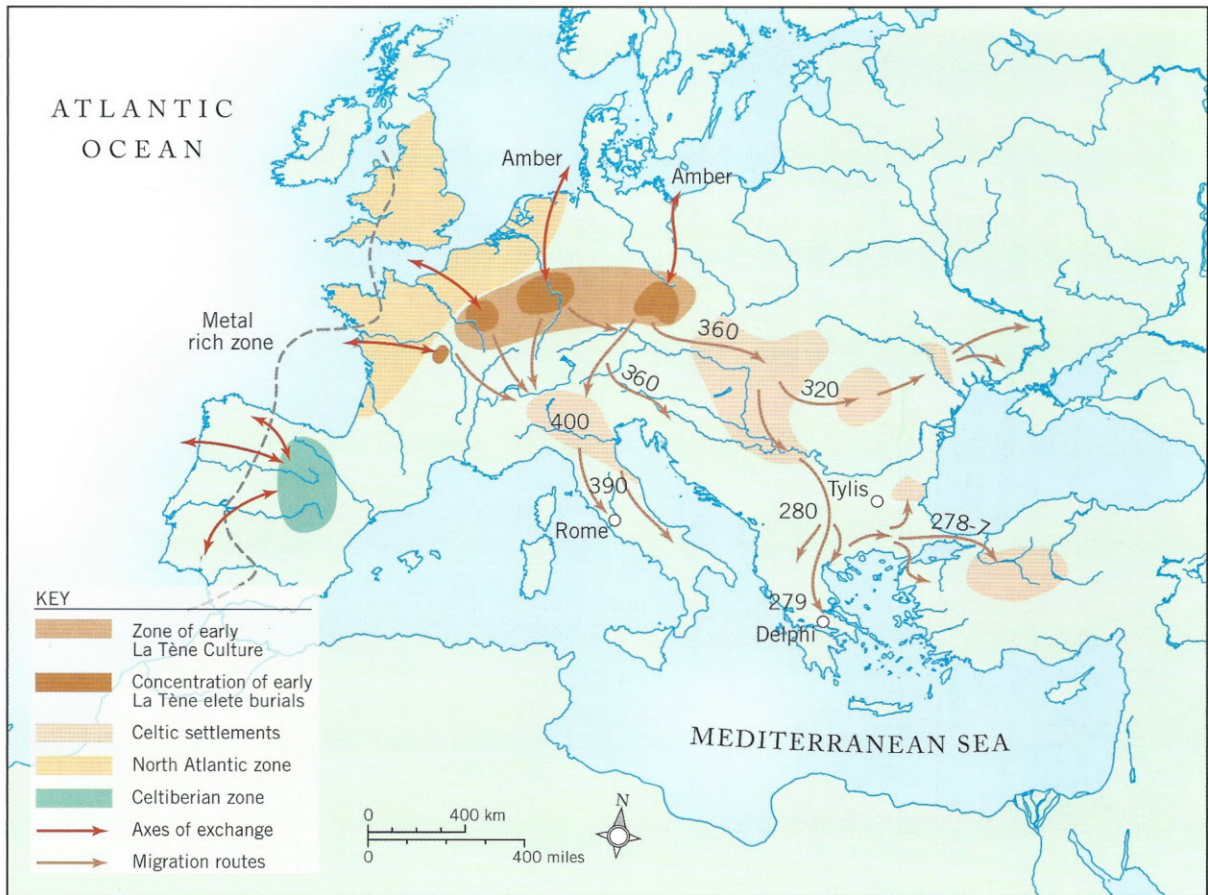


where new energies were unleashed. Graeco-Scythian metalwork draws from both traditions, creating a truly original art with the power to startle. Yet little if any of it would have been seen in the Aegean homeland. Once in the hands of the indigenous elites, it disappeared with them into their graves. It was not until the nineteenth century AD that the reappearance of these exquisite items, dug out of the kurgans by an entrepreneurial peasantry and acquired by the Russian aristocracy, brought the wonders of Graeco-Scythian art to an astonished and appreciative western audience.

