

Gesture politics and the art of ambiguity: the Iron Age statue from Hirschlanden

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The discovery of the extraordinary Hirschlanden figure was reported in this journal in 1964. Since then the statue has featured in numerous discussions of Iron Age art and society, to the extent that it has become one of the iconic images of the European Iron Age. It has become almost taken for granted that the Hirschlanden figure is an 'intensely masculine' warrior statue representing the heroised dead. However, certain aspects of the figure suggest a rather deeper, more ambiguous symbolism. The authors use their up-to-date critique to raise questions about the eclectic character of Iron Age spirituality.

Keywords: Europe, Hirschlanden, Iron Age, sculpture, spirituality

Introduction

The life-size sandstone statue known as the Hirschlanden figure was found on the first day of a rescue excavation on an Iron Age burial mound in Baden-Württemberg in 1962 (Figure 1; Zürn 1964). Although it was found face down beside the perimeter kerb, the excavator believed that it had once stood on top of the mound (Figure 2). Its heavily weathered condition suggests that the Hirschlanden figure stood above ground for some years, perhaps even centuries.

The Hirschlanden tumulus contained the remains of at least 16 people, and more graves may once have existed in the ploughed-out upper part of the mound. Despite its valley-bottom location, it would have formed a prominent presence in the landscape. Following the conventional Hallstatt pattern, the mound contained a central inhumation (in this case two superimposed) surrounded by satellite graves. The burials form a relatively undistinguished series of the early sixth to early fifth centuries BC, while the statue has been dated to around 550-500 BC (Hallstatt D2) on the basis of its antenna-hilted dagger (Frey 2005: 28; Marzoli 2003: 203). Since the robbed central burial seems to date to around 600 BC (Zürn 1970: 59-60), the mound may have been in use for a generation or more before the statue was commissioned.

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Received: 14 May 2007; Revised: 3 December 2007; Accepted: 15 January 2008

ANTIQUITY 82 (2008): 409-422

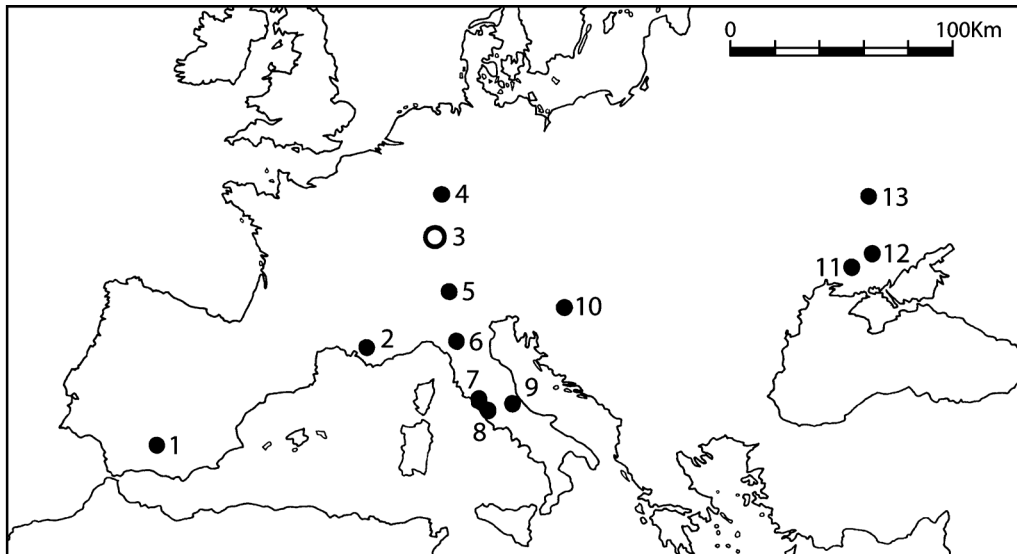


Figure 1. Places mentioned in the text: 1. Collado Los Jardines; 2. Roquepertuse; 3. Hirschlanden; 4. Glauberg; 5. Lumbrein; 6. Casale Marittimo; 7. Vulci; 8. Regolini-Gallassi tomb, Cerveteri; 9. Capecetrano; 10. Nesactium; 11. Novovasil'evka stele; 12. Kozhemyaki stele; 13. Kulsevolovka stele.

The statue and its context

Technology

The Hirschlanden figure (Figure 3) was carved from a rectangular block of Stuben sandstone, which could have been obtained from around 6km from the site (Marzoli 2003: 201). The stone is of rather poor quality and weathering has exposed numerous holes and irregularities. The carving of the statue seems to have been carried out fairly systematically using a variety of pointed and flat tools (Röder 1970: 71). It had been finished by polishing, still evident on the less weathered areas, such as between the legs. The plasticity of the modeling varies quite considerably, for example between the flat and featureless front torso, and the relatively finely rendered back, complete with vertebrae and shoulder musculature, suggesting that the statue may be the work of more than one person. The issue is complicated, however, by the heavy weathering which affects certain areas more than others. There is little doubt that the sculptor(s) had some exposure to the stone carving practices of the Mediterranean, perhaps in northern Italy. Evidence from preserved chisel marks indicates some over-cutting, suggesting inexperience on the part of at least one of the sculptors (Röder 1970: 71).

