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IRON AGE COMMUNITIES IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM FROM TÂRGU MUREȘ

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The present volume is the result of the International Colloquium held at Târgu Mureş in 9–11 October 2009, entitled “Iron Age Communities in the Carpathian Basin”, and includes studies concerning the communities of the second half of the 1st millennium BC from the Carpathian Basin. Its theme continues the debates covered by the previous volume, concerning the communities of the Bronze Age from the same region (see ed. Berecki et al., “Bronze Age Communities in the Carpathian Basin”, Bibliotheca Mvsei Marisiensis, I), which also originates from another international meeting held in the same location.

The main reason for choosing the Carpathian Basin as the central subject of both scientific meetings is its particular status – a region characterised by several contacts between western and eastern civilizations, but also between the Mediterranean south and the temperate Europe, from prehistory until the modern time. This area is crossed by two major axes, the Danube – a river which always was an essential route between Western and Eastern Europe, and the Amber Route which facilitated the economic and cultural connections between the Mediterranean space and distant populations from the Baltic shores.

The chronological interval of the Iron Age was chosen mainly because of the significant accumulation of new archaeological data having the potential to offer new perspectives on the evolution of indigenous or newly come communities from this region. At the same time, both recent information and older results of the archaeological investigations are now integrated into a series of new interpretative models which offer the possibility to compare various cultural patterns from the Carpathian Basin with others recently proposed for different contemporaneous geo-cultural entities from temperate Europe.

Last but not least, the chosen chronological interval was characterised by intense demographic, economic, social and spiritual dynamics, all having a major impact on the ways in which different social and political entities from the Carpathian Basin defined themselves from an ethnic, political or military point of view before the Roman conquest. From this perspective, a series of careful and detailed investigations of the regional cultural interactions and interferences may reveal various mechanisms through which such communal identities were constructed, and also many cultural practices through which these characteristics were expressed.

In the present volume are included articles written by archaeologists from ten countries, covering a variety of subjects: studies concerning the circulation of different specific artefacts, technologies or decorative motifs on smaller or larger areas of the Carpathian Basin, case-studies or syntheses concerning particular cemeteries or rural and fortified settlements, detailed analyses of the building techniques of certain communities, studies concerning particular ceramic categories, weaponry or jewellery, analyses of certain funerary practices. The list also includes some inter-disciplinary studies involving the use of aerial photography, archaeozoology and isotope analyses.

First, we would like to thank all the participants in the Colloquium (T. Bader, Z. Czaļilik, M. Egri, I. V. Ferencz, M. Guštin, M. Hauschild, M. Jevtić, B. Križ, M. Ljuština, V. and R. Megaw, J. G. Nagy, H. Pop, C. N. Popa, P. C. Ramsl, A. Rustoiu, R. Scholtz, L. D. Vaida), but also the authors of the articles included in this volume, the collaborators, the support of family and friends, the management (Z. Soós) and colleagues from the Mureş County Museum.

Berecki Sándor
April 2010
Târgu Mureş, RO
PRELLENKIRCHEN.
CELTIC SETTLEMENT IN THE FORELAND
OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

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Keywords: Prellenkirchen, La Tène Culture, Boii, Austria, Carpathian