal chiefs and defensive centres in a society dominated by conflict, the transition from Middle to Late Iron Age appeared unremarkable. New contacts with the Mediterranean world simply enhanced the ability of some to rise to dominance over others, leading to the development of larger territorial units. The problem now is that with the removal of the warrior society, and the defensive nature of hillforts, and the hierarchy resident within them, the Middle to Late Iron Age transformation becomes an even stranger, more bewildering phenomenon. Where then did these Late Iron Age dynasties that culminated in the rule of Cunobelin come from? How did they emerge from their Middle Iron Age past?

One of the key elements in this story, which is frequently left out, is gold. Gold had been known in the Bronze Age, but the sum of all the gold found in the Early and Middle British Iron Age (outside Scotland) is one gold ring from East Yorkshire, and that has been lost (Jope 1995). This is decidedly unimpressive. But from the mid to late second century onwards gold re-emerges in the archaeological record of southern Britain in the form of coin and torcs. Both the gold *per se* and this new form of material culture, coin, were alien to Britain. As such they would have been invested with the kind of values and mystery commonly associated with goods from a distant land (Helms 1988). Finds of gold coins have been found in far more locations than Dressel 1a amphorae, and yet the potential of this medium as being a significant causal factor in the changes seen in the last two centuries BC has not been significantly addressed. It would not be too unreasonable to assume that these new forms of material culture in some ways featured in the articulation of power relationships, through either their display or exchange. In which case it is worth exploring the potential impact of their arrival a little more closely than has been done hitherto. In the rest of this chapter, I will examine what is known of the structure of authority and kingship in later Iron Age northern Europe, and how the re-emergence of gold in Britain can be tied in with other significant changes taking place in the archaeological record.

Individual authority and the *comitatus*

The core–periphery framework, within which northern European studies of the Late Iron Age have been studied over the last two decades, presented a picture of the evolution of 'celtic society' on the periphery of the expanding Roman world. Put in its simplest terms, communities were more developed and politically evolved the closer they were to the Roman world. Nash (1981) saw nascent state-formation taking place amongst the tribes of central Gaul; here kingship gave way to new institutions which restricted the power of any one individual. Amongst the Aedui we hear of the *Vergobretos*, an annually elected magistrate with the authority of a king, though limited in his powers by legal restraints preventing him from leaving the territory (thereby gaining military prowess), and by restricting access of other members of his family to the title until his death (thereby preventing the rise of dynastic rulers). Alongside this were the creation of *oppida*, coinage and a higher level of material culture which included more imports from the Mediterranean world. All of these features were seen as giving these 'tribes' the characteristics of developing states. Meanwhile, just as the growing Roman presence in southern Gaul had had an effect on the Aedui and others, so these groups had an effect on the communities to the north, perhaps starting out by raiding them to procure resources, including slaves, for the insatiable Roman market, but then developing into more formal patron-client relationships. Examples of this include the Bellovaci in north-east Gaul who were said to be under the protection of the central Gallic Aedui (Caesar, *BG* 2.3). This core–periphery model was extended to Britain, with the Belgae raiding the south coast, then trading and settling there (Haselgrove 1984b).

   This model was adapted to include a discussion of Britain after Caesar's conquest of Gaul. The south-east was seen as the core territory, gaining imports from the Roman world, whilst procuring resources from less-developed communities around them. On the eve of the Claudian annexation, Cunobelin's 'kingdom' based on Camulodunum could have laid claim to being significantly more developed than any other polity in Britain at the time. It, too, had client communities such as the Dobunni (Dio 20.2). Perhaps, given time, the model might have suggested that it also would have developed into a more oligarchical structure. The broadest discussion and application of this thesis has been Cunliffe (1988).

   Various problems exist with this model, the most important being the extremely unilinear sense of political evolution it places upon the evidence. At first sight it appears to fit very well with the data, though on closer inspection perhaps this is illusory. Much of it was developed from Caesar's description of Gaul, but Caesar was only dealing with a narrow chronological time-slice in his commentaries, so a long-term, dynamic picture of change cannot be reconstructed from this material. However, there are three regions where 'celtic' groups have been recorded in the classical record over a much longer time-span, and the political trajectory their development took is instructive (Dobesch 1980:182-236; Roymans 1990:37-8). Amongst the 'celts' in the eastern Alps, northern Italy and the Galatians, earlier kings were replaced to make room for the rule of a broader aristocracy, just as we see with the developments amongst the Aedui. Nonetheless in each instance kingship