The Rise of the Celts

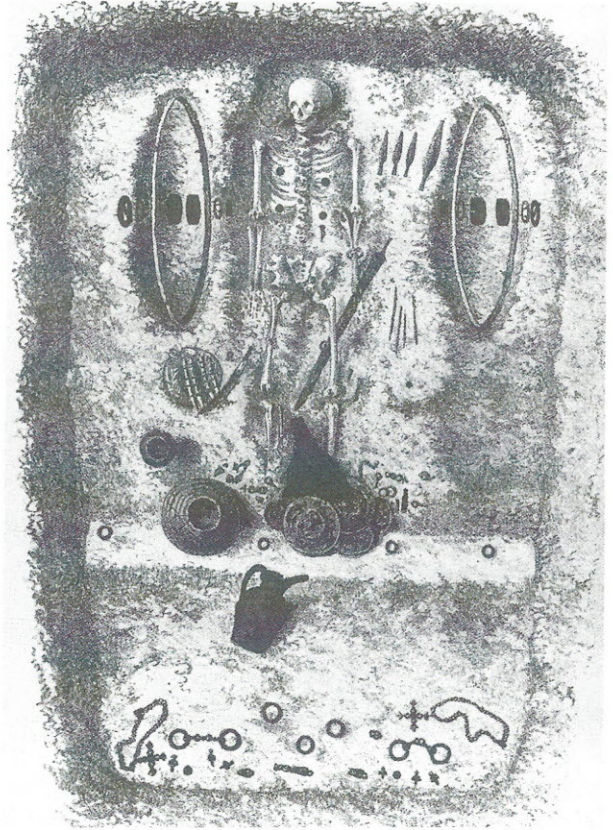
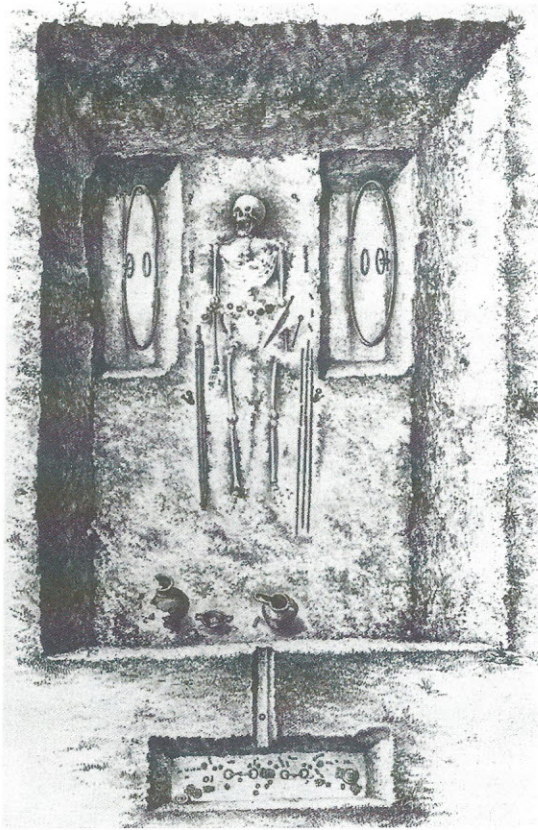
There has been much confusion about the use of the word 'Celt'. To early Greek writers like Hecataeus and Herodotus it meant peoples living in the west of Europe over against the Atlantic Ocean. But as time went on, the words 'Celt' and 'Gaul', which were often used synonymously, tended to be applied more generally to the barbarians of western Europe to distinguish them from the inhabitants of eastern Europe, who were banded together under the general name of 'Scythians'. When, therefore, the Roman and Greek worlds began to come into direct contact with migrants from west central Europe they classed them all as Celts or Gauls, though whether the migrants considered themselves to be ethnically one people is unknown. According to Julius Caesar, however, writing in the mid-first century BC, the tribes then occupying the part of France between the rivers Seine and Garonne did specifically call themselves Celts. Clearly the concept of the Celts was variously interpreted by ancient writers. We will use the word here in the same way as the historians Livy and Polybius, as a general term to refer to the tribes of west central Europe who migrated towards Mediterranean lands in the second half of the first millennium BC.

In the previous chapter we considered the Late Hallstatt elites who occupied a broad territory extending through west central Europe from north-eastern France across to southern Germany in the sixth century BC. This zone was linked to the Mediterranean by trade routes via the Rhône valley, and through the Alpine passes to the Po valley. Another transcontinental route led from the Po valley to eastern Pomerania on the Baltic. By the beginning of the fifth century these systems were in collapse and a new elite zone was beginning to develop around the outer fringe of the old Late Hallstatt zone: archaeologists call this new culture Early La Tène. A simple way to explain the shift in power is to suppose that the communities occupying key positions on the periphery of the Late Hallstatt zone were able to take control of the throughput of commodities. The inability of the Hallstatt chieftains any longer to ensure a flow of goods led their prestige-goods economy to collapse.