Physicality

Although an evidently masculine ithyphallic representation (i.e. with an erect penis), the Hirschlanden figure departs from naturalistic depiction in several key respects. Firstly, the upper half of the statue is far more slender than the weighty, muscular lower body; a contrast best seen by comparing the dimensions of the legs with those of the arms (Figure 3). There may have been simple technical reasons for preferring a disproportionately massive lower

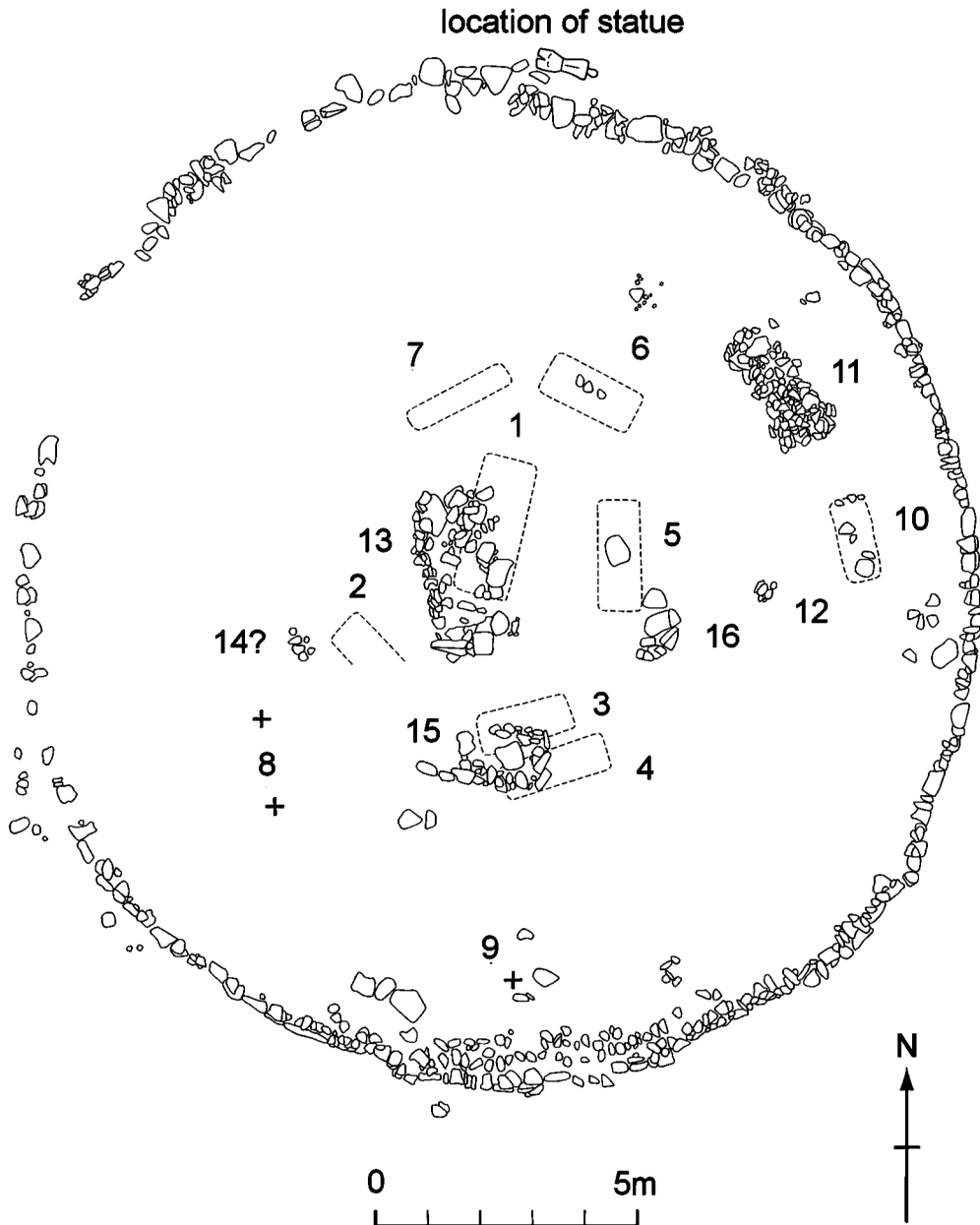


Figure 2. The Hirschlanden burial mound showing the location of the statue (after Zürn 1970: 55).

body, which would have provided greater structural stability for the statue. Perhaps also, if the figure was intended to be observed from below, from the base of the mound, the narrowing towards the head may have given the illusion of greater height.