Table 1.1. *The Roman perception of the social structure of tribes in north-east Gaul and parts of Germany (the location of these different communities is given in Fig. 2.2)*

Communities to which the term 'king' (*rex*) is applied:		
Eburones	Dual kingship (Ambiorix and Catuvolcus). Ambiorix complained that the people had as much power over him as he had over them. Catuvolcus killed himself with poison from a yew tree in 53 BC after a failed rebellion. This has been interpreted as a ritual suicide (Roymans 1990:34).	Caesar *BG* 5.24-7 and *BG* 6.31
Suessiones	Kingship. First headed by Diviciacus, who also held domains in Britain; then by Galba: 'to whom as a just and able man, the supreme direction of the war was being entrusted by common consent. He possessed 12 strongholds, and undertook to furnish 50,000 troops.'	Caesar *BG* 2.4
Atrebates	Commius was made 'king of the Atrebates' by Caesar, though whether this was a new appointment or recognition of an existing situation is unclear.	Caesar *BG* 4.21
Frisia	Dual kingship (Verritus and Malorix). They visited Rome in Nero's reign.	Tacitus *Annales* 13.54
Batavi	Whilst the position at the time of Caesar is not clear, the Batavi at some point had a monarchy: Iulius Civilis claimed to be of royal descent in the mid-first century AD.	Tacitus *Hist.* 4.13
Remi	In 57 BC 'The Remi . . . sent Iccius and Andecombogius, the leading men of their tribe' to pass information on to Caesar and negotiate with him. Caesar says that the Remi and Suessiones enjoyed the same laws, obeyed the same king and magistrate. A commander Vertiscus is named as the chief magistrate of the tribe a few years later.	Caesar *BG* 2.3; 8.12
Communities where kings are not mentioned but other types of leader (e.g. *principes*) are:		
Bellovaci	Diviciacus the Aeduian blamed the disaffection of the Bellovaci on the leading men of the community, and said they had fled to Britain. The Bellovaci had lived under the protection of the Aedui, in return for which they provided troops. No mention is made of a king.	Caesar *BG* 2.14
Nervi	Boduognatus is named as 'commander-in-chief'. Individuals are described as leaders and chiefs. No mention is made of a king.	Caesar *BG* 2.23; 5.41
Treveri	In Caesar's narrative there were two rivals amongst the leaders of the Treveri, who were described as fighting for supremacy: Indutiomarus and Cingetorix. Later Tacitus represents them as having had a monarchy, saying that Iulius Classicus in the mid-first century AD claimed to be of royal descent.	Caesar *BG* 5.3-4; Tacitus *Hist.* 4.55
Tenctheri and Usipetes	These crossed the Rhine into Gaul and subsequently came to blows with Caesar. In all the discussion a king or leader is not mentioned.	Caesar *BG* 4.1-4; 4.16-8
Ubii	The Ubian chief and council are mentioned, but no king.	Caesar *BG* 4.11
No explicit statements:		
Morini, Menapii, Ambiani, Veliocasses, Aduatuci, Viromandui		

returned. This Dobesch related to times of stress, such as periods of migration or threats of conquest where in each situation the case for a strong war-leader provided a basis for the re-establishment of a monarchy. However, upon a return to longer-term stability, pressure from the aristocracy reduced and occasionally abolished the position of king. Looking back at the evidence from central Gaul we can see just such strains on these 'proto states' in the years leading up to the Gallic Wars (Roymans 1990). At the start in the run up to the migration of the Helvetii, Orgetorix tried to establish himself as their king. Then later, in response to the Roman threat, Vercingetorix and Indutiomarus both tried to re-establish the monarchy in other areas where it had previously been abolished; at the same time Arminius was carving out a power-base amongst the Germans. We have to consider that monarchy/individual power was by no means a fixed, permanent institution, and that political evolution is very historically contingent, and so assumptions about linear evolution should be avoided.