The La Tène cultural zone of the fifth century BC occupied a wide arc stretching from the mid-Loire valley to Bohemia. Within this it is possible to identify four specific regions where there were concentrations of elite burials: the area around Bourges, the Marne valley, the Moselle valley and Bohemia. Significantly each of these regions commanded a major route: Bourges controlled the route via the Loire valley to the Atlantic and the main sources of tin from Armorica and Britain; the Marne group sat between the Seine and the Meuse which provided access to the English Channel and the southern North Sea; the Moselle group controlled the Rhône–Rhine axis; while the Bohemian group developed astride the major intercontinental route between the Po valley and the North European Plain with the amber resources of the Baltic beyond. The emergence of the La Tène elites, therefore, can most simply be explained by their favourable geographical positions, controlling the flow of commodities from western and northern Europe to the consuming Mediterranean world. In return they received a range of luxury goods from the south.

10.24 Cultural interactions in Europe in the fourth to third centuries BC.



10.25 Two Early La Tène chariot burials from the Marne region of northern France: left from Somme-Bionne found in 1876; right from La Gorge-Meillet found in 1878. The graves were accompanied by Etruscan bronze flagons and horse gear for the pair of ponies which pulled each chariot.

Among the items traded northwards to the Early La Tène zone were Etruscan bronze vessels – beaked flagons, probably made at Vulci, and two-handled *stamnoi* (jars) used in the wine-drinking ritual. To accompany these sets, Attic Red-Figured cups, coming through the ports at the head of the Adriatic, were also trans-shipped to the north. Most of the trade seems to have been managed by the Etruscans who had by now firmly established themselves in the southern part of the Po valley. It was probably from the Etruscans, that the La Tène elites took over the idea of the fast two-wheeled chariot which they now also used as a funerary vehicle. In this way they were embracing the technology and style of the exotic Etruscan world while adapting them to suit traditional practices.

Etruscan trade with the north, passing through both the eastern and western Alpine passes, was being actively developed from the beginning of the fifth century BC. This would have required the negotiation of agreements with the communities controlling the southern approaches to the passes, but it may also have involved sending ambassadors to the north to establish friendly relationships with native elites. Already in the sixth century there are indications that this may

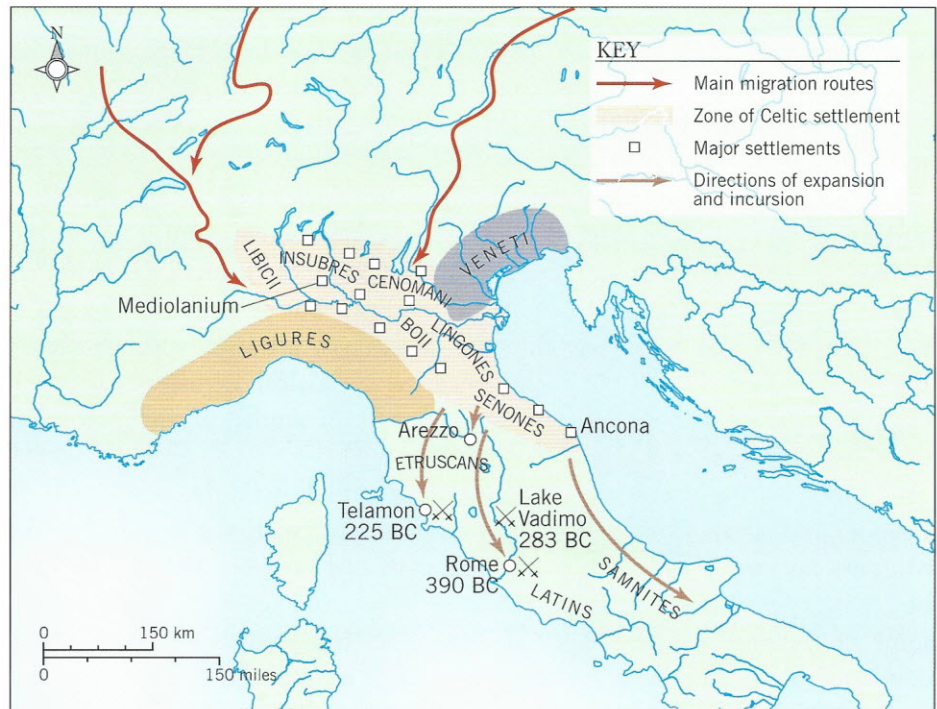
have been done with the east Pomeranians and now, in the early fifth century, the large number of Etruscan beaked flagons found in the Moselle region makes it look as though a special relationship had been established with the chieftains of the region. It is possible that the clusters of beaked flagons found in the Marne and Bohemia may also represent some kind of introductory offer.

