

WEST-CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Decline in Trade in the Fifth Century B.C.

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THE PROBLEM

Massalia, the Greek city on the site of modern Marseille, was founded about 600 B.C. by Ionian Greeks from the city of Phocaea in Asia Minor. The Phocaeans were known in the Greek world particularly as traders, and Massalia was established as a trading city. Unlike colonial settlements established by other Greek cities in Sicily, southern Italy, and southern Russia, Massalia was not founded in an area of rich agricultural lands, but, as Strabo points out (IV 1,5), on a relatively bare and rocky coast unfit for extensive agriculture, though ideally located for

trade with inland Europe. The natural harbor of Marseille, one of the finest in the western Mediterranean, is situated just east of the mouth of the Rhône, the principal artery leading into the heart of the European continent.

During the 6th century B.C. intensive trade relations were maintained between Greeks at Massalia and central European communities. The clearest evidence of this trade is to be found in the numerous Greek and Etruscan objects recovered on settlement sites and in graves of the Late Hallstatt Period (roughly 600-450 B.C.) in eastern France, southwest Germany, and northwest Switzerland. Most striking are such exotic objects as the Vix krater, the bronze rod-tripods from La Garenne and Grafenbühl, the Grächwil hydria, and the bone, ivory, and amber carvings from Grafenbühl. Besides these exceptional items, Attic painted pottery of the second half of the 6th century B.C. has been found at several settlements, including Mont Lassois, Château-sur-Salins, the Britzgyberg, Châtillon-sur-Glâne, and the Heuneburg, and in the grave at Vix. Etruscan bronze jugs occur in several Late Hallstatt graves. In both settlement deposits and graves are found ceramic transport amphorae from southern France.

There has been some discussion in the literature as to whether the majority of the Greek and Etruscan objects in west-central European contexts of the 6th century B.C.

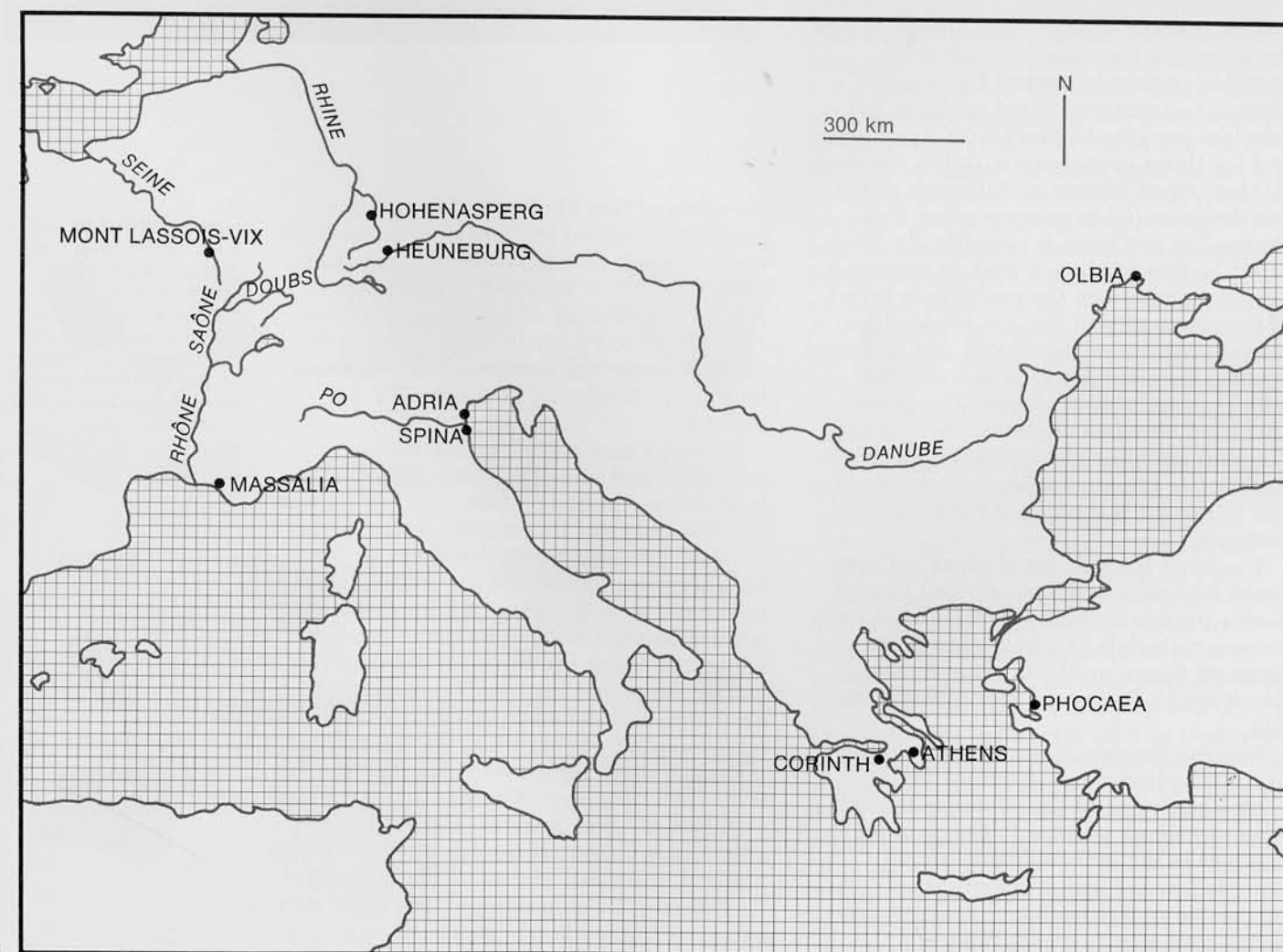
arrived via Massalia and the Rhône-Saône valleys or over the Alps from Italy; see A. Lang, *Die geriefte Drehscheibenkeramik der Heuneburg* (Berlin, 1974) 49-52 for a summary of the literature. The evidence now available in west-central Europe, southern France, and northern Italy makes it apparent that a majority of the imports of this period arrived in central Europe through Massalia and the Rhône valley.

