

# The Etruscan roots of the Reinheim armring

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*Keywords:* La Tène period / Reinheim / Potnia Theron / Etruscan / Waldalgesheim  
*Schlagworte:* La-Tène-Zeit / Reinheim / Potnia theron / Etrusker / Waldalgesheim  
*Mots clés:* époque laténienne / Reinheim / Potnia thérôn / Étrusques / Waldalgesheim

## Introduction

The Potnia Theron was a popular motif in the ancient world that depicted a goddess holding onto or surrounded by a variety of animals. It originated in the Near East in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC and was modelled after the motif of the ‘Master of Animals’, a male deity depicted subduing wild animals. The motif normally consisted of a female goddess or demon standing between two wild animals, often felines but also birds, deer, or fantastic beasts. The Potnia Theron usually demonstrated mastery over creatures by holding or touching their tails or necks or simply standing between them<sup>1</sup>. This motif was later adopted by both Greek and Etruscan artisans for their own goddesses during the Iron Age<sup>2</sup>. In the late Hallstatt and early La Tène period, Celtic artisans also paired female deities with animals, but the rationale remains obscure. In this paper, I would like to explore the origin of this motif and its possible transmission into central Europe by analysing specific iconographic elements of a gold armring recovered from an early La Tène grave at Reinheim, Germany.

The La Tène period tumulus was discovered in 1954 during rescue excavations in the village of Reinheim (Saarpfalz-Kreis). The burial within the tumulus contained a number of artefacts, including a gold neckring, two gold armrings, two gold finger rings, and two gold and iron fibulae. Two other bronze fibulae, a bronze mirror, and over a hundred glass and amber beads were also found in the tomb chamber. Next to the burial were feasting and drinking vessels: a pair of gold mounts for drinking horns, a pair of bronze basins, and a bronze spouted flagon (*Röhrenkanne*)<sup>3</sup>. The presence of a mirror led the excavators to conclude that this was the grave of a wealthy Celtic female whom they called the ‘Princess of Reinheim’<sup>4</sup>. The neckring and the right armring of the deceased (*Fig. 1*) were decorated with figures on both ends that appear to have been inspired by the motif of the Potnia Theron – ‘the Mistress of Animals’.

On the Reinheim rings, the beardless, presumably female, figures on the neckring (*Fig. 2*) and armring (*Fig. 3*) have a bird of prey<sup>5</sup> sitting atop their heads. At each end of the ring are ‘pommels’ or ‘balusters’, beneath which the faces of owls or lions peer out. These ‘pommels’ or ‘balusters’ appear on a number of Celtic rings decorated with human heads or faces and have been interpreted as symbols signaling the depiction of deities or heroes<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> BARCLAY 2001, 373–374.

<sup>2</sup> SPARTZ 1962, 5; ICARD-GIANOLIO 1997, 1026.

<sup>3</sup> KELLER 1965, 13–30.

<sup>4</sup> KELLER 1955, 33.

<sup>5</sup> KELLER (1965, 31) identified it as an eagle but ROSS (1967, 273) suggested an owl.

<sup>6</sup> LENERZ-DE WILDE 2006, 343; GUGGISBERG 2010, 208.



Fig. 1. Reinheim neckring (diameter 172 mm), right arming (diameter 80.5 mm), and left arming (diameter 69 mm).

If these human figures on the Reinheim neckring and arming do indeed belong to the supernatural realm, their depiction with animals suggests an association with the Potnia Theron. That this motif was known in central Europe as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC is evidenced by its appearance on the handle of the famous Grächwil hydria, a bronze vessel recovered from a Hallstatt grave at Grächwil, Switzerland (*Fig. 4*).

The hydria was an Italian import, assembled in northern Italy but likely made by Greek craftsmen from the Peloponnese or the Spartan colony of Taranto<sup>7</sup>. Similar to the Reinheim rings, the Potnia Theron on the Grächwil hydria has a raptor bird perched above her head and a coterie of animals on either side, including lions. Although the excavator at Reinheim, Josef Keller, viewed the neckring and the arming as purely Celtic creations, he believed that the Grächwil hydria must have served as a precursor to them<sup>8</sup>. More recently, Rudolf Eicht, in his comprehensive study of the Reinheim burial, suggested that Greek artistic influences on the Reinheim rings were more pronounced, citing not only the Grächwil hydria but also the Francois Vase and a gold pendant from Rhodes, which were both 6<sup>th</sup> century BC artefacts displaying the Greek goddess Artemis as a Potnia Theron<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of different opinions on the origin of the hydria, see FREY / FREY 1998, 528.

<sup>8</sup> KELLER 1965, 31; see also GUGGISBERG 2010, 223; VERGER 1991, 10; GRAN AYMERICH 2006, 36.

<sup>9</sup> ECHT 2000, 265; ECHT 1999, 45.