The Early La Tène elites were receptive to Etruscan goods and ideas but quickly integrated them into their own highly distinctive culture. From the beginning local craftsmen were copying and adapting the form of the Etruscan flagon to better match their own aesthetic values, but even more spectacular was the way in which they developed a totally new art style – referred to as Early Celtic Art – from the basic concepts of classical Etruscan design by incorporating indigenous elements and aspects of animal art learned from their eastern neighbours.

One recurring theme in La Tène male burials was the deposition of weapons, usually a sword and one or more spears, with the deceased. This contrasts noticeably with Late Hallstatt burials and suggests that we may now be dealing with a more warlike society in which warrior activity and raiding had some prominence within the social system. Such a predisposition may have developed, or at least have become intensified, in response to the increasing demand for slaves by the Mediterranean world. Once it became known through contact with the south that slaves were a marketable commodity, the incentive would have been to acquire more by increasing the frequency of raiding.

Some time towards the end of the fifth century BC a massive social upheaval convulsed west central Europe. The effects can be seen in the archaeological record, while classical authors, particularly Livy and Polybius, give detailed accounts of what they believed to have been happening. Livy writes of the Celts living to the north of the Alps as having become so prosperous 'and so numerous that it seemed hardly possible to govern so great a multitude'. The king therefore decided to send his two nephews 'to find such homes as the gods might assign to them by augury and promised them that they should head as large a number of emigrants as they themselves desired'. One migrant group set out eastwards for the Black Forest and Bohemia, another took 'a far pleasanter road into Italy . . . with a vast host, some mounted, some on foot' (*Hist.* 5.34). Once in the Po valley, they defeated an Etruscan army and founded a settlement at Mediolanum (Milan). Polybius gives an outline of the Celtic settlement in the Po valley, enumerating the various tribes taking part and describing how they rapidly took over the entire region, except for the land of the Veneti who lived around the head of the Adriatic, later thrusting southwards down the Adriatic coast into Umbria. He goes on to describe their settlements and their society. They lived in open villages following 'no pursuit other than war and agriculture . . . they wandered

10.26 The movement of Celtic tribes into Italy in the fourth century BC and subsequent Roman response.



10.27 *Opposite:* A Celtic helmet from a burial at Canosa, Apulia, Italy decorated in distinctive Early La Tène style, fourth century BC. Helmets of this kind were developed by Celtic craftsmen in Italy and the idea was transmitted back into the Celtic homelands in Gaul.

from place to place and changed their dwellings as their fancy directed'. Wealth was measured in terms of gold and cattle, and status by the size of a man's entourage and his ability to offer hospitality.

There can be little doubt that the classical sources were describing a mass migration brought about by population pressure. The archaeological evidence is consistent with this. In the homeland in the Marne and Moselle regions there are clear signs of social disruption, with an apparent thinning-out of population, while the material culture of the early immigrants settling in the Po valley clearly derives from the Early La Tène culture zone north of the Alps. The date of the main migration lies at the end of the fifth century BC but there may have been more limited movements through the Alpine passes in the preceding centuries.

From their new homeland in the Po valley Celtic raiding parties penetrated the Apennines and descended on the cities of Etruria. Rome intervened but in 390 BC a Roman army was defeated. Large parts of Rome itself were sacked and the remainder besieged for some months before the Celts were bought off with a thousand pounds of gold. Thereafter Celtic war bands, sometimes serving as mercenaries, were active in Italy until the end of the third century BC, when the Roman army drove the remaining Celts back through the Apennines and then set about subduing and settling the Po valley with Roman colonies.