Secondly, the shoulders are drawn up to a seemingly unnatural degree and, although they have been described as 'powerful' (Aldhouse Green 2004: 68), they could equally be argued to have a rather bony, almost puny appearance. Schickler (1999: 25) has suggested that the

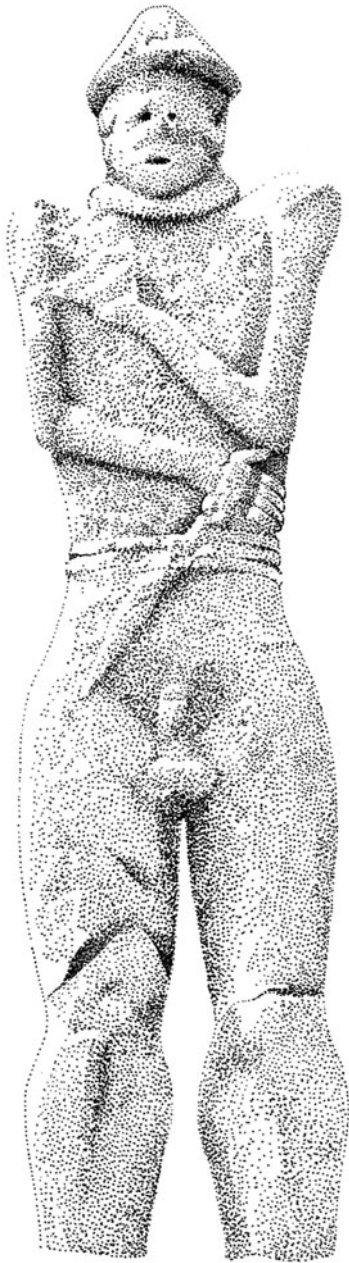


Figure 3. The Hirschlanden figure: with the missing lower legs and feet it would have stood c. 1.7m tall, more or less life size.

hunched shoulders may reflect the depiction of a funerary procedure paralleling the early Italic custom by which the corpse was displayed upright, held by spears under each arm-pit. In Schickler's view it is this custom that it is represented by the engraved javelins on the columns which support the broadly contemporary Italic 'Warrior of Capestrano' (*ibid.*).

Thirdly, the arms are extremely thin relative to other elements of the body. The gesture of the arms and hands, which lie across the slender torso, is very specific and is discussed further below.

Finally, in contrast to the detailing of certain other elements, the face is a caricature, with pin-eyes, slit-mouth and flat nose, recalling the seventh-century BC funerary mask from Kleinklein (Unruh 1994: 80). Indeed Zürn has described the Hirschlanden face as a 'mask' (1964: 225) and his interpretation can be supported both by examination of the alignment of the ears and nose, which depart significantly from their expected anatomical relationship, and by the angle of the face which seems to 'slip forward' from the head (Figure 4). Although this might conceivably represent a re-working of the original face following some form of breakage, it seems more likely to be a deliberately crude depiction. It has been suggested that the Capestrano figure also wears a death mask, although in this case the putative 'mask' retains more or less normal facial proportions and is indicated only by a sharp line drawn around the face (Marzoli 2003: 204).

Clothing and equipment

The Hirschlanden figure is naked except for a conical hat with attached neck-piece, a heavy torc, and a distinctive belt around his narrow waist, from which is suspended a short antenna-hilted dagger. It has been suggested that the sharp ridging of the shins indicates that the figure is wearing greaves (Schickler 1999: 24), but the evidence is ambiguous, as is the suggestion that the hunched shoulders represent epaulettes (Marzoli 2003: 205).

The distinctive conical hat is markedly similar to the birch-bark hat found with the richly attired 'princely' corpse in the spectacular Hochdorf burial mound only 5km or so from Hirschlanden, which dates to the same broad period (Biel 1981). It may represent

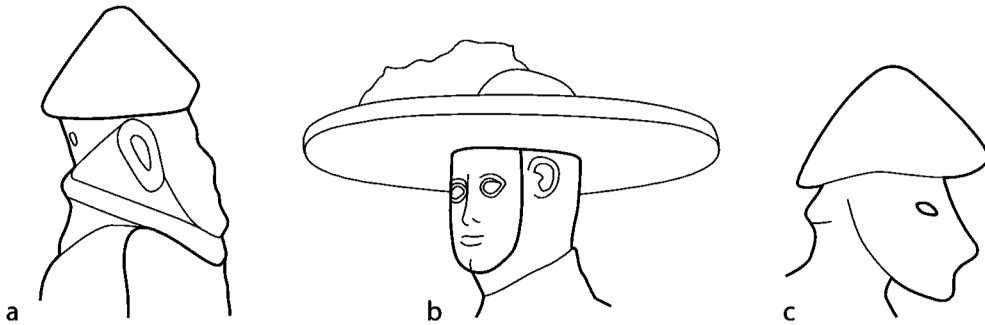


Figure 4. 'Masks' from (a) Hirshlanden, (b) Capestrano, and (c) a bronze figure from the North Caucasus (after Krause 1996: 135).

a sign of rank or religious status. There is still an argument, however, partly based on the apparent presence of an attached semi-circular neck-guard, that the Hirschlanden headgear represents a bronze helmet (Schickler 1999: 24) similar to those depicted on, for example, the Providence situla (Lucke 1962: Plate 9, lower) or the Strettweg cult-vehicle (Aldhouse Green 1996: 114), and actual helmets from Cremona and Oppeano (Sansoni 1961: Plate 20) in northern Italy, all of the same broad date (Schickler 1999: 24).