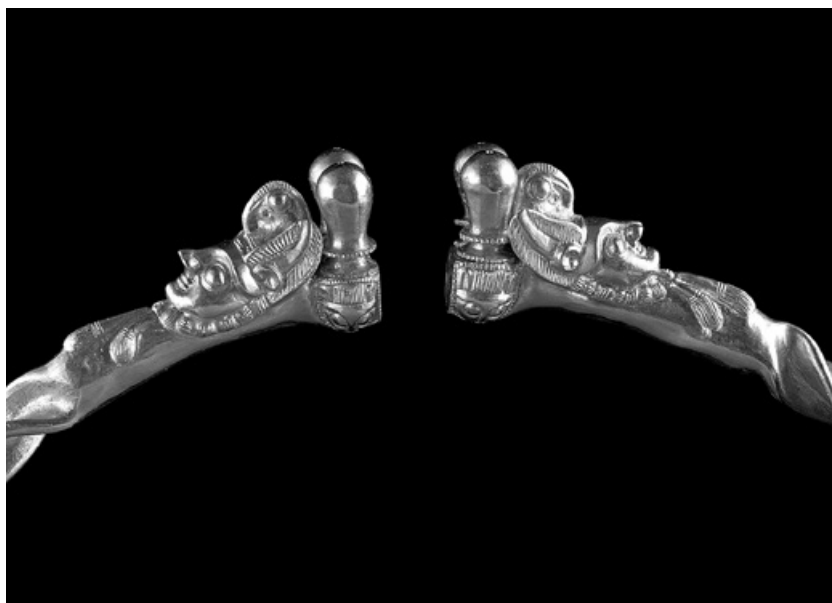


Fig. 2. Reinheim neckring. – Without scale.

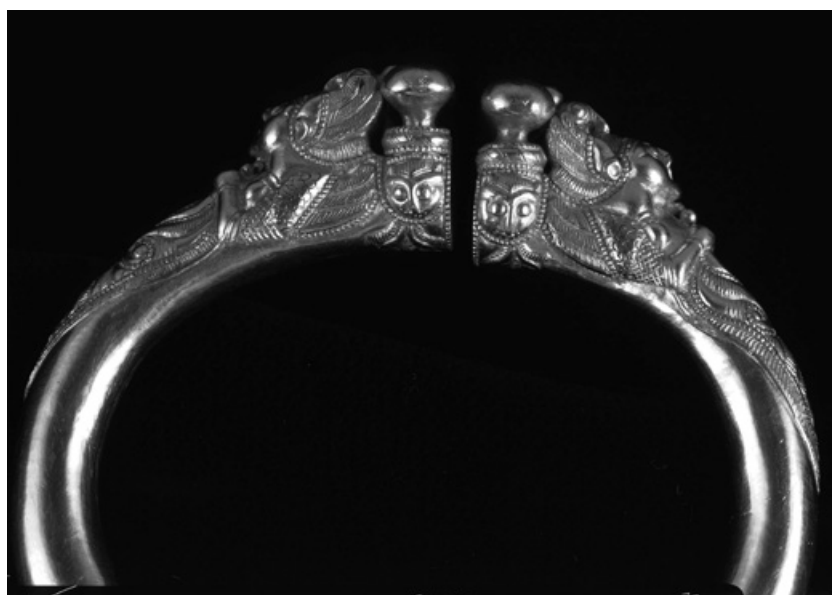


Fig. 3. Reinheim armring. – Without scale.

Echt believed the Celtic artisan combined the imagery of Artemis as a *Potnia Theron* with the iconography of the Greek Athena / Etruscan Minerva to fashion a unique Celtic *Potnia Theron*<sup>10</sup>. However, a close examination of three decorative details on the Reinheim armring – (1) the headdress of the goddess, (2) the faces of lions / owls occupying the ends of the armring, and (3) the lower body of the deity – instead suggests that the primary

<sup>10</sup> ECHT 2000, 264–265; ECHT 1999, 50–51.



Fig. 4. Handle of Grächwil hydria (h. 26.4 cm).

influence on the composition of the Reinheim rings was derived from the centuries-old Etruscan Potnia Theron.

#### The headdress

In Echt's study, he identified depictions of Phrygian helmets on Apulian red-figure vases in southern Italy as the inspiration for the headdress of the Potnia Theron on the Reinheim armring, but there are reasons to be sceptical of this potential link to the art of *Magna Graecia*. The Potnia Theron on the neckring and the armring both wear a type of headdress with a bird perched upon it. The headdress of the Potnia Theron on the armring differs slightly from that on the neckring. Whereas the artisan melds the bird on the headdress with the forehead of the goddess on the neckring, the goddess on the armring appears to wear a helmet with a bird on top of it (Fig. 5)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> ECHT 1999, 49–50; cf. FREY 2004, 37.



Fig. 5. Front view of Reinheim armring. – Without scale.

In Echt's view, the entire ensemble was a Phrygian helmet, a type of helmet distinguished from other types by the forward-leaning apex that was topped sometimes with a bird or a griffin's head. Echt believed that the Celtic artist had based his rendition of the Potnia Theron's helmet on depictions of Athena in Apulian red-figure vase painting, where she is depicted wearing a Phrygian helmet instead of the more common Attic helmet<sup>12</sup>. In particular, he focused on the protective band above the forehead known as the frontlet, which appears on some of the Phrygian helmets that Athena wears in Apulian vase painting and is best represented on a vase in Naples<sup>13</sup>. The frontlet was typical of Attic helmets<sup>14</sup> but does not appear on Phrygian helmets outside of Apulian red-figure vase painting.