With the above in mind we should now turn our attention to the description of the political situations which our sources provide for us in the closest part of the continent to Britain: north-east Gaul and Germany. This is summarised in Table 1.1. In general the evidence paints a patchwork picture of the situation; no two neighbouring communities were necessarily organised in the same way. Kings (*regnes*) are mentioned in some communities but not others, and where they did exist they appear to have had varying levels of authority. Frequently Caesar just mentions the existence of a broader aristocracy (*principes*) without being any more specific. To a certain extent we must constantly keep in mind the idea that varying degrees and roles of personal authority may not have translated particularly easily from their Gaulish/Germanic context into these simple Latin terms. Nonetheless, the texts represent Caesar's and other authors' perception of the situation. The variability revealed even in this relatively restricted area is enormous, and this should caution us against trying to apply too uniform or clear a picture to south-east Britain at a comparable date; varying political structures could easily have existed in different counties in Britain, and the situation before Caesar could have been extremely fluid.

In addition to Caesar's nomenclature for the elites of these different communities, we also find evidence for a hierarchy between them. For example the Eburones and Condrusi were clients of the Treveri, though to complicate matters the Eburones also paid tribute to the Aduatuci (*BG* 4.6 and 5.27). The hierarchy of communities also suggests that there was certainly the potential for hierarchies of kingship, as occurred in early Medieval Ireland.

Within the context of kingship/authority, what role did wealth play? Wealth, social status and warfare were common motifs in the classical depictions of the Gauls. A great deal of competition for rank took place amongst the elite, with individuals expending huge amounts on providing their clients with feasts and gifts. Those who could attract the largest number of clients were deemed the most influential and powerful. But it is suggested that these clients were only retained as long as success in warfare and hospitality continued (cf. Athenaeus 4.36–40; Caesar, *BG* 4.15).

> Wealth – precious metal ornaments such as torcs and rings, weaponry, cattle
> – and its use within the clientage system was fundamental to the social order
> and as such was in the control and gift of the elite (e.g. Polybius 2.17;
> Diodorus Siculus 5.27). The preoccupation in the eyes of the Classical world
> of this society with warfare was intimately bound up with the social structure,
> success in warfare offering a mechanism for acquiring booty such as valuables
> and slaves, ransoms and productive land, and thus the capacity to attract
> further clients (Strabo, *Geography* 4.4.2).
> (Haselgrove 1984a:84)

Early gold coinage has been perceived as fitting within this framework as a specialised form of wealth, used for articulating client relationships (cf. Allen 1976; Nash 1981). Haselgrove and Nash also consider that into the first century BC, the versatility of coin may have led to it supplanting other mechanisms in the discharge of social obligations such as mercenary payments, bridewealth, tribute, fines and rents.

One specific way in which members of the elite exerted their will, whether they were called *principes* or kings, was through the creation and retention of a *comitatus*. Tacitus refers to individual leaders in Germany who surrounded themselves with a loyal body of horsemen.

> Both prestige and power depend upon being continually attended by a large
> train of picked young warriors, which is a distinction in peace and a
> protection in war. And it is not only in a chief's own nation that the superior
> number and quality of his retainers brings him glory and renown.
> Neighbouring states honour them also, courting them with embassies and
> complimenting them with presents. Very often the mere reputation of such
> men will virtually decide the issue of a war.
> (Tacitus, *Germania* 13; published *c.* AD 98)

Similar motifs recur in Caesar's commentaries from various parts of Gaul. Dumnorix the Aeduan was said to have 'maintained at his own expense a considerable force of cavalry, which he kept in attendance upon him' (*BG* 1.18). So too did one of the Ebuorian leaders, Ambiorix; upon being taken by surprise by the Roman forces he 'escaped alive, though he lost all the military equipment that he had with him, his carriages and his horses' (*BG* 6.30). Commius the Atrebatian also has a group of horsemen with him whenever he is mentioned (*BG* 8.23). We get slightly more detail from Caesar's representation of Crassus' campaigns in Aquitania:

> the king of the tribe, Adiatuanus, attempted a sortie . . . with six hundred
> followers who were bound to him with a vow of loyalty. The Sotiates call such
> persons *soldurii*. The friend to whom they attach themselves undertakes to
> share with them all the good things in life, on the understanding that, if he
> meets with a violent end, they shall either share his fate or make away with
> themselves; and within living memory of man none has yet been known to
> refuse to die when the friend to whom he had sworn allegiance was killed.
> (Caesar, *BG* 3.22)

Table 1.2. *Proportion of principal animal bones from Danebury*

Danebury	Early cp3–5 470–310 BC	Middle cp6 310–270 BC	Late cp7 270–100/50 BC	Latest cp8–9 100/50 BC–AD 50
Sheep	62.5%	56.7%	63.1%	54.4%
Cattle	22.8%	24.9%	21.0%	31.7%
Pig	11.4%	13.9%	12.5%	6.7%
Horse	**3.3%**	**4.5%**	**3.4%**	**7.3%**
No. of frag.	n=4191	n=3133	n=33,730	n=1317

Data: Grant (1991:448, Table 9.7). Calculated on the basis of fragment counts from all phased contexts. The data include the bones from the 1979–88 seasons, but not those from 1969–78, as the report for these did not distinguish the cp7 material from cp8–9 (Grant 1984b:499, Table 61).