Parallels and influences

Perhaps the dominant theme in previous discussions of the Hirschlanden statue has been its perceived affiliation with various artistic traditions, both exotic and indigenous. What is perhaps most striking is the apparent mixing of styles. As Zürn puts it, *'the archaic, fully sculptured execution of the back and legs of the figure is in sharp contrast to the barbaric Hallstatt character of the front and upper part of the body'* (1964: 226). Much ink has been spilt over the derivation of these various traits.

Indigenous roots?

It is one of the peculiarities of the Hirschlanden figure that it lacks any clear indigenous precedent. There are other stone stelae in the region (Kimmig 1987; here Figure 1) but none reflect anything approaching the figurative qualities of Hirschlanden. Individual features can be paralleled, although we should bear in mind that certain aspects of the Hirschlanden figure, notably the overall shape, with limbs tight against the body, might reflect a background technology of wood-carving. The eyes, for example, recall those on an anthropomorphic stele from Lumbrein in eastern Switzerland, of probable sixth-century BC date (*ibid.*: Figure 21), while the depiction of genitalia is similar to that on the broadly contemporary Stammheim stele from Baden-Württemberg (Baittinger & Pinsker 2002: 211). So while there was clearly an indigenous stone-working tradition, and a pre-existing association of monumental stone carving and funerary beliefs, the Hirschlanden figure marked a radical departure from conventional practice.

Greek and Italic influence

Since it was first excavated the Hirschlanden figure has been regarded as a Greek-influenced piece (e.g. Zürn 1964: 226). The existence of active trade links between the Hallstatt communities of central Europe and the expanding colonial settlements of the Mediterranean fringe during the sixth century BC are not in doubt, although their extent and importance are subject to ongoing debate (e.g. Arafat & Morgan 1994; Sherratt 1997).

We can dismiss the theory that the Hirschlanden figure is an actual re-worked Greek sculpture (e.g. Beeser 1983), if for no other reason than the local derivation of the stone. But Greek influence is harder to dismiss. The thick calves and muscular thighs of the Hirschlanden figure, for example, can be compared with similar features on Greek kouroi, though this hardly compensates for the huge differences: kouroi are depicted stepping forwards rather than standing still, they are not ithyphallic, their arms hang rather uninterestingly by their sides, and they lack the material accoutrements of the Hallstatt figure. Etruscan derivatives of the kouros tradition, however, such as that from Volterra (Brendel & Ridgway 1995: 104) provide a more promising avenue. Further north, the fragmentary figures from Nesactium in Istria (present-day Croatia) provide parallels for ithyphallic stone statuary in an Iron Age funerary context.

Zürn (1964: 226) postulated that the Hirschlanden figure may represent the rendition in stone, under Greek or Etruscan influence, of an indigenous image more usually rendered in wood (and thus archaeologically invisible). It has even been suggested that a Greek craftsman or craftsmen may have been engaged by a local chief or lineage group to work on the statue. This sort of relationship is by no means impossible and the physical presence of such individuals may be reflected elsewhere in Hallstatt Europe, for instance in the mud-brick walls of Phase IVa-b at the Heuneburg (Kimmig 1975).

Eastern and northern parallels

The Greek world, however, is not the only source of likely influence. The rendering of the upper part of the body, especially the hunched shoulders and thin arms, finds parallels in numerous stelae from the Eurasian steppe, especially the Scythian statue-stelae which develop from the seventh century BC (Telegin & Mallory 1994: e.g. Figures 28.3 & 28.4). Jones-Bley (1997) has argued that the deployment of these characteristics along with accoutrements such as belt and dagger, and visible genitalia, provide specific links between the Hirschlanden figure and the broadly contemporary Scythian stelae, although these eastern carvings were essentially two-dimensional grave markers, lacking the relative technical sophistication of Hirschlanden. Helmets shown on certain statue-stelae (e.g. an example from Olkhovchik, Telegin & Mallory 1994: Figure 29) also display strong similarities to the conical headgear of Hirschlanden. A Scythian bronze figure from the north Caucasus, illustrated by Krause (1996: 135), also bears a striking resemblance to Hirschlanden in its headgear, as well as its ithyphallic nature and, perhaps most intriguingly, the apparent depiction of a sloping face-mask, similar to that suggested for Hirschlanden (Figure 4). Certain characteristics of the Hirschlanden figure also find parallels further north. Aldhouse Green (2004: 69), for example, has noted similarities in the treatment of the heavy calf muscles and erect phallus between the Hirschlanden figure and certain Scandinavian rock carvings.

The hybrid nature of the Hirschlanden figure, first mentioned by Zürn (above) has also been remarked on by Jones-Bley who has proposed that *'the upper body of the Hirschlanden figure takes its shape from a . . . Scythian source'* while the legs derive from *'ultimately a Greek source'* (1997: 99). It is this fusion of influences (perhaps more aptly a creolisation, creating a wholly new and indigenous style) that makes the Hirschlanden figure so striking, and it is hard to believe that this effect was unintended. Though its iconographic content may have mirrored potentially earlier works, like the Lumbrein stele, the styling of the Hirschlanden stele seems intended to provoke the shock of the new.