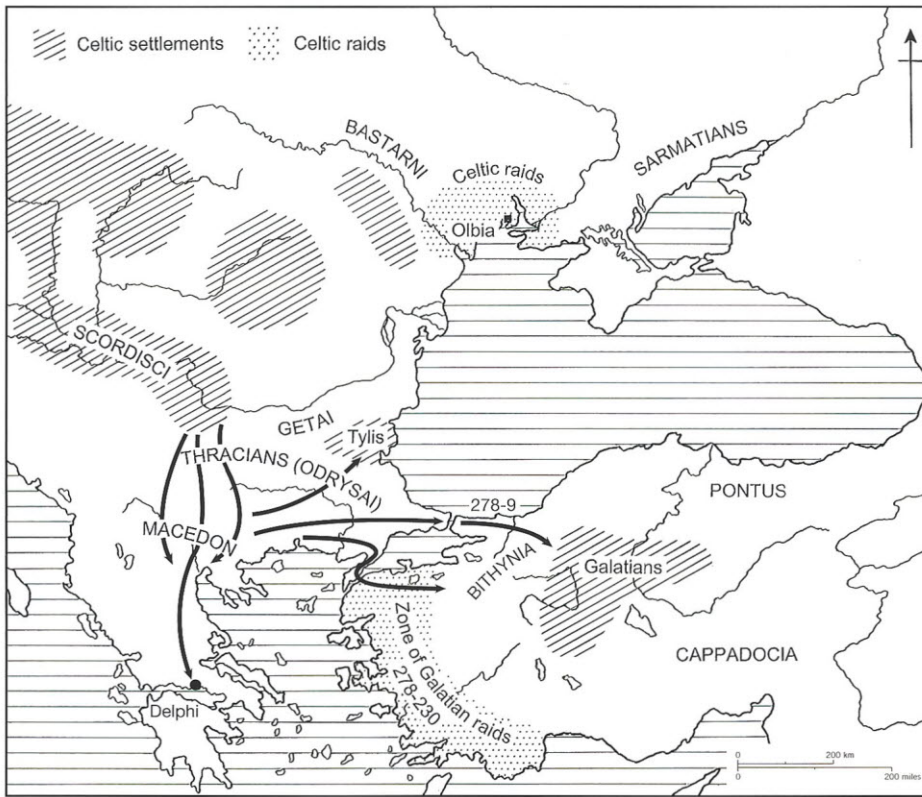
Meanwhile, the second band of migrants moved along the Danube valley into the Carpathian Basin, settling in both Transdanubia and the Great Hungarian Plain in the middle of the fourth century, some of the migrants moving into Transylvania about 320 BC. The evidence for this is largely archaeological. La Tène material culture spread throughout the region, replacing the Scythian material culture of the local inhabitants. What this means in terms of population replacement is more difficult to say. There can be no doubt that 'Celtic' immigrants moved into the area, but the probability is that they merged with the indigenous population to form a hybrid community. The material culture that emerged was predominantly La Tène in character but with a recognizable indigenous component.

From the Middle Danube valley (present-day Serbia) raids were mounted against the Illyrians and it was here that the Celts came into direct contact with the kingdoms of north-western Thrace with whom it appears they established a degree of harmony in their relations. At this time the Thracian region was fast coming under the domination of the Macedonians and in 335 BC Celtic emissaries visited the court of Alexander the Great to negotiate a treaty of friendship. Some flavour of that moment is captured by Strabo:

The king received them kindly and asked them, when drinking, what they most feared, thinking that they would say himself, but they replied that they feared nothing except that the sky might fall on them, although, they added, they put above everything else their friendship with such a man as he. (*Geog.* 7.3.8)

So long as the Macedonians had a firm hold on Thrace the Celtic groups were constricted to the region around the confluence of the Sava and the Danube (modern Belgrade). But in the chaos that followed Alexander's death, their love of raiding was given full rein again and in 279 BC a large Celtic raiding party fought its way southwards through Thrace and Greece to the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. The Greek sources give us to understand that the raid was unsuccessful and that the entire force rapidly retreated. Some of the invaders returned to their homeland in Serbia while others moved eastwards, crossing the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus and entering Anatolia, where eventually they set up a kingdom near present-day Ankara. This particular enclave continued to indulge its passion for raiding, choosing the rich Greek cities of the Aegean coastal region as its prey, until, eventually, in the mid-second century BC it was decisively defeated by the rulers of Pergamum.

