Chapter 6: Prehistoric Europe North of the Mediterranean

# Chapter Summary [Copied from Olszewski 2019, Chapter 6]

* Mesolithic hunter–gatherer–foragers lived in Europe from 9600 to 4000 cal BC. During the early part of the Mesolithic, due to lower sea levels, continental Europe was linked to Great Britain by land across the southern North Sea basin.
* Mesolithic sites in northern Europe often have good organic preservation due to waterlogged conditions or peat bogs. This allows us to gain a fuller picture of their lives and activities.
* One of the last Mesolithic groups in Europe was the Ertebølle Culture of Scandinavia. They lived just north of expanding groups of Neolithic farmers. Ertebølle Culture sites yield evidence for intensive use of shellfish in addition to hunting land and sea animals and birds. Their cemeteries show special treatment of some individuals based on their grave goods and body placements. Dogs with grave goods are buried in a manner similar to humans.
* Domesticated plants and animals were not developed locally in Europe. Instead, groups of Neolithic farmers began to spread from the Middle East, at first into southeastern Europe (Balkan Peninsula). From there, two main waves of Neolithic colonization occurred.
* Cardial Ware Culture (6400 to 4700 cal BC): these groups spread through the Mediterranean area using boats to travel along the coasts. In addition to domesticated cereals, they also had sheep and goats.
* Linear Pottery Culture (5700 to 4500 cal BC): these farmers moved into central and eventually northwestern Europe following major rivers, such as the Danube, and their tributaries. They brought with them domesticated cereals, cattle, and pigs.
* Over time, some Linear Pottery Culture groups began to fortify their villages, and there is evidence of massacres, suggesting increasing levels of violence. This archaeological culture overlaps with the Ertebølle Culture, although they did not occupy the same areas.
* Another Neolithic group that overlapped with Ertebølle Culture was the Funnel Beaker Culture (4100 to 2800 cal BC). It was during this period that agricultural innovations such as the plow and wheeled wagons were developed. The Neolithic practice of dairying (adults drinking milk) is thought to have led to natural selection for lactose tolerance (adult ability to digest milk sugar without digestive issues), a feature that persists today, especially in people from Europe.
* Neolithic groups throughout Europe are well known for their construction of monuments, sometimes incorporating megaliths (large stones). Examples of these constructions include menhirs, alignments, causewayed enclosures, henges, and tombs (dolmens, long barrows, and passage graves).
* Stonehenge is one of the best known of the henge monuments. It was redesigned several times but was first constructed during the Neolithic period. In addition to a small bank and ditch, which gradually mostly filled in, there was a series of holes (Aubrey Holes) for the placement of bluestones brought from Wales and cremation burials. When the sarsens (sandstone megaliths) were added, the bluestones were rearranged. The layout of Stonehenge that we see today dates to the Bronze Age.
* British archaeologists have interpreted the Neolithic landscape, including monuments, in several ways. One is chronological, with changes in social practices over time—for example, the use of long barrows for group burials in the Early Neolithic but the abandonment of these structures in the Late Neolithic. Alternatively, this landscape can be perceived as landscapes of the living and of the dead, with wooden construction (e.g., houses) symbolizing the living and stone construction, such as Stonehenge, representing the dead (stone being more permanent than wood).
* During the Bronze Age (3000 to 800 cal BC), metallurgy that combined copper and tin to produce bronze artifacts was practiced. These ores and their sources became important resources in trade and exchange. Other trade items included amber, jet, salt, fur, and perhaps slaves.
* In the Early Bronze Age, most settlements are not fortified. By the Middle Bronze Age, more fortified sites, including ones on hilltops, begin to appear. This trend continues into the Late Bronze Age. Fortifications suggest increased levels of violence between communities, a pattern that may be supported by swords, daggers, shields, helmets, and other military equipment found in the burials of elite males. These elites are often called warriors. They may also have been “chiefs” controlling small “chiefdoms.”
* Bronze Age elites likely controlled trade routes as their sites are evenly spaced along major river systems and they and some of their group were warriors who could protect these routes. Metals were especially important. In addition to grave goods, metal artifacts have been found in what appear to be offering deposits in wetland areas (rivers, bogs) and in hoards that can number dozens to hundreds of pieces. Many of the hoards contain broken items.
* There were many changes in Bronze Age societies over time. In addition to fortified sites, other changes include how people were buried (in barrows, in cemeteries, in urnfields). Some of these differences mark elites as opposed to commoners, others are regional, while still others are chronological. Bronze Age Europe thus was not a single unified polity but many smaller societies that developed, were independent of each other, and then disappeared.
* During the Iron Age (800 cal BC to 59/51 BC), iron metallurgy was dominant. Making iron artifacts does not require other ores, and iron ore is widespread in Europe (unlike tin ore sources in the Bronze Age). Two well-known Iron Age groups are the Hallstatt Culture and La Tène Culture.
* In the Hallstatt Culture period (750 to 450 cal BC) of the Early Iron Age, fortified sites that functioned as central places for trade and exchange and craft work were common. Elite individuals gained wealth from the control of these activities as well as from owning land and managing agricultural products. Elite males continued to be buried with military equipment and are identified as warriors, but there also are a number of richly furnished burials of elite women. This might suggest that women had important social roles in Early Iron Age societies.
* The central places of the Hallstatt Culture are sometimes described as “urban,” but this is widely debated and continues to be an issue in the Late Iron Age. By the end of the Hallstatt Culture period, all of their central places were abandoned.
* Hallstatt Culture is followed by the Late Iron Age La Tène Culture (450 cal BC to 59/51 BC). Many features of this culture are similar to those of Hallstatt Culture. They include control of trade and exchange and agricultural products, land ownership, wealthy elites, male warrior leaders, and fortified central places. There are now large sites called oppida (usually fortified to some extent) and settlements identified as unenclosed agglomerations. The size and estimated population of some of these central places is sometimes argued to indicate urbanization, but not all researchers agree that La Tène had urban centers. Many of these central places, however, were not densely populated and had large open spaces that could have been used for ceremonies or other activities.
* By the late La Tène Culture period, there are indications that state-level polities may have been developing in some areas north of the Mediterranean. What these entities might ultimately have become is unknown because the Roman Empire extended its influence into parts of Europe beginning ca. 59 BC and imposed their system of political organization in these areas.