When viewed in profile, however, it can be seen that the headdress of the Potnia Theron on the Reinheim armring (*Fig. 6a*) differs significantly from that of Athena in Apulian vase painting (*Fig. 6b*). First, the triangular 'frontlet' on the Potnia Theron's headdress is banded and appears to be fitted to her head, while the frontlet on the Phrygian helmet has a rounded shape like a diadem and clearly serves as an attachment to the helmet. Second,

<sup>12</sup> ECHT 1999, 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> SCHÄFER 1997, 71; HANNAH 1983, 114.

<sup>13</sup> See LAUBSCHER 1980, 231 and pl. 50,1.

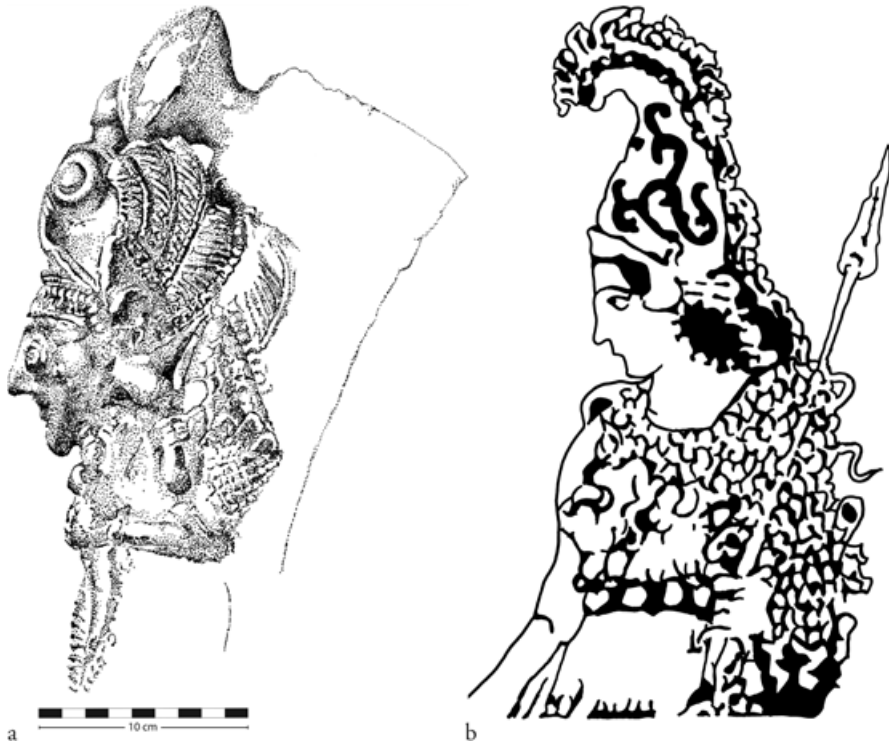


Fig. 6. a Reinheim armring, headdress of the Potnia Theron in profile; b Athena with Phrygian helmet on red-figure Apulian vase.

the bird on the Reinheim armring has two large eyes, a well-defined beak, and fully articulated wings on either side. On the Apulian vase, the bird / griffin's head is purely decorative and depicted only as a protome at the very top of the helmet. No wings are present and a lion's mane appears to crown the top of the mythological creature's head. Placing a fully articulated bird atop the head of a Potnia Theron was not an uncommon motif, having occurred both on the aforementioned Grächwil hydria and in Etruscan art on a 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Etruscan bronze winged Potnia Theron in the museum of Cortona (IT)<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the dating of the earliest Apulian vase that depicts Athena with a Phrygian helmet (last decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC)<sup>16</sup> is essentially contemporaneous with that of the Reinheim armring (400–370 BC)<sup>17</sup>. It would be surprising for Celtic artists in Europe to adopt or innovate a peculiar headdress for Athena around the same time as Apulian vase painters, without a southern Italian trade contact acting as a direct intermediary.

### Lions or Owls?

Often the Potnia Theron was depicted with felines, but the two animals that peer out beneath the terminal balusters on the Reinheim neckring and armring appear only as faces and lack any bodies to aid in identification, as can be seen in *Figure 7*.

<sup>15</sup> GRAN-AYMERICH 2010–2013, 50 and pl. XIVc.      <sup>17</sup> ECHT 1999, 282–283.

<sup>16</sup> MUGIONE 2002, 63.



Fig. 7. Reinheim armring, detail of lions / owls.

Keller believed the faces of the creatures represented lions but made note of the fact that their faces were lacking a defining characteristic: lower jaws<sup>18</sup>. Nonetheless, he interpreted the dots impressed by the goldsmith at the bottom of the lion's faces as indicative of whiskers, as has Echt more recently<sup>19</sup>. Vincent Megaw, on the other hand, viewed these dots as a possible attempt by the metalworker to delineate the bearded tuft of feathers usually depicted along the bottom of an owl's face<sup>20</sup>, and Otto-Herman Frey has drawn attention to the rendition of the noses on the lion / owls on the Reinheim armring. As Frey has noted, for felines in frontal view, Celtic artists usually rendered the nose as broad and rounded at the bottom. On the Reinheim neckring and armring, however, the artist narrowed the nose – presumably to delineate a beak<sup>21</sup>.