This perception may owe much to earlier ethnographies, the sources are patchy and there is liable to have been a significant degree of variation amongst the different Gallic communities; however, at a minimum we can conclude that powerful individuals frequently had a large permanent male retinue around them. These leaders might be the kings of communities as Adiatuanus was, or they might be potential usurpers such as Dumnorix the Aeduian, wishing to wrestle power from his brother and the existing oligarchy.

It is at this point that we should turn away from the continental testimony with all its inherent problems, and turn to the specific archaeological evidence from Britain in the years shortly before Caesar's visits. Do we have any evidence for the existence of *comitates* or individuals marking themselves out from their peers?

To start with let us return to the area around Danebury where Cunliffe's excavations have provided the richest database. It was at the end of ceramic phase 7 (cp7) that slingstones were hoarded and the entranceway to Danebury was burnt down, and it was in the final layers of that phase that the majority of the horse fittings were found. The date for this destruction is difficult to pin down precisely. The final enhancement of the sites defences took place around 100 BC and the subsequent destruction was not long thereafter (Cunliffe 1995a:100). Then things changed. The evidence for occupation is much reduced: the ceramics which are present (cp8) are now dominated by wares from the Poole Harbour area, demonstrating new contact with the coast, and there are fewer pits with propitiatory deposits, suggesting a significant change in whatever social requirements there had been to make them in the first place. However perhaps most relevant to the discussion here are some changes in the faunal assemblage. Whereas hitherto horse had made up only a tiny proportion of the larger mammals from the site, now the proportion approximately doubles (Table 1.2).

At about the same time as the decline or transformation of Danebury (cp7), Bury Hill, a nearby hillfort, was reoccupied. It was redefined with a massive new ditch with a rampart on both inner and outer lips. Occupation was intense but short lived, and the rise in proportion of horse bones at Danebury pales into insignificance in

comparison to its dominance at 48% at this site, complemented by a large collection of iron and bronze horse gear (Cunliffe 1995b).

> If . . . Bury Hill II . . . was set up as a rival focus to Danebury, we might be witnessing the final stage in a power struggle between a long established polity and a newly emerging faction. The emphasis on horse and vehicle trappings may be a reflection of the development of a more warlike situation. It may be no accident that the bulk of the horse gear from Danebury was found in the last stratified phase of cp7 broadly contemporary with the Bury Hill II occupation.
> (Cunliffe 1995a:100)

Bury Hill awaits full publication, but in the light of the earlier discussion the idea that it might represent the location of a leader and his *comitatus* is very tempting. Unlike Danebury it was located right next to a plentiful water supply which horses would have required. Activity at Bury Hill was short lived, ceasing as cp7 gave way to cp8, when activity at Danebury was scaled down. But at the same time yet another site in the area was brought back into occupation and massively re-defended:

> . . . at this time that the long-established settlement at Suddern Farm was enclosed within a new system of very substantial ditches. Hints that the site may have been of high status are provided by the discovery there of fragments of wine amphorae, a pottery vessel imported from N-W France, and a large quantity of wheel-made pottery from the Poole Harbour production centre. A simple explanation would be to see the massive ditches as a symbol of high social prestige.
> (Cunliffe 1995a:101)

This small area of central-southern England appears to show marked changes towards the end of cp7, with horses and horse gear becoming increasingly prominent, and new types of sites emerging such as Suddern Farm, which unambiguously represent what must be considered 'elite residences' or 'high-status sites' (making a change from the earlier ambiguities of the evidence from hillforts).

Broadening the scene out to other sites in central-southern England we see a fairly similar picture. The other area which has seen relatively intensive fieldwork is in the vicinity of Maiden Castle. No two areas are identical, but related phenomena can be detected here as well. From the MIA to the LIA there is again a rise in the proportion of horse bone in relation to pig, cattle and sheep; it rose from 1.6% in phase 6, the densest period of occupation, to 11.8% in phase 7, the LIA (data based on fragment counts: Armour-Chelu 1991:143). The rise is impressive, though the faunal assemblage for the latest layers was small in comparison to the main occupation of the site so the figures may be distorted. However, other changes went alongside the rise of horse bone. The nature of the occupation of the site also changed, and Sharples described it as being dramatically different:

> There is no indication [in the LIA] of continuous occupation across the interior and the layout of the streets and communal storage areas had been

abandoned. The occupation was patchy and probably largely concentrated in the area of the original Early Iron Age fort.