# Key Terms

**Bettelbühl necropolis:** a Hallstatt Culture cemetery near the Heunenburg in Germany (Europe) which contains a barrow burial (dating to 583 BC) of an elite woman.

**Bronze Age**: a period in the Old World characterized by the manufacture of bronze artifacts. In Europe, the Bronze Age is from 3000 to 800 cal BC. Beginning and end dates differ for various regions of Europe.

**Bruszczewo 5**: an Early Bronze Age fortified site in a wetlands (lake/moor) context in Poland (central Europe). It was abandoned during the Middle Bronze Age and reoccupied during the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age.

**Cardial Ware Culture:** Early Neolithic farming groups (6400 to 4700 cal BC) with pottery decorated by using the edges of cockle shells. They spread into Europe along the Mediterranean route by sea-faring from Greece.

**Carnac**: a series of 3,000 menhirs arranged as alignments during the Neolithic period in France (Europe).

**Causewayed enclosure:** a European Neolithic construction characterized by a series of concentric ditches and banks with access (causeways) across the ditches to a central open area. One interpretation is that these were ritual centers for Neolithic communities.

**Chiefdom:** a category of political organization that is described as a ranked society in which rank is inherited. Elites in a chiefdom live at central places, control densely populated regions, and have greater access to prestige goods and other resources.