The appearance of abundant Mediterranean luxury imports in west-central Europe during the 6th century is associated with major changes in the culture of the Early Iron Age societies. Where only small agricultural villages had existed previously, large centers of population, industry, and commerce now emerged. These sites, including Mont Lassois, the Heuneburg, and the Hohenasperg, were centers of

economic activity and political power, as indicated by the concentration of industrial and trading activity and the presence of graves outfitted with an extraordinary wealth of imported luxury goods and elegant local craft products in gold, bronze, and other materials. The workshops at these centers produced metal objects and ornaments of various kinds for smaller settlements in the surrounding countryside as well as for the local inhabitants. These sites functioned as foci in the long-distance commerce between central Europe and the Mediterranean world. The rise of these centers and of highly specialized industrial and commercial activities carried on at them, and the emergence of an elite group expressing its economic and social superiority in the richness of its burial inventories, depended on the growing trade

1 Bronze krater from the rich grave at Vix on the upper Seine. The vessel stands 1.64 m. high to the top of the handles and weighs 208 kg. (Photograph courtesy of Professor René Joffroy, Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint-Germain-en-Laye.) See R. Joffroy, *Le Trésor de Vix* (Paris 1962)

2 Map of the northern Mediterranean world showing some important sites of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.



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between west-central Europe and the Mediterranean world.

Shortly after about 500 B.C. an abrupt change took place. Attic pottery and other Mediterranean luxury products stopped arriving in this part of west-central Europe. The centers of population, wealth, industry, and trade ceased to carry on their high intensity of activity. No new rich graves appeared in the area after around 500 B.C. (with one single exception), and the objects that characterized them—both the exotic imported products and the special local manufactures such as gold neck-rings—no longer appeared. Evidence for any interaction between sites in this region of central Europe and the Mediterranean world is very sparse after the beginning of the 5th century B.C. In areas to the north, however, such as the Saarland and the Rhineland-Palatinate, a series of rich graves of the 5th century B.C. contain Mediterranean imports; on this group see A. Haffner, *Die westliche Hunsrück-Eifel-Kultur* (Berlin 1976).