Interpreting Hirschlanden

The association of statues with Iron Age funerary monuments has led to suggestions that they constitute heroised representations, even 'portraits', of dead warriors (e.g. Frey 1998: 4). Zürn, for example, believed that the *'warrior who stood in stone upon the mound'* at Hirschlanden, represented the individual buried in one of the centrally placed graves (1964: 226). Alternatively, it could be suggested that such figures represent more generalised ancestor figures, an apotheosis of the ancestors, representing the lineage as a whole, even if based around the memory (real or imagined) of a specific individual. A central assumption in most interpretations is that these figures represent warrior/guardians embodying a set of essentially martial values. Close consideration of the Hirschlanden figure, however, suggests that the situation may have been rather more complex.

Gesture and pose

One aspect of the Hirschlanden statue which has received relatively little attention is its distinctive pose, and in particular its hand gesture. While the term 'pose' implies stasis, 'gesture' suggests movement and is perhaps a less obvious subject for discussion in relation to a statue. Here we take the pose to be the overall bodily disposition of the figure, the gesture being the very particular arrangement of arms and hands. In the Hirschlanden gesture, the left arm lies across the upper body, with the open left hand held against the right side of the chest. The right arm is held across the stomach, with the fingers curving across the waist: the right hand is held open with the thumb extended to touch the left elbow. Both elbows are held tight against the body, accentuating the impression of tension, perhaps trepidation or fear, given by the drawn-up shoulders. Although they do not figure to any significant extent in Greek art of the period, splayed fingers have been interpreted elsewhere as a sign of death, for example in the context of Ukrainian Bronze Age stelae (Telegin & Mallory 1994: 27). Aldhouse Green regards the gesture as *'distinctly non-aggressive'*, displaying a *'remoteness and detachment . . . evocative of a separate, heroic plane of being'* (2004: 22).

For some, neither pose nor gesture appears exceptional. Chaume (2001: 266), for example, writes *'cette position nous paraît assez naturelle et c'est ainsi que l'on représente les guerriers morts ou les dignitaires dans pratiquement toutes les cultures.'* Certainly the motif of hands laid across the chest is not uncommon in the later prehistoric art of temperate and Mediterranean Europe. However, in the great majority of cases it is the right arm that is laid across the chest, the right hand held over the heart, with the left arm below, somewhere around the waist. This is not an irrelevant detail, since the careful cultural distinction between left and

right is extremely common in human societies. It is perhaps symptomatic of our modern cultural indifference to bodily orientation that a recent scholarly publication included a reversed photograph of the Hirschlanden figure showing the right (i.e. wrong) arm raised (Aldhouse Green 1996: 45). Such nuances of gesture, quite deliberately chosen and depicted, would, however, have been especially important in non-literate cultures such as those of Iron Age temperate Europe. We will examine this left/right distinction in more detail below.

Left/right symbolism

The right-handed version of the Hirschlanden gesture can be seen in a great many sculptures of the period from a range of cultural contexts, usually depicting male warriors (Figure 5a-c). The Italic 'Warrior of Capestrano', dating to the seventh or sixth century BC, and often seen as emblematic of the Mediterranean influence on the Hirschlanden figure, is one example. More locally, the mid-fifth-century Glauberg figure (Frey 2004: Plate I) again has its right arm uppermost. In both cases the detailed similarities of pose include the erect thumb, suggesting more than a casual resemblance. The gesture is replicated on innumerable stelae from the Eurasian Steppe e.g. the Novovasil'evka and Kozhemyaki stelae (Ol'khovskii & Evdokimov 1994: Illustrations 10, no. 15 and Illustration 20, no. 33), again with the right arm uppermost.

By contrast, the left arm gesture is much more fugitive. Closest to Hirschlanden, both geographically and chronologically is the Lumbrein stele (Figure 5g), found devoid of context in road-workings in eastern Switzerland. It may also date to around the sixth century BC (Kimmig 1987: Figure 21). Rather further afield, a naked ithyphallic statue from a funerary context at Nesactium, Istria (Figure 5b), superficially seems to parallel the Hirschlanden gesture as the left arm is raised across the chest; the details of the gesture show potentially significant differences, however, as the left fist, which rests close to the centre of the chest, is clenched rather than open, and the right hand grips the left arm just below the wrist. Further away still, among the Scythian statue-stelae there are also rare examples bearing a raised left arm, in contrast to the usual raised right arm gesture. Nearly all, however, bear a drinking cup, or rhyton, in their raised hand, rather diminishing the comparison with Hirschlanden, and fall within a group characterised by being relatively lightly armed compared to other Scythian examples. Telegin and Mallory have suggested that they may depict priests (1994: 72). Nonetheless one example, from Kulsevolovka (Ol'khovskii & Evdokimov 1994: Illustration 45, no. 78, here Figure 5), does strike a pose very similar to that of Hirschlanden.