Part of the difficulty in accepting the possibility that the faces at the ends of the Reinheim neckring and armring could represent owls is the fact that the pairing of the Potnia Theron with owls was uncommon. Yet, the appearance of this goddess with owls decorated the handles of wine-drinking vessels produced in and around the north Etruscan city of Chiusi during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>22</sup>. The motif can be seen on the handle of a 7<sup>th</sup> century BC *bucchero kyathos* (drinking vessel) from the site of Poggio Civitate, about 50 km west of Chiusi (IT). Recovered from the remains of an elite building complex, the vessel likely had some ritual significance since it was part of a large banqueting service that included nearly 60 drinking vessels and 100 setting or serving vessels<sup>23</sup>. Above the shoulders of a winged Potnia Theron, two owls hover on either side (*Fig. 8*).

This iconography predates the association of the owl with Athena in Greece<sup>24</sup> and should be understood in its Italic context<sup>25</sup>. In many cultures, the owl has traditionally been viewed

<sup>18</sup> KELLER 1965, 31.

<sup>19</sup> ECHT 1999, 35.

<sup>20</sup> MEGAW 1970, 80.

<sup>21</sup> FREY 1992, 54. – For a comprehensive bibliography on the lion / owl debate, see ECHT 2000, 265 no. 26.

<sup>22</sup> See MOORE 2018, 68–69; VALENTINI 1969, 416–418 (nos 1; 2; 18; 24). – The handles of her 'type A' vessels often display the goddess with two birds above her shoulders, described only as 'uccelli' or 'volatili' in Italian. For other examples at Poggio Civitate, see PHILLIPS 1971, 259 figs 8;

13; DONATI / GAMBONI 1985, 133 cat.-nos 500; 503.

<sup>23</sup> BERKIN 2003, 119–123.

<sup>24</sup> SHAPIRO 1993.

<sup>25</sup> To my knowledge, the only other evidence for this pairing can be seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC Burney relief in the British Museum, which depicts a female deity (perhaps the Near Eastern goddess Astarte – Ištar – Inanna) with taloned feet, standing upon lions and flanked by owls on either side. This clay tablet seems too chronologically and geographically distant to exert any influence on Etruscan or



Fig. 8. Potnia Theron with owls on kyathos handle from Poggio Civitate (IT).

as a threat to newborns and infants<sup>26</sup>. The Roman poet Ovid described creatures he called *striges* (from *strix*, ‘screech-owl’ in Latin) that supposedly attacked newborns at night<sup>27</sup> and it is likely that the Etruscans shared this superstition with their neighbours. Since the Potnia Theron was generally understood to have held power over the creatures she was depicted with<sup>28</sup>, the pairing of the Potnia Theron with the owl in Etruscan art may have alluded to the goddess’ perceived ability to thwart or control the owl, thereby ensuring the fertility of the mother and protecting the newborn<sup>29</sup>. By choosing to depict this goddess with owls instead of lions, the Celtic artist could have been referring to the iconography of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Etruscan Potnia Theron, as well as highlighting an aspect of the goddess that set her apart from the Greek goddess Artemis.

### The lower body

Lastly, consideration of the lower bodies of the goddesses depicted on the Reinheim armring may lend further credence to the idea that her iconography was based on Etruscan prototypes, and that the Celts associated the goddess depicted on the armring with fertility. On the neckring, only the faces of the goddesses are depicted. On the armring, though, the goddesses possess full torsos and lower bodies (see *Fig. 3; 5*). Their shoulders and arms have decorative scale patterns and wear armrings on their wrists, in similar fashion to the deceased. Spheres sit beneath their chins, three on one side and two on the other. Above their clenched hands, they appear to hold a ring or bracelet in front of their chests<sup>30</sup>.

Celtic art. See ALBENDA 2005 and COLLON 2007 for synopses on its origin and interpretation.

<sup>26</sup> ARMSTRONG 1958, 113; GASTER 1942, 45–48; GASTER 1947, 186.

<sup>27</sup> Ov. fast. 6,101–182.

<sup>28</sup> See above, note 1.

<sup>29</sup> See MOORE 2018, 64–67.

<sup>30</sup> KELLER 1965, 32; also LENERZ-DE WILDE 2006, 319; cf. ECHT 1999, 44. – Keller originally suggested that the goddesses appeared to be holding a ring or bracelet in front of their chest, but Echt disagreed with his assessment. He observed that





Fig. 9. Female figure with tree of life design on kyathos handle from Poggio Civitate (IT).