THE EVIDENCE AND ITS INTERPRETATION

This marked change—the abrupt end of the intensive commercial interaction between centers in central Europe and Massalia—is an important problem for scholars working in Early Iron Age Europe and for those concerned with the commercial history of Massalia. Although noted and documented in many studies, this change has not been systematically investigated. In this paper, we wish to suggest a new perspective on the problem in terms of the economics of the greater Mediterranean world, and to propose one explanation for the change which is consistent with the available evidence. The model advanced here has applicability to many different situations of interaction between societies in the greater Mediterranean area, and to similar instances in other cultural contexts.

The basis for the interactions between Greek Massalia and west-central Europe during the 6th century was the Greek need for raw materials of various kinds, a common theme on the borders of the Greek world during the first millennium B.C.

Because the raw materials were destined to be transformed before or during use, none of the products traded from barbarian peoples to Greek cities survives in the archaeological record. Nonetheless we can make educated guesses as to the products involved, based on the evidence of ancient literary



accounts of two kinds: (1) descriptions of products obtained by Greeks in comparable environments, southern Russia, for example, as appear in Polybius' *The Histories* (IV 38, 4-5) and (2) descriptions of materials obtained by Mediterranean societies from west-central Europe a few centuries later, as in Strabo's *Geography* (IV 3,2 and 4,3).

Massalia was a trading city whose existence and prosperity depended on its trade in raw materials from interior Europe and the coasts of France and Spain, and finished products from elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Cities of the eastern Mediterranean were growing rapidly and had to import necessities such as grain, lumber and other forest products for shipbuilding, animal skins and furs, leather and wool products. Slaves had to be brought into the cities regularly to maintain the labor force. Importation of metals was essential for the industries of eastern Mediterranean cities.

All these items were available in abundance in central Europe, whose forests not only provided timber, pitch, resin, and wax needed by shipbuilders, but were also a haven of animals which served as a

3
Sphinx carved of bone with amber face, from the rich grave at Grafenbühl near the Hohenasperg. Height, 4.8 cm.; length, 5.2 cm. (Photograph courtesy of the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart.)

source of furs and skins. Timber could be floated down the Rhône-Saône river systems to Massalia; products of smaller bulk may have been transported either by water or overland.

The principal import product of the cities of the eastern Mediterranean was wheat to feed the urban populations. Much of the colonization by Greek cities was done primarily to establish new sources of wheat for the mother cities as well as for new colonial populations. Grain may have been transported down the Rhône from the rich agricultural lands of eastern France to be transhipped at Massalia to the east. Transportation of bulk cargoes over water was both relatively cheap and efficient.

Cattle and sheep were raised in substantial numbers in Early Iron Age central Europe, as animal bones recovered on archaeological sites demonstrate. Leather and perhaps meat and cheese may have been supplied by cattle for export. Fine woolen garments were manufactured in central Europe, some of which may have been intended for export south.

We know very little about whether or not slavery existed during the Early Iron

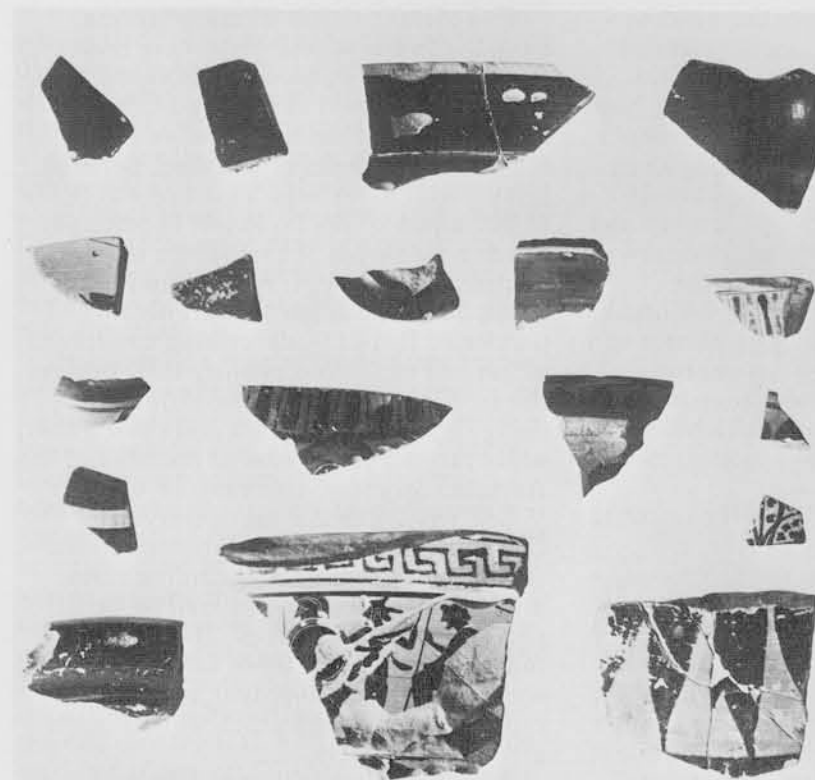
Age in continental Europe, but it is not impossible that circumstances were somewhat like those in Africa at the time of the European slave trade to the New World. Greek cities relied largely on barbarian lands for their supplies of slaves, and central Europe may have been a source at this time.