Activity also extended outside the interior of the fort. The area within the earthworks of the eastern entrance was an industrial area, with extensive metalworking. Further out, there was the cemetery of the settlement. In the Middle Iron Age, both of these activities were dispersed within the settlement and appeared to be integrated with other aspects of the domestic life of the occupants. Their isolation is another sign of the increasing segregation of role and function in Late Iron Age society.

(Sharples 1991:263)

Sharples also perceived a rise in the degree of enclosure and the establishment of field systems in the vicinity of Maiden Castle. All of this he associated with the reappearance of individuals of status and wealth, as identified by material culture ranging from high-quality ceramics and personal adornment to new burial rites and the advent of coin.

At Hod Hill, another hillfort, we also see changes in its latest Iron Age stages with the construction of a palisade dividing off the 'chieftain's hut' from his peers, though the dating here is not secure (Richmond 1968). At Gussage All Saints, again in its final phase, one of the roundhouses was enclosed by a deep ditch marking it off (Wainwright 1979), and again a rise in the proportion of horse was identified from the MIA to LIA phases from 5.3% to 8.2% (based on minimum number of individuals; Harcourt 1979:157). At both sites, hitherto occupied for a long time, individuals were being marked out as different.

From the architectural differentiation and the selective distribution of imports it is clear that social stratification was increasing at this time, or to be more precise, it was becoming archaeologically manifest, and the increase in equestrian material culture and horse bones happens at the same time. The social control of central-southern Britain appeared to be changing. Perhaps we might be moving away from our 'egalitarian' hillforts and towards a landscape managed, ruled and terrorised by new leaders with their faithful followings.

An unreliable idea of the scale of the men/horses under arms comes from Caesar during his visit to Britain in 54 BC. After a defeat against the Romans on the banks of the Thames, 'Cassivellaunus had now given up all hope of fighting a pitched battle. Disbanding the greater part of his troops, he retained only some 4000 charioteers . . .' (Caesar, *BG* 5.19). Of course the testimony is biased and the numbers might be exaggerated, but when one considers that at Gussage All Saints there were, at a minimum, the remains of 50 sets of chariot fittings present, then large *comitates* do not seem so unfeasible.

If there was a trend which involved a move towards the control and management of large number of horses, then discussion should not continue without mention of some of the earliest *oppida*. Many of these are situated in valley bottom locations. This has previously been discussed in terms of providing better locations to control trade and communications, as these sites were viewed as commercial centres to go

alongside the new medium of coinage and all the new imported goods arriving. However, an alternative factor can be seen in their foundation: many of them enclose or include large areas down by water meadows. Oram's Arbour (Winchester, Hants), situated beneath the earlier hillfort of St Catherine's Hill, enclosed a large area on the valley side down to the river Itchen, which at this date existed as a series of water channels along the valley bottom providing excellent grazing. Dyke Hills (Oxon.), on the northern edge of the area dominated by hillforts, occupied a spur in the bottom of the Thames Valley. With a *comitatus* as a power-base, and a herd of horses to manage, water meadows and water itself were very valuable resources; so valley bottom sites were more appropriate than hilltops. This is the case for some of the later *oppida* as well. At Verulamium the Devils and New Dykes enclose the northern part of the valley bottom; curiously the ditch is on the inside rather than the outside, again suggesting defence was not the primary purpose, and opening up the possibility that it was an area for keeping prestige stock (Fig. 7.9). The development of Silchester is also instructive; the settlement was established rapidly on a virgin site, probably with a fairly significant population size. The pollen evidence shows a significant shift upon its foundation – not from woodland to arable to keep the population fed, but from woodland to extensive pasture. The outer earthworks at the site may again relate to protected pasture (Fig. 7.10).