Elsewhere the distinctive left-handed gesture is often associated with female figures (Figure 5d-f), as in the closely contemporary context (*c.* 600-575 BC) of the Etruscan bronze bust from Vulci, her left hand raised to her breast with thumb splayed (MacNamara 1990: 30). The Italic 'Lady of Capestrano' also has her left hand raised, again with splayed thumb, this time to the base of her throat (Baittinger & Pinsker 2002: 316). Unambiguously male parallels are harder to find (Figure 5g-i), although we do have a limestone figure from Casale Marittimo, which pre-figures much Etruscan monumental sculpture, dating to the seventh century BC (Frey 2002: 208-18; Esposito 2003: 58-9). This, however, is one of a symmetrical pair where the partner-statue is depicted with the more usual right-handed

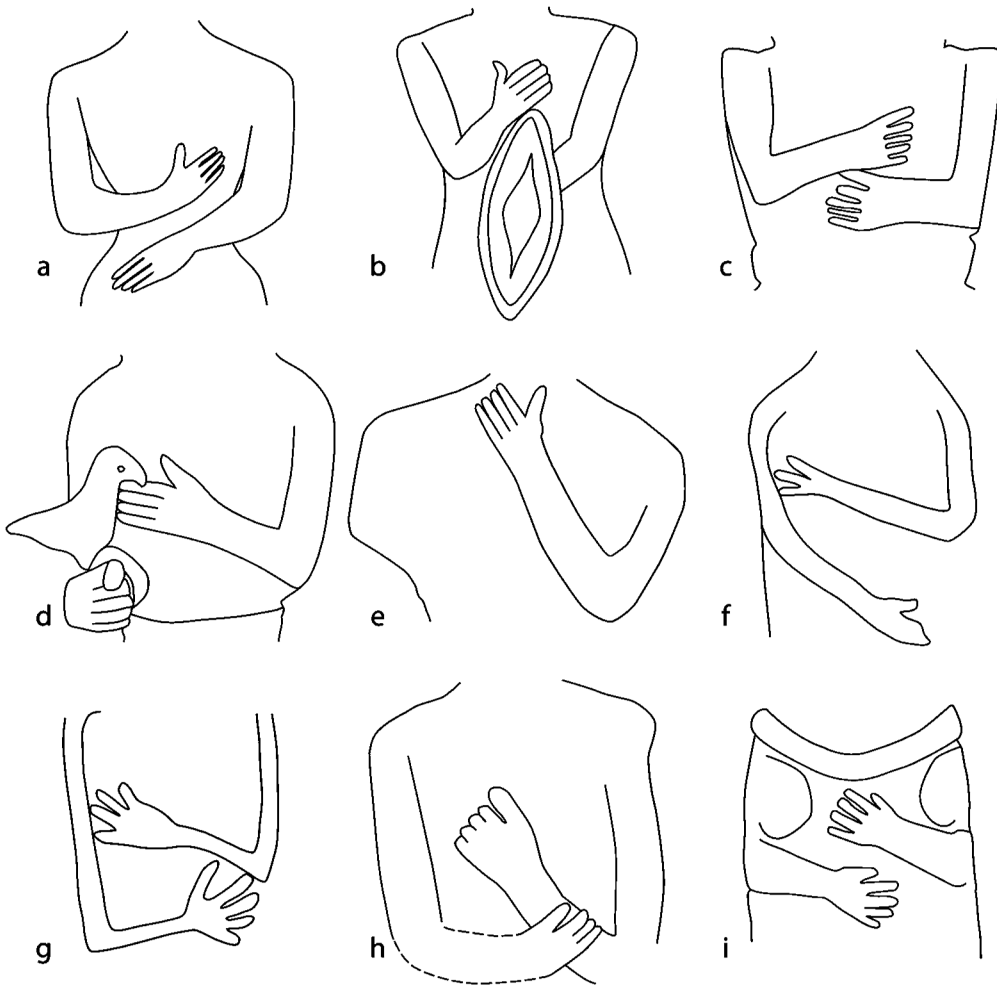


Figure 5. Arm gestures on Iron Age figures (various scales): Right handers: a) Warrior of Capestrano, Abruzzo, central Italy (after Baittinger & Pinsker 2002: 215); b) Glauberg figure, southern Germany (after Frey 2004: Plate I); c) Kozhemyaki stele, Ukraine (after Ol'khovskii & Evdokimov 1994: Illustration 20, no. 33). Female left handers: d) Etruscan bronze bust of a goddess from the Polledrara cemetery at Vulci; e) 'Lady of Capestrano', central Italy (after Baittinger & Pinsker 2002: 316); f) votive bronze from Collado Los Jardines, Andalucia (after Prados Torreira 1992: no. 590). Male left handers: g) Lumbrein stele, eastern Switzerland (after Kimmig 1987: Figure. 21); h) Nesactium, Istria (after Baittinger & Pinsker 2002: 216); i) Kulsevovka stele, Ukraine (after Ol'khovskii & Evdokimov 1994: Illustration 45, no. 78).

version of the same gesture. One of the seated 'warrior' statues from Roquepertuse in Provence also displays a variant of the left arm gesture, although here the left hand is held against the left side of the chest, thus still held to the heart (Baittinger & Pinsker 2002: 224). Again the interpretation of the Roquepertuse figure may be complicated by the possible pairing of statues, as the other well-preserved figure from the site does not have its left arm raised in this way (*ibid.*: 225).