The quest for metals is well documented in the Greek world, and southern France and Spain are often cited as important sources. Many investigators have argued for a tin trade from Cornwall across France via the Seine and down the Rhône-Saône river system to Massalia; for a summary of the arguments, one should see F. Villard, *La céramique grecque de Marseille* (Paris 1960) 137-161. Whether or not tin was brought across France to the Mediterranean, it was certainly not the only item traded, and not, we think, the principal one. Tin trade has been cited to account for the Greek and Etruscan objects at Mont Lassois and Vix (with no archaeological evidence to support the suggestion), but commerce in tin cannot in any reasonable fashion account for the similar pattern of Greek and Etruscan objects at the Heuneburg and in the graves at Hohenasperg.

As stated above, the Greek world relied on non-Greek peoples on the fringes of the Mediterranean for a variety of raw materials, in exchange for such finished luxury products as wine, oil, Attic pottery, and bronze vessels. This pattern is a typical one for interactions between economically highly developed societies and those less so, as has been studied by P. Bohannon and F. Plog (Eds.) in *Beyond the Frontier: Social Process and Cultural Change* (Garden City 1967) and D. E. Walker (Ed.) *The Emergent Native Americans* (Boston 1972).

From the other perspective, the emergence during the 6th century in west-central Europe of centers of trade, industry, and population, as well as the appearance of an elite marked by sumptuous burials, came about as a result of the desire of central European chieftains to acquire the luxury trappings of Mediterranean civilizations. In their position at the center of their communities' economic systems, the chiefs were able to stimulate their communities to produce surpluses of those materials desired by the Greeks. They could acquire from the Greeks the wine, painted pottery, and other luxuries they wanted, and at the same time redistribute among their people certain imported luxury goods as rewards for their participation in the production of surpluses

4
Sherds of Attic Black Figure pottery from the settlement deposits at the Heuneburg. (Photograph courtesy of the Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Tübingen.)



for export. The centers emerged in response to the need for foci for collection, production, and exportation of the materials wanted by Greek traders. As the scale of the trade increased, so did the material wealth and the status of the chieftains controlling that trade.

Shortly after about 500 B.C., luxury imports from the Mediterranean world stopped arriving regularly in this part of central Europe. For discussion of this date see W. Dehn and O.-H. Frey, "Die absolute Chronologie der Hallstatt-und Frühlatènezeit Mitteleuropas auf Grund des Südimports," 6th International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences, *Atti*, vol. I (Florence 1962) 197-208.

At the same time the other special features of the 6th century also disappeared—no very rich graves occurred after that time, the industries in elegant luxury goods (such as gold neck rings) stopped producing in the area, and the former centers declined in activity, though they continued to be occupied for at least several decades. There is no archaeological evidence to suggest a decline in population, an invasion, exceptional internal warfare, or any kind of natural disaster.