**Dolmen**: a Neolithic tomb found in Europe. It has a few standing megalithic stones topped with a capstone.

**Duvensee:** a peat bog region in northern Germany with a series of Mesolithic sites showing targeted harvesting and processing of hazelnuts; the sites date between 8900 and 6500 cal BC.

**Ertebølle** **Culture:** a late Mesolithic hunter–gatherer–forager group (5500 to 4000 cal BC) in southern Scandinavia and northern Germany (Europe) that lived in proximity to people with food-production economies.

**Funnel Beaker Culture:** Late Neolithic groups in central and northern Europe (4500 to 2800 cal BC) who made pottery that had a globular body and an out-turned flaring rim. It is often interpreted as an interaction zone rather than a single culture.

**Hallstatt Culture:** the early part of the Iron Age in Europe, from about 750 to 450 cal BC. It is found north of the Alps in central Europe and extends in an arc to the east and west of Italy.

**Hambledon Hill:** a Neolithic causewayed enclosure in England (Europe) that has human skulls placed at intervals in one of the ditches.

**Heuneburg, the**: a Hallstatt Culture proto-urban center in southern Germany with evidence of trade with the Mediterranean and lavish burials of elites.

**Iron Age**: a period in Europe from about 800 to 59/51 cal BC. It is characterized by the manufacture and use of implements made of iron.

**La Tène Culture:** the later part of the Iron Age in Europe, from approximately 450 to 59/51 cal BC, when much of Europe was conquered by the Romans.

**Lactose tolerance:** most adults are not able to digest the milk sugar lactose without digestive issues. High frequencies of lactose tolerance in adults in some world populations, such as those descended from the Funnel Beaker Culture groups, shows natural selection for a gene in populations who had a cultural tradition of drinking milk.

**Linear Pottery Culture:** Early Neolithic farming groups (5700 to 4500 cal BC) with pottery decorated with incised lines in a band. They spread into central and northwestern Europe along the Danube River and its tributaries from the Balkan Peninsula area.

**Long barrow:** a communal earthen mound tomb built in Neolithic Europe. It has wooden or stone interior corridor into which the dead were placed over an extended period of time.

**Menhir:** a single standing megalithic stone, put into place by Late Neolithic farming groups in Europe. Arrangements of several menhirs can be found marking avenues, as alignments, or circles, including henges.

**Oppida**: the plural of oppidum; large, often fortified settlements of the Late Iron Age La Tène Culture. They are sometimes described as urban centers, although not all archaeologists agree with this interpretation.

**Passage grave**: a communal earthen mound tomb built in Neolithic Europe. It has a stone passage with one or more burial chambers at the end of the passage into which the dead were placed over an extended period of time.

**Passo di Corvo:** an Early Neolithic Cardial Ware Culture site on the eastern coast of Italy.

**Schöneck-Kilianstädten:** a late Linear Pottery Culture Neolithic site in Germany (Europe) with evidence of the massacre of an entire community.

**Skateholm:** an Ertebølle Cul-ture (Mesolithic) site in Sweden (Europe). It contains graves show-ing a diversity of burial positions, as well as dog burials treated in the same way as human burials. Different grave goods for adult males and females indicate gender distinctions.

**Starr Carr:** a Mesolithic site adjacent to a lake in England. It dates between 8700 and 8400 cal BC. The site had excellent organic preservation, and recovered items include red deer antler frontlets, antler points, and a wooden platform/trackway.

**Stonehenge:** a henge monument begun in the Neolithic period that underwent several changes from an initial bank and ditch surrounding cremation pits to the addition of the bluestones from Wales, the larger local sarsen stones, and an avenue.

**Urnfields:** European Late Bronze Age cemeteries where thousands of people were buried in pottery urns after being cremated.

**Vedbæk:** an Ertebølle Culture (Mesolithic) site in Denmark (Europe). It contains graves show-ing gender distinctions between adult males and females in grave goods, some dog burials, evidence for violent death, and a woman buried with her newborn child placed on a swan’s wing.