There are parallels for the use of the left hand in funerary contexts, including the group of 33 Etruscan miniature bucchero figures from the Regolini-Galassi tomb, dating from



Figure 6. Etruscan bucchero figures from the Regolini-Galassi tomb (photograph courtesy of the Vatican Museums).

around 650 BC (Figure 6; Spivey 1999: 51), some of which hold their left hands to their chests in expressions of grief. These are usually seen as females, their imagery deriving from the cult of Astarte which exerted a profound influence on Etruscan funerary iconography from the late eighth century (Tuck *pers. comm.*) Several votive bronze figurines from the Iron Age Iberian sanctuary of Collado Los Jardines also display this left-handed gesture (Prados Torreira 1992). These include clear depictions of both males and females (e.g. *ibid.*: no. 362 *vs.* no. 589) as well as more ambiguous variants.

The distinction between the left and right-handed gesture has not usually been regarded as significant. Indeed it is the superficial similarity between the Hirschlanden gesture and that of, say, Glauberg, that has generally been stressed (e.g. Frey 2004: 112; von Hase 2003: 368). The inferiority or ‘wrongness’ of the left hand is of course a common, perhaps universal belief in human societies (Hertz 1960): the left hand is often identified as female, associated with death, while the right tends to be identified as masculine, associated with power and benevolence (*ibid.*: 102). Insoll, for example, stresses the importance of left/right handedness in relation to the structuring of ritual practice (2004: 154). So what made the sculptor(s) of the Hirschlanden figure choose to depict him with his left arm raised in this distinctive way? Although conceivably the Hirschlanden statue may have been one of a symmetrical pair, this seems rather unlikely on present evidence. The associations of the raised left hand otherwise seem to relate to death and mourning; yet these associations are predominantly female. This is an issue that is worth pursuing a little further.

Discussion: exploring gender

Recent writings on mortuary and cult practice in the European Iron Age have begun to explore the complexities which surround the identification and interpretation of gender (e.g. Arnold 2005; 2007). Such studies form part of a wider reassessment of social forms which increasingly recognise a rather more fluid situation than has traditionally been envisaged (e.g. Burmeister 2000; Knüsel 2002; Kurz 1997; Müller 2002). Death, and the rituals surrounding it, formed a central arena where social norms could be defined, maintained, challenged, or over-turned. It is within this active and dynamic social context that we must see the creation of the Hirschlanden figure.

If the Hirschlanden gesture was indeed loaded with meaning, and connected with death- and mourning rituals, then it seems reasonable to look for parallels in the burial record. At Hirschlanden, however, the burials (where bone survives) were supine with arms extended by their sides, and a brief review of broadly contemporary cemetery assemblages shows that the distinctive left arm gesture is not replicated in male burials from major cemeteries such as Hallstatt, Dürrnberg bei Hallein, and the Magdalenenberg. However, the gesture is not wholly absent. Although, during the nineteenth-century excavations, Ramsauer only retained sketches of selected graves from Hallstatt, he does appear to have focused on those which were in some way out of the ordinary, and it is thus likely that any unusual arm positions would have been recorded. Of the graves where the position is recorded, only Grave 237 came close to replicating the Hirschlanden gesture (Figure 7; Hodson 1990: Plate 58). Here a petite female, around 4ft 6in tall, was buried with her left hand laid across her right breast and her right arm across her body. The moderately wealthy grave, dating to around 600 BC, contained personal jewellery and a pot, but it was not among the richest or most distinctive in the cemetery (*ibid.*). Two other adult females were buried with their left hands on their right chest or shoulder (graves 893b and 967), but in these cases the right arm did not replicate the Hirschlanden gesture. Where adult males were buried with arms across the chest, it was the right hand which covered the left breast (graves 290 and 464). Although a tiny sample, this appears to indicate that the left arm gesture was not commonly associated with adult males in death, and where it occurs at Hallstatt, it is a female attribute.

There are also aspects of the Hirschlanden sculpture itself which seem a little odd in the context of a 'warrior statue'. The belt, formed of a double ring, is strikingly similar to one found in Grave 11 of the Hirschlanden mound: a female grave. Indeed, the type is rare except for a few examples in women's graves (Marzoli 2003: 203; von Hase 2003: 365). The rendering of the hands is also unusual in that the left hand does not project straight from the wrist but is slightly twisted downwards. Such 'limp wrist' gestures have been seen as a distinctively female attribute, one much beloved by modern female impersonators, although the extent to which this can be applied cross-culturally is debatable (e.g. Morris 2002: 360). Pauli (1972), however, has suggested the presence of transvestite ritualists in Hallstatt Germany on the basis of seemingly anomalous grave assemblages, as at Bad Cannstatt 1 and 2 with their mix of weaponry and supposedly female objects like hair ornaments. His ideas have been disputed, however, on the basis that they betray a simplistic equation between gender and material culture (Arnold 1991). As well as ethnographically known transvestite ritualists from relatively recent societies there are also European Iron Age