These patterns have been most fully studied in Württemberg, where two of the centers—the Heuneburg and the Hohensperg—are located. Available evidence suggests that the same kinds of changes occurred around 500 B.C. in the neighboring regions where similar centers existed—eastern France and northwest Switzerland. If changes in central Europe had been responsible for the cessation of Mediterranean imports, then it would seem likely that some parts of central Europe would have continued to import Attic pottery and other materials after others had stopped receiving them. But according to the present archaeological evidence the break in imports appears to have been abrupt and simultaneous throughout west-central Europe, suggesting that the source of change was in the area from which the imports were coming—the Mediterranean world.

At Marseille a sharp drop in the quantity of Attic pottery is apparent just after 500 B.C. Villard interprets this evidence as indicating that Massalia suffered a period of economic decline during the 5th century. In *Hellenische Poleis*, vol. II, 867-870, Clavel-Lévêque argues that the evidence suggests not a decline, but rather a change in the city's commercial economy. While the decline in Attic pottery indicates a decrease in trade with some areas to the

east, local pottery is well represented in 5th century deposits, and new types, some of them imitations of imported forms, appeared during that century. The coinage of Massalia also suggests that the city did not suffer any major economic decline during the 5th century.

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

A possible explanation for the break in commercial relations between west-central Europe and the Mediterranean around 500 B.C. can be formulated through consideration of the problem in its broader Mediterranean-wide context.

West-central Europe, a vital source of food and other raw materials for the growing urban populations of Greece, was, however, a long way from Greece and Ionia. In addition to the distance by sea from Massalia, the distance up-river into central Europe must be reckoned, as must certain overland transport distances to bring materials to the Rhône-Saône-Doubs river system. Materials from centers in Württemberg, for example, had to cross the Rhine and be brought to the Doubs south of Belfort. Even with wagons or pack-animals, overland transport was inefficient and costly in time and energy. This cost would have been measured by merchants operating out of Massalia in terms of quantities of wine, oil, Attic pottery, and other trade goods.

This distant source of materials may have become obsolete when new resource-rich areas were opened up for Greek trade. One such area was at the head of the Adriatic Sea. In the last decades of the 6th century, Greeks established, perhaps jointly with Etruscans, a port city at Spina at the mouth of the Po River, to trade for the rich resources of that fertile and productive valley; see N. Alfieri and P. E. Arias, *Spina* (Munich 1958). Polybius (*Histories* II, 14.15), describing conditions at the end of the 2nd century B.C., praises the fertility of the Po Plain, citing especially its richness in grain and pork. From areas just north and east of the head of the Adriatic, Strabo (*Geography* IV 6, 9-10; V 1,8), writing in the 1st century after Christ, records the exportation of forest products of small bulk, including resin, pitch, wax, and honey, as well as cattle, cheese, hides, and slaves. There is every reason to think that these same products were in abundant supply during the 5th century when Greek cities were in such great need of them.

Wheat was probably the principal product obtained by Greeks from the Po

Plain and traded through Spina to the cities of the eastern Mediterranean. Other agricultural products and those from animals, such as meats and hides, and a wide range of forest products are likely to have played a part too. The scale of Greek commerce centered at Spina is suggested by the great quantity of Attic pottery recovered in the excavated graves there; see for example that published by S. Aurigemma, *La necropoli di Spina in Valle Trebbia* (Rome 1960). For Greek traders, the advantage of the Po Plain as a source of materials over the interior areas north of Massalia may have lain in the accessibility of the products for easy transport to Spina. It may also have lain in more favorable exchange conditions, better political relations, or other non-tangible factors.

Another area that may have replaced west-central Europe as a source of materials is that north of the Black Sea. The plains of southern Russia were a principal source of wheat for Greek cities and Polybius tells us (*Histories* IV 38) that at a slightly later date Greeks were obtaining there such products as timber, wax, honey, gold, hides, fish, salt, amber, drugs, and slaves. For evidence of a period of expanded commercial activity beginning around 500 B.C. at Olbia, see A. Wasowicz, *Olbia pontique et son territoire* (Paris 1975).