Precisely how these individuals broke free from the MIA social constraints on the concentration of power is unclear, though I would imagine the arrival of so much gold probably had more to do with it than the arrival of only a few Mediterranean imports. Gold provided a lot of potential for the display of authority using torcs, and for the articulation of social relationships and obligations through the exchange of coin. But there is the additional question of where the gold came from, and the mechanisms for its arrival. Caesar provides us with two possible suggestions. First he refers to Diviciacus, king of the Suessiones in NE Gaul in the previous generation; it was said that he had also held domains in Britain (*BG* 2.4). This would provide for the movement of wealth, as payments were made to clients. However, his second reference is to the migration of the Belgae to Britain, and this is more problematic.

The migration of the Belgae has caused much anxiety in archaeological narratives of the Iron Age, stemming largely from a mistaken association between this 'migration' and the Aylesford–Swarling burial rites which appeared across south-east England, though mainly in the area north of the Thames. This link was effectively dismissed by Birchall (1965), who pointed out that virtually all the burials were post-Caesarean, and therefore they could not be taken to represent Caesar's immigrants. This is what Caesar said:

> The interior of Britain is inhabited by people who claim, on the strength of an oral tradition, to be aboriginal; the coast, by Belgic immigrants who came to plunder and make war – nearly all of them retaining the names of the tribes from which they originated – and later settled down to till the soil.
> (Caesar, *BG* 5.12)

The statement about tribal names creates resonances when one thinks of the later

Roman *civitas* names in central-southern England, including the 'Atrebates' centred upon Silchester, and the 'Belgae' centred upon Winchester (Cunliffe 1982). However, demonstrating any form of migration from one populated area to another is extremely difficult. Finding convincing archaeological correlates for even some of the best historically attested migrations is hard, such as the 'celtic' migration into the Po Valley in the fifth century BC, or the movement around southern Europe of the Cimbri or Teutones in the later second/first century BC. Nonetheless, the idea of groups coming from the continent to raid and plunder, and finally settling, does give a rather neat context for the sudden instability which appears in the late second/early first century in Britain.

Archaeologically this was the time when contact was re-established between both sides of the Channel. The site which has received the most attention has been Hengistbury Head (Cunliffe 1987). The chalk headland jutting out into the opening of the Solent made for a wonderfully protected harbour on its northern side, while the promontory itself was easily secured by the construction of a double dyke. However Hengistbury was not alone; other locations such as Poole harbour and part of the Sussex coast near Arundel also show concentrations of imports. These contacts were broadly spread across northern Gaul from Armorica eastwards (Cunliffe and de Jersey 1997).

Not only did imports arrive, but in some areas more deep-rooted changes also appear. At Westhampnett (near Chichester, W. Sussex) we have perhaps the earliest cremation cemetery of the southern Iron Age. For a period of about 40 years, from *c.* 90–50 BC, burial took place at this small site using a rite strongly influenced by contemporary traditions in Normandy or adjacent regions of France (Fitzpatrick 1997:208). The ceramics were also strongly influenced by Normandy styles, though they were made in local fabrics. This is also about the time coinage was no longer just imported but also manufactured here.

Changes took place beyond the coast. For much of the final stages of early La Tène and middle La Tène periods the design of British brooch types had begun to diverge in style from those of the continent. This remained true for much of Britain throughout the second century BC, except for one area, that of Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. Here a few appeared which displayed continental innovations; these were Hawkes and Hull's types 3A–B dating to the later stages of middle La Tène, i.e. the mid-second century BC (Hull and Hawkes 1987; Haselgrove 1997a:54). Whatever was happening on the coast was also being reflected in dress/display inland.

So let us summarise the situation. The south was dominated by hillforts with little obvious internal evidence for architectural or other features to make any one individual stand out. In the late second century BC and early first century BC we see changes taking place at a number of sites: enclosures mark out individuals; there are more horse trappings found and at some sites horse makes up a larger proportion of the faunal assemblage. Whereas hitherto rather plain 'saucepan pots' had dominated ceramic assemblages (cp7), now decorated wares and pots from the Dorset coast appear (cp8), alongside which continental imports begin to be found on the coast and at a restricted number of sites inland. This is also the time that gold begins to

arrive in the area (of which more later). Added to this, ceramics are now being made on the coast in local fabrics imitating Gallic forms, and placed in burials, imitating Gallic rites. Given all of this I find the idea that much of this disruption to the existing settlement pattern was caused by the emergence or intrusion of 'warrior groups' or *comitates* very appealing.