Beneath the rings, the lower bodies become highly abstract. Two tendril-like S-spirals, presumably representative of legs, lead down below the goddess' forearms and are contained in long pointed triangles ornamented with a series of geometric hatchings. Searching for the inspiration for this curious depiction of the lower half of these figures, scholars have cited the tail-like bodies of Graeco-Scythian snake-goddesses<sup>31</sup>, but examples of this type are either contemporaneous with, or later than, the Reinheim armring. Although ambivalent about the inspiration behind the lower bodies of these goddesses on the Reinheim armring, Martin Guggisberg drew attention to the appearance of the Potnia Theron with a snake- or tendril-limbed body in early Etruscan art<sup>32</sup>. On Etruscan metalwork, heads or busts sitting atop vegetal motifs<sup>33</sup> and tendril-limbed deities appear as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>34</sup>. In ceramics, the handles and struts of 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Etruscan bucchero drinking vessels are often combined with a stylised 'tree of life' design, a Near Eastern vegetal motif associated with fertility and regeneration (*Fig. 9*)<sup>35</sup>.

Ludwig Curtius, in his seminal work on the development of this motif from ancient times until the present, designated the depiction of a goddess whose lower body was composed of a tendril or vegetal motif as a *Rankenfrau* or *Rankengöttin*<sup>36</sup>. This motif was likely based on the concept of a chthonic earth goddess, which at first developed locally in various

the 'ring' that the goddesses appeared to hold had a furrow down the middle and that rings of this type were not manufactured in the Celtic world during the La Tène period. He offered no certain identification of the object but suggested instead that they were *krotaloi*, musical instruments used by Greek dancers. *Krotaloi*, though, were usually more bell-shaped than ring-shaped (WEST 1992, 123 and pl. 31) and the significance of their being

held by a deity instead of a supplicant is unclear.

<sup>31</sup> BAGLEY 2013, 72; KULL 1997, 386; cf. MEGAW 2005, 42.

<sup>32</sup> GUGGISBERG 2000, 196–197.

<sup>33</sup> SCHAUBENBURG 1957, 218.

<sup>34</sup> RUPP 2007, 213 fig. 2.

<sup>35</sup> BROCATO / REGOLI 2011, 220–221; BERKIN 2003, 101–102; CAPECCHI / GUNELLA 1975, 44.

<sup>36</sup> CURTIUS 1957.



Fig. 10. Potnia Theron on kyathos handle from Chiusi (IT).

places and then later on gained increasing prominence in the Mediterranean when associated with Artemis in Greek art<sup>37</sup>. Maria Ustinova believes the earliest rendition of a goddess of this body-type can be found on 7<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century BC gold plaques from Cerverteri (IT), where two tendrils lead below the chest of a female figure and end in two fan-palmettes bracketed by lion heads<sup>38</sup>. In his global survey of this motif, Walter Veit observed that 7<sup>th</sup> century BC depictions of a female with a tendril-lower body and palmettes on Etruscan jewellery are more relevant to the development of the *Rankenfrau* or *Rankengöttin* motif in Classical art than that of the Scythian snake-goddess<sup>39</sup>. Particularly relevant to this study is a 7<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century BC bucchero handle housed in the Chiusi museum which displays a motif somewhat similar to that found on the Reinheim armband, wherein the lower body of a Potnia Theron was replaced with a decorative floral motif (*Fig. 10*)<sup>40</sup>.

On the Etruscan vessel handle, spiralling volutes take the place of the Potnia Theron's legs while two birds – likely owls – can be seen hovering above the goddess' shoulders. In form, it is very similar to the composition seen on the Reinheim armband. Anthony Tuck has suggested that the Etruscan artist rounded out the lower body of the Potnia Theron on

<sup>37</sup> VEIT 1990, 24.

<sup>38</sup> USTINOVA 2005, 73–74.

<sup>39</sup> VEIT (1990, 8) believes the original genesis of this motif can be traced back to Egyptian and Meso-

potamian depictions of a Potnia Theron or Magna Mater.

<sup>40</sup> VALENTINI 1969, 423 no. 24; also RUPP 2007, 213–214 and fig. 3.



Fig. 11. Bronze plate from Waldalgesheim grave. – Scale 2:3.

the kyathos handle with a lotus-palmette in order to remind the viewer of the goddess' link to fertility and fecundity<sup>41</sup>.

In Celtic art, the use of the *Rankenfrau* or *Rankengöttin* motif for the lower body of a 'Potnia Theron' may not be unique to the Reinheim armring. Claudia Tappert's recent analysis of the goddess depicted on the bronze yoke and wagon fittings recovered from the early La Tène wagon grave at Waldalgesheim (DE) suggests that her iconography was also based on the artistic conventions used for the Etruscan Potnia Theron<sup>42</sup>. On the two bronze plates decorating the yoke of the wagon, the upper bodies of female figures are engraved with a winding tendril-motif on their torsos. When arranged atop the yoke, the plates would have been set back-to-back, giving the female figures a Janus-like configuration, analogous to the figures on the Reinheim rings. Both female figures appear to wear leaf-crowns, suggesting their connection to the supernatural world (*Fig. 11*)<sup>43</sup>.