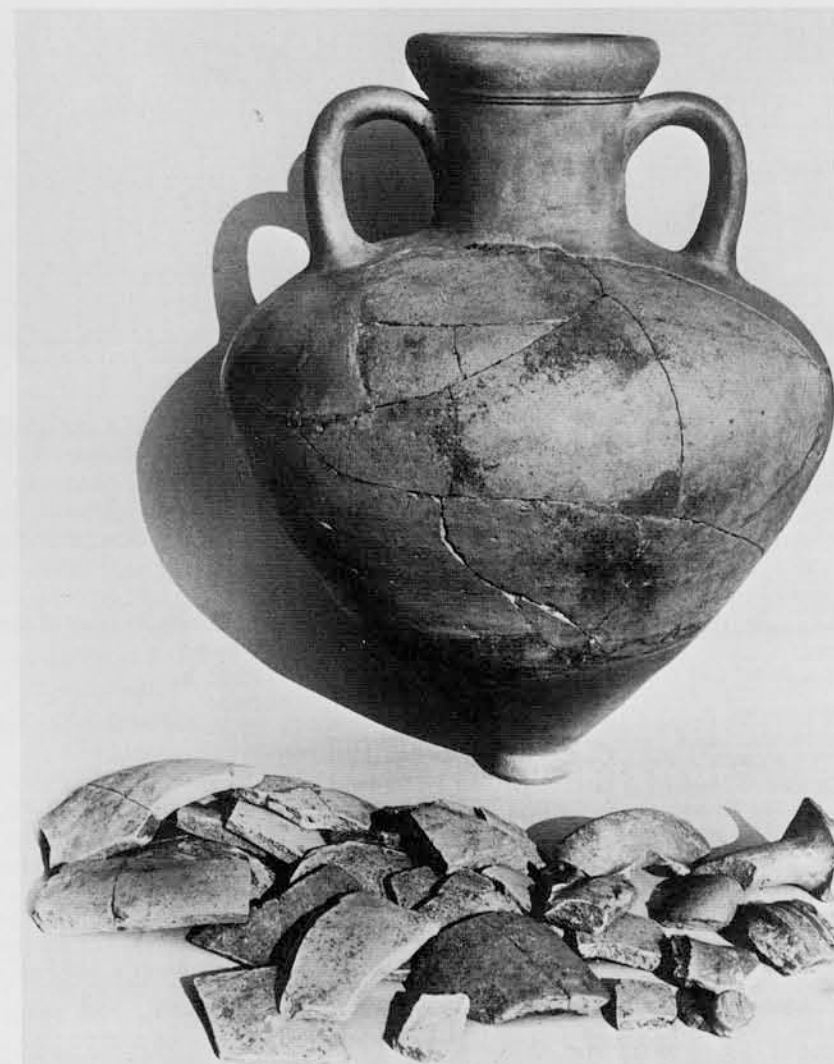
These are only two areas on the borders of the Mediterranean world that may have supplanted west-central Europe as sources of materials for resource-hungry Greek cities. A great deal more archaeological research in different parts of the greater Mediterranean world will be necessary before we can say anything more definite about the changes in the lands from which Greek traders were drawing resources. We present this suggestion here in the hope of stimulating further research in this direction.

Prehistorians specializing in one region such as west-central Europe can easily lose sight of the broader context of the problems on which they are working. That of the break in trade relations between Massalia and the centers of west-central Europe, and of the decline of those centers and the social and industrial developments accompanying them, cannot be solved in terms of central Europe alone or in terms of interaction between central Europe and Massalia. Because culture changes that occurred in west-central Europe during the 6th century B.C. had their roots in the trade relations established to help satisfy the needs of the growing urban centers of

the eastern Mediterranean, the corresponding changes after 500 B.C. can be understood only in terms of changes in the means of satisfying those same needs.

From a Mediterranean-wide view of the situation, one plausible explanation for the end of Greek trade with west-central Europe is the development of new, more accessible or otherwise more favorable sources of the same goods elsewhere. From the point of view of the Greek cities, the source of the materials was unimportant. From the perspective of the centers in west-central Europe, on the other hand, new sources of the materials meant an end to the intensive and profitable trade that had thrived for a century, and an end to the special economic and social systems that had developed in response to that trade.

5 Restored Greek transport amphora, from sherds recovered at the Heuneburg. (Photograph courtesy of the Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Tübingen.) See W. Kimmig and E. Gersbach, "Die Grabung auf der Heuneburg 1966-1969," *Germania* 49 (1971), 21-91.



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