Hitherto there has been a strong temptation to try to apply the 'warrior band' and 'feasting' image of celtic society to the age of hillforts. However the lack of strong archaeological indicators of such an elite has led to the Middle Iron Age being seen as a far less autocratic place. Nonetheless, it may be that this image would instead be far better applied to the twilight years of the forts, as new power-bases using the horse, gold and Mediterranean imports wrestled control from wherever it had hitherto lain. The idea that change was a consequence of simply a few traders and Mediterranean imports is a little too placid for me; I imagine the Middle to Late Iron Age transition as a far more violent time, at least for a short while as new forms of authority were established.

To conclude, there are two possible analogies which may help us understand the inception and nature of these new warrior bands. First, with the expansion of the Roman world it is a commonplace to believe that the demand for slaves from Gaul and northern Europe increased. In some more modern colonial circumstances the demand was not met directly by imperialist entreupeneurs, but rather indirectly through new political structures which developed amongst the native population to procure these goods. For example in West Africa, whilst slavery had existed in some form previously, the demand increased radically with the arrival of the Portuguese:

> Very rapidly . . . the scale of European buying increased beyond previous bounds. New African political powers emerged to manage foreign relations, maximise profits from slave trading, and minimise the risk of European invasion or direct slave recruitment. Inter-European competition for slaves to man the mines and plantations of the Americas enabled the stronger and more astute front-line kingdoms to prosper at the expense of the West African middle belt which became a depressed raiding ground.
> (Birmingham 1979:29)

Perhaps Britain in the late MIA and early LIA was such a raiding ground, and the horsemen groups represent the developing structures to articulate this trade, with the arrival of gold being its reward. The warrior groups are also reminiscent of bands of men described in Medieval Irish literature, which specifically talks of men living apart from the rest of society, loyal to their leader. These were the *fiana*, and they provide the second analogy.

Irish literature has two bodies of tradition related to 'the hero'. In both traditions heroes were perceived as warriors/magicians, moving frequently between the sacred and profane worlds, but in other respects the two bodies of tradition markedly diverge. One set, exemplified by the tales of Cu Chulainn, represents the hero as faithful to his king and the community. This is the classic hero which also has some reality in history. However the second body of tradition refers to the *fiana*, or band of

warriors who existed outside tribal tradition. They were a body of men who hunted and fought during the summer season, then lived off the country like billeted troops during the winter months. They were not subject to the king, but to their own leaders. When joining the *fiana* an individual had to go through a whole series of initiation ceremonies; a consequence of joining this band was the severance of ties and obligations with one's family. No longer was one obliged to avenge wrongs done to one's own clan, nor could his clan claim compensation for his death. They existed outside the communal institutions which bound everyone else together. So what is the historicity of these groups, or are they merely mythological inventions? That is difficult to tell.

> The Irish annalists admit as a matter of course the historicity of the Fenian Cycle. For the historian Keating (17th century) the *fiana* are a professional army charged with the defence of the country against foreign invasion. This conception prevails in the most recent stories, but it does not correspond to conditions reflected by the earlier texts, in which the *fiana* appear constantly at war with each other or with the royal power, and assume no nationalistic function.
> (Sjoestedt 1994:86)

It is all too easy to imagine that the dynasts of Late Iron Age Britain developed out of earlier pre-existing elites, or a gradual stratification of earlier social systems. But descriptions of leaders of people such as the *fiana* are reminiscent of our Aeduan attempting to usurp authority, of the sacred oaths binding *soldurii* to their leader, of the multiplicity of 'kings' in Kent. If external pressure required the development of 'force' to protect MIA Britons against incursions, then either society had to change radically or latitude had to be given for these warrior elites to extend their authority.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed how the MIA/LIA transition is seen. Hillforts are being seen more as communal monuments that as the focal point of warlike elites in the MIA. However the more this happens, the greater the scale of the transition from this to the highly ranked dynasties of Britain on the eve of the arrival of Claudius' legions becomes. I have tried to suggest that the archaeological evidence demonstrates a significant degree of change in the later second century, early first century BC. The nature of the occupation at many sites changes and new sites come into existence, many of which appear to be dominated by horse-trappings and, indeed, horse remains. Alongside this came the arrival of gold, and also possibly migration on some scale from the continent. One possible reconstruction is to see these as a series of 'warrior bands', perhaps defensive in response to migration, perhaps aggressively engaged in the procurement of slaves; I doubt if the archaeological evidence could distinguish between the two. The next chapter will focus much more upon the nature of individual authority, and how leaders may have expressed their position and status using new media such as gold coin and torcs.