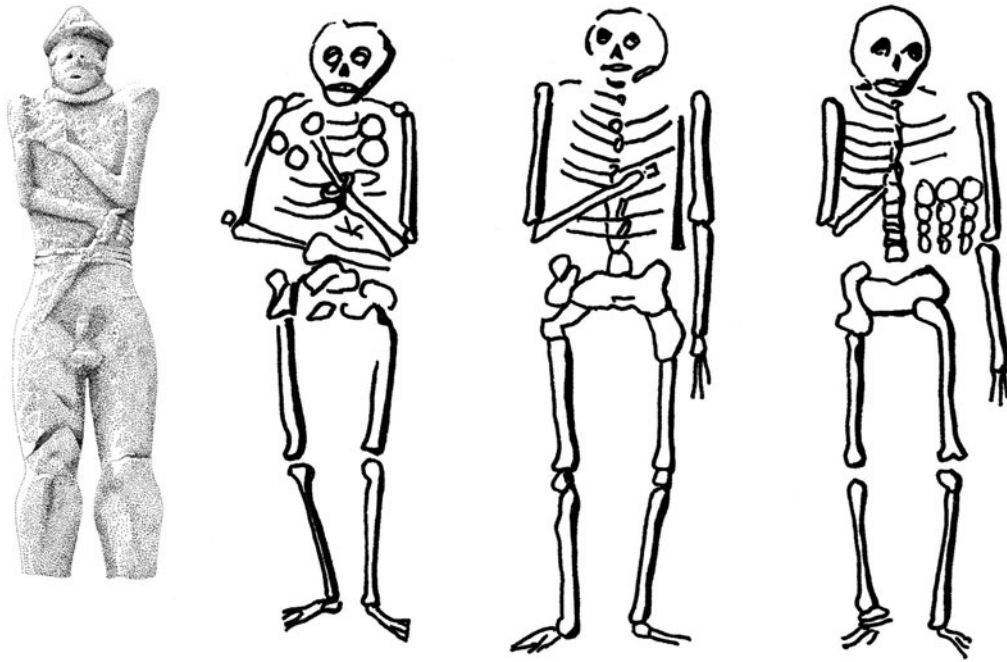


Figure 7. Grave positions from Hallstatt compared with the Hirschlanden figure (various scales): a) Hirschlanden figure simplified; b) grave 237 (female); c) grave 290 (male); d) grave 464 (male). (Drawings b-d simplified from Hodson 1990: Plates 58, 60 and 65).

parallels, such as the fifth-century Scythian Enarees described by Herodotus (Book IV.67; de Sélincourt 1954: 292; Taylor 1996: 210-4), and, more controversially, in various depictions on the Gundestrup cauldron (*ibid.*: 215-7).

It seems initially rather perverse to explore the female associations of an ithyphallic statue. Aldhouse Green sums up the general view when she states that *'every aspect of the image is intensely masculine, from his moustached and bearded face to his erect phallus and great leg-muscles'* (2004: 68). While we do not suggest that the Hirschlanden figure depicts some form of Hallstatt *berdache* (a man who takes on female gender roles), there are clearly hints that the intended 'readings' of the statue may have been ambiguous. Particularly when seen in relation to the somewhat later (La Tène A) figure from Glauberg, whose warrior credentials are more easily defended, the Hirschlanden statue displays mixed messages in several important areas.

Conclusion: Hirschlanden and Hallstatt society

There is little doubt that the Hirschlanden figure represented a deliberate statement, though we might debate whose statement it was; chief, community, craftsman etc. As such, the choices made in terms of both style and gesture were as deliberate as (to us) more obvious aspects of iconographic content such as clothing and weaponry. Was the unique combination of 'barbarian' (whether wholly indigenous or derived from the Steppe) and Mediterranean styles intended to have specific resonance in this regard? Was it thereby significant that it

was the legs, the lower part of the body, that are shown in Greek or Etruscan style, while more visually and, one might conjecture, conceptually complex upper body was depicted in the style of northern and/or eastern regions?

We would suggest that the Hirschlanden gesture is neither unimportant (Chaume 2001: 266), nor straightforwardly masculine (Aldhouse Green 2004: 68). Rather, it seems to denote a specific relationship with death, the ancestors, and the Otherworld which could have either male or female associations. One might even suggest that the Hirschlanden figure embodies a complex nexus of relationships, between life and death, male and female, indigenous and exotic, and perhaps more.

It is perhaps a modern cultural expectation that leads us to expect, as the Greeks might have done, a 'simple' message in a 'barbarian' statue. We expect warrior societies to erect warrior statues. Yet the Hirschlanden figure contains sufficient subtlety and ambiguity to suggest that it once expressed a far richer, deeper and more spiritual set of meanings.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Mark Schmidt and Thomas Hoppe of the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Dirce Marzoli, Karlene Jones-Bley, Jim Mallory, Vincent Megaw and Anthony Tuck for help at various stages. The drawings are by Libby Mulqueeny (1-3, 5 & 7) and Dan Bashford (4). We are grateful to Lourdes Prados Torreira for her comments on an earlier draft, and for the comments provided by two anonymous referees.

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