At first glance, the lower bodies of these female figures appear to be missing, but Tappert has suggested that their 'legs' were actually the curved wooden yokes running under the

<sup>41</sup> TUCK 2006, 132.

<sup>42</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for recommending

this article.

<sup>43</sup> TAPPERT 2017, 176; cf. BAGLEY 2014, 106.

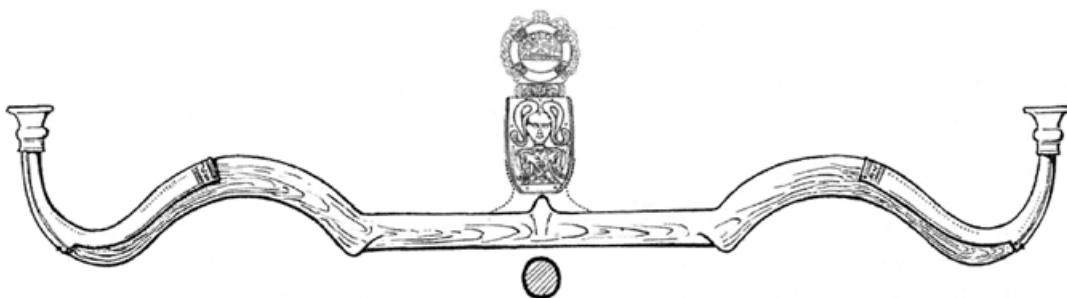


Fig. 12. Bronze plates atop the Waldalgesheim yoke fittings. – Without scale.

bronze plates and sitting on top of the shoulders of the yoked horses, in a fashion similar to a snake goddess or a *Rankenfrau* (Fig. 12)<sup>44</sup>.

Tappert points to the Reinheim armring as evidence that this artistic concept had reached the Celtic sphere by the early La Tène period. Set above these bronze plates were bronze openwork yoke mounts that display antithetical birds and tendril motifs. These motifs, Tappert believes, were inspired by depictions of the Potnia Theron on late Iron Age bronze handles from northern Italy, as well as depictions of the Gorgon in Etruscan art. In the latter case, she points to instances where the Gorgon was depicted as giving birth, as on an Etruscan 6<sup>th</sup> century BC wagon fitting from Perugia and a 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Etruscan gold bulla, now in the British Museum<sup>45</sup>. In Tappert's analysis, the entire ensemble of the yoke and wagon fittings at Waldalgesheim – a female deity with tendril or snake-limbed legs surrounded by animals – was meant to highlight the fertility of a female goddess associated with animals. Although very different mediums, the iconography of the Reinheim armring and the Waldalgesheim yoke and wagon fittings share the centrality of a 'Potnia Theron' with birds and a tendril-like lower body, linking her to fertility and regeneration. This iconography appears to have its roots in Orientalising Etruria.

### Conclusion

Over time, the Potnia Theron motif changed and evolved when adopted by different cultures of the ancient Mediterranean. As the motif travelled from the Near East to Greece, the Potnia Theron became associated with Artemis, the goddess of the hunt<sup>46</sup> and, by extension, nature<sup>47</sup>. In Etruria, the motif of the Potnia Theron was not associated with the Etruscan version of Artemis (Artumes)<sup>48</sup>, but rather adopted iconography seemingly based on Phoenician prototypes<sup>49</sup> and associated with fertility<sup>50</sup>. When the motif spread further

<sup>44</sup> TAPPERT (2017, 167–168) prefers the reconstruction of the yoke fittings by MARIËN 1961, fig. 4.3, where the bronze plates are attached atop the yoke, versus that of JOACHIM 1995 fig. 84, where the bronze plates are attached to the yokes themselves.

<sup>45</sup> TAPPERT 2017, 170–175; a crouching female giving birth is also depicted on a shard from a 6<sup>th</sup> century BC bucchero vessel from Poggio Colla (IT), see PERKINS 2012.

<sup>46</sup> KRAUSKOPF 1998, 174; cf. ICARD-GIANOLIO 1997, 1074.

<sup>47</sup> CHRISTOU 1968, 14 and 155.

<sup>48</sup> KRAUSKOPF 1984, 787; cf. NIELSEN / RATHJE 2009, 268.

<sup>49</sup> DAMGAARD ANDERSEN 1992–1993, 74–76; NIELSEN / RATHJE 2009, 267

<sup>50</sup> MAGGIANI 2012, 400–401; PERKINS 2012, 189; TUCK 2006, 132; cf. DAMGAARD ANDERSEN 1992/1993, 106.

north into Europe, this latter aspect of the Etruscan Potnia Theron may have appealed to some Celtic elites during the late Hallstatt and early La Tène period, even though it had largely fallen out of favour in Etruscan art by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>51</sup>.