The continent-wide scale of the migration was unprecedented. Transcontinental trade routes were disrupted, the long-term cultural divide between the western and eastern zones of central Europe was overridden and, for the first time, the civilized Mediterranean world experienced the full

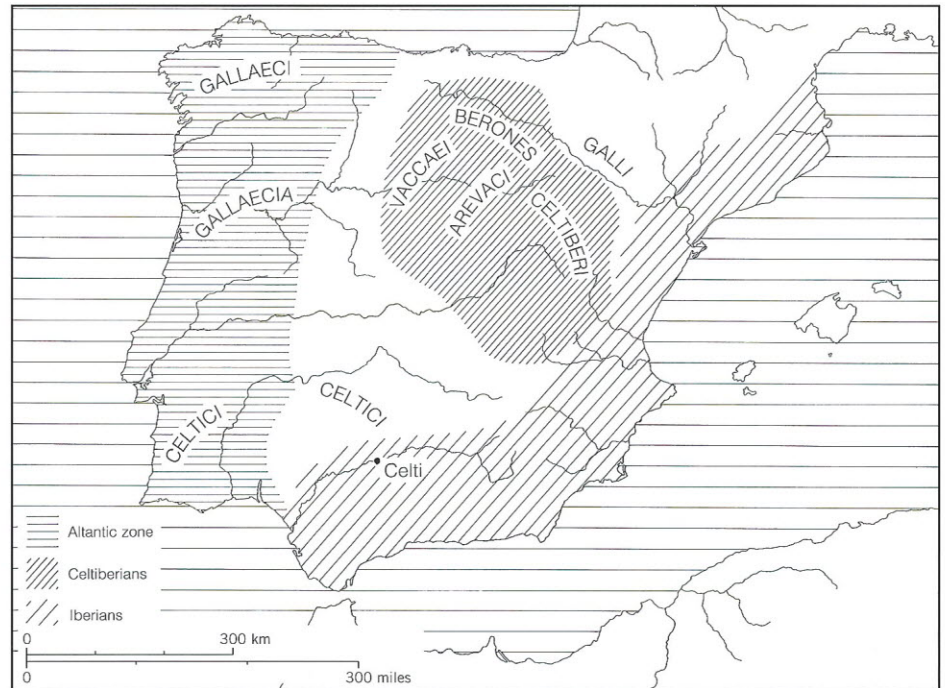


10.28 The Celts in eastern Europe and beyond, showing areas of settlement and the major thrust of the migrations of 279–277 bc.

might of its barbarian neighbours. It was a shock that Rome was never to forget.

What initiated the migrations is not entirely certain but Livy was probably right when he saw uncontrollable population growth as the underlying dynamic. La Tène society was based on warrior prowess and success in the raid. With more young men wishing to compete for status and with the general population increasing, the only safety valve was to find new homelands from which successful raids could be mounted – homelands preferably within easy reach of rich pickings. The Po valley offered the wealth of Italy, the Carpathian Basin had Thrace and Macedonia on its doorstep, from Transylvania raids could be mounted into the north Pontic zone, and from central Anatolia there was a broad periphery of ripe cities to prey on. Instead of being passive recipients of luxuries from the Mediterranean, the communities of the Middle European zone now set out to acquire them for themselves. There was also a social imperative. Since status was predicated on aggressive leadership, engagement with the Mediterranean world offered not only raiding opportunities but also the chance to sell mercenary services. Dionysius of Syracuse recruited Celtic mercenaries to fight with him in

10.29 The extent of the Celtiberian culture in Iberia with the peripheral Celtic tribes named. These tribal groups may have migrated from the Celtiberian homeland.



Greece. Mercenaries also found employment in the service of Hellenistic states in Anatolia and in Egypt. Mercenary activity was little different from perpetual raiding.

The population mobility that gripped temperate Europe from the fifth to the second centuries BC is also evident in Iberia. The powerful Celtiberians, comprising a number of separately named tribes, occupied a large part of the centre of the peninsula. From such a position they were able to benefit both from the metal resources of the west coast and ease of access to Mediterranean luxuries through the Iberian states that occupied the Levantine littoral. In the fifth century there is some archaeological evidence to suggest expansion westwards into the territory of the Vettones and into the Estremadura. The historian Pliny also writes of movements of Celtiberians south into Andalucía as well as north into what is now northern Portugal. In all these regions names such as Celtici, Celti, Galli and Gallaeci are recorded, derived from general ethnic designations rather than specific tribal names. This implies the movement of mixed groups made up of a number of different tribes. The evidence hints at a considerable degree of mobility in the centre and west of the peninsula but there is no reason to suppose that peoples from Europe beyond the Pyrenees were involved. It was an indigenous Iberian phenomenon. The similarity lay in the prime causes – population growth and the need for new outlets for aggressive energy.