It was not the motif of the Potnia Theron or Mistress of Animals that prevailed in Celtic art during the La Tène period, however, but that of the Despotēs Theron, or ‘Master of Animals.’ Martin Guggisberg’s study on the Master and Mistress of Animals motif in early La Tène art concluded that the Master of Animals motif largely supplanted his feminine counterpart during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. He attributed this shift in focus to the ascendancy of a male warrior elite at the beginning of the early La Tène period, who identified more readily with the Master of Animals<sup>52</sup>. In this regard, it is surprising to see the appearance of the Potnia Theron – if that was the intention of the artisans – on objects recovered from the early La Tène sites of Reinheim and Waldalgesheim. It may be more surprising that the iconography of these early La Tène objects appears to be derived from Orientalising Etruria, given the significant temporal and geographic distance separating them. Jennifer Bagley has recently discussed the challenge of interpreting the Mistress or Master of Animals motif in Celtic art. As Bagley observes, early La Tène artisans produced artefacts with sufficient skill and detail that they can be compared to the iconography of the Mistress or Master of Animals in other cultures, but our knowledge of the motif’s role in the Near East, Greece, or Etruria can only provide hints of its meaning in the Celtic world. Lacking written sources, Bagley encourages archaeologists to rely on the comparatively robust evidence for the context and usage of early La Tène art to gain a better understanding of the motif’s meaning<sup>53</sup>.

Taking this approach, consideration of the burial practices associated with early La Tène princely graves can potentially be useful. In her survey of high-status burials during the late Hallstatt and early La Tène period, Carola Metzner-Nebelsick observed that the presence of wagons and precious metal goods in female tombs appeared in a frequency similar to that of males, and that a similar situation could be seen in Orientalising Etruria. She attributed this phenomenon to the emergence of a social structure based on ancestry during the late Hallstatt period, in a manner similar to that theorised by Petra Amann for Orientalising Etruria<sup>54</sup>. In any society relying on familial bonds, the role of women would be elevated because of their key role in ensuring the continuation of the family line. This elevated status was recognised by well-appointed ceremonial graves, with Metzner-Nebelsick suggesting that the contacts established between the two societies during the Hallstatt period provided a paradigm for the female elites of the late Hallstatt and early La Tène period to emulate later on<sup>55</sup>. Thus, similar social dynamics may have undergirded the popularity of the Potnia Theron motif in Etruria and the Celtic world.

The possibility that Celtic elites and artisans of the late Hallstatt and early La Tène period could have been acquainted with Orientalising Etruscan iconography and beliefs should not be discounted. Following Metzner-Nebelsick’s analysis, it would have been a logical choice for Celtic artisans to turn to the centuries-old artistic conventions of the

<sup>51</sup> DAMGAARD ANDERSEN 1992/1993, 106–107; see also Guggisberg 2003, 180–181, on this point and its potential implication for the adoption of the Potnia Theron motif during the early La Tène period.

<sup>52</sup> GUGGISBERG 2010, 231.

<sup>53</sup> BAGLEY 2019, 199–205.

<sup>54</sup> AMANN 2000; see also TUCK 2006; TUCK 2010.

<sup>55</sup> METZNER-NEBELSICK 2017, 253–254; cf. ECHT (1999, 222) who suggested that the deceased at Reinheim might have been a priestess, but METZNER-NEBELSICK (2017, 258) believes that confining a female elite’s role in Celtic society to the religious sphere is too narrow a perspective.

Potnia Theron in *Orientalising Etruria* to develop an iconography that resonated with elites, particularly females. The reliance on Etruscan prototypes in the figural decoration of Celtic jewellery was demonstrated long ago by Paul Jacobsthal's comparison of a finger ring recovered from the early La Tène princely grave at Rodenbach (DE) with that of a late 6<sup>th</sup> / early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC gold finger ring from Vulci (IT)<sup>56</sup>. Two decades ago, Gerhard Dobesch suggested that Celtic migration into northern Italy likely dated back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and that this proximity to Etruscan settlements in the Po Valley could have played a formative role in the development of the early La Tène artistic style.<sup>57</sup> Excavations at the Etruscan settlement of Bagnolo San Vita (IT), south of Mantua and north of the Po Valley, have produced late Hallstatt fibulae dated to late 6<sup>th</sup> / mid-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC which Frey has interpreted as evidence that Celtic merchants had entered northern Italy in order to facilitate trade between the two regions at an early date<sup>58</sup>. With social contacts and trade links established between northern Italy and central Europe as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, it is reasonable to assume that Celtic elites and artisans would have had an adequate understanding of the narrative behind the iconography of the Etruscan Potnia Theron that was popular during the Orientalising period.

To justify this assumption, ethnographic studies may be of some use, as Vincent and Ruth Megaw have suggested<sup>59</sup>. In an attempt to understand the transmission of the iconography of Native American tribes, an experiment was conducted by the U. S. archaeologist Dorothy Washburn using art students in a Native American art history course. While studying paintings and textiles, groups of students were exposed to varying degrees of explanation about the artistic techniques and iconography used in Navajo and Arapaho artworks. Predictably, those students who had received comprehensive explanations about the narratives behind the artworks successfully reproduced both the artistic details and their proper configuration within them later on, while those who had only seen the artworks a few times and were given limited explanations failed at the same tasks<sup>60</sup>. In thinking about the transfer of iconography and narrative from northern Italy into central Europe, the fact that the Celtic artisan of the Reinheim armring was able to reproduce the key details of an Etruscan Potnia Theron in a similar configuration – central goddess, owls / raptor birds above, and tendril / vegetal motif below – suggests a working knowledge of the narrative that informed that iconography.

It is possible that as a male warrior elite began to assert itself politically during the early La Tène period, as Guggisberg has surmised, the iconography of a fertility goddess borrowed in part from Etruria and associated with elite females could have served as a reminder to people of a more stable and conservative social order based on ancestry. Other details on the Reinheim armring, such as the helmet, cuirass, and 'ring' held out in front of the chest of the goddess on the armring, may have been influenced by Greek prototypes, as Echt has suggested, but their incorporation into an iconographic scheme used for the Etruscan Potnia Theron would likely have given them a different meaning, comprehensible to a Celtic viewer but unknown to others. Whether the Celtic viewer understood the goddess on the Reinheim armring to be a 'Potnia Theron' in the traditional Mediterranean sense cannot be known, but it seems likely that fertility must have been one of her most important attributes.

<sup>56</sup> JACOBSTHAL 1944, 125; more recently, see GUGGISBERG 2000, 120–125, who cites other instances of Etruscan and north Italian decorative jewellery influencing early La Tène iconography.

<sup>57</sup> DOBESCH 1992, 157.

<sup>58</sup> FREY 2011, 375–377.

<sup>59</sup> MEGAW / MEGAW 1994, 297; more recently, see WENDLING 2018, 372.

<sup>60</sup> WASHBURN 2001, 94–98.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the editorial team and the anonymous reviewers of *Germania* for their comments and helpful suggestions on an earlier version of this article. I would also like to thank Dr Vincent Megaw for sharing his insights on Celtic contacts with Italy as well as Thomas Martin at the *Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte*, Saarbrücken, and Dr Claudia Tappert for their help. Any errors remaining are my own.

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**Abstract: The Etruscan roots of the Reinheim armring**

The figural decoration on the armring recovered from the early La Tène grave at Reinheim displays a goddess with a bird perched on her head and animals behind her shoulders. While reminiscent of the Mediterranean Potnia Theron (Mistress of Animals), the iconography of this deity remains obscure, though influences from Hallstatt, Greek, Scythian, and north Italian art have been identified. This study argues that three particular aspects of the armring's decoration – the headdress of the goddess, the animals she was depicted with, and the stylisation of her lower torso – place the primary influence for this artistic composition in Orientalising Etruria.

**Zusammenfassung: Die etruskischen Wurzeln des Reinheimer Armreifs**

Die figürliche Darstellung auf dem Armreif aus dem frühlatènezeitlichen Grab von Reinheim zeigt eine Göttin mit einem Vogel, der sich auf ihrem Kopf niedergelassen hat, und Tieren hinter ihren Schultern. Sie erinnert an die mediterrane Potnia theron (Herrin der Tiere), doch bleibt die Ikonographie dieser Gottheit unklar, wenn auch Einflüsse aus der Hallstatt-, der griechischen, skythischen und norditalischen Kunst festgestellt werden konnten. In dieser Studie wird argumentiert, dass drei spezifische Aspekte der Darstellung auf dem Armring – der Kopfschmuck der Göttin, die Tiere, mit denen sie dargestellt wurde, und die Stilisierung ihres unteren Körperteils – den Haupteinfluss für diese künstlerische Komposition im orientalisierenden Etrurien verorten.

**Résumé: Les racines étrusques du bracelet de Reinheim**

La représentation figurée sur le bracelet provenant de la tombe laténienne ancienne de Reinheim montre une déesse avec un oiseau posé sur sa tête et des animaux derrière ses épaules. Elle évoque ainsi la Potnia thérôn méditerranéenne (maîtresse des animaux), mais son iconographie reste floue, bien que l'on puisse constater des influences artistiques hallstattiennes, grecques, scythes et nord-italiennes. Cette étude réunit des arguments soutenant que trois aspects spécifiques de cette représentation – le couvre-chef de la déesse, les animaux qui l'accompagnent, ainsi que la stylisation de la partie inférieure de son corps – permettent d'attribuer à l'Étrurie orientalisante l'influence principale contribuant à cette composition artistique.

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## References of figures:

*Figs 1–3; 5:* Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Saarbrücken. – *Fig. 4:* Bern, Bernisches Historisches Museum. – *Fig. 6:* Drawing by Stephanie Gleit after ECHT 1999, pl. 13,1; drawing by St. Gleit after CAMBITOGLU / TRENDALL 1961, pl. 4,15. – *Fig. 7:* ECHT 1999, pl. 12,3; photograph M. Zorn. – *Fig. 8:* BERKIN 2003, fig. 15,30; drawing St. Gleit. – *Fig. 9:* BERKIN 2003, fig. 17,36; drawing St. Gleit. – *Fig. 10:* Drawing by St. Gleit after VALENTINI 1969, pl. 107b. – *Fig. 11:* TAPPERT 2017, fig. 1,5, based on the reconstruction of MÜLLER 2009, fig. 10. – *Fig. 12:* TAPPERT 2017, fig. 4, based on the reconstruction of MARIËN 1971, fig. 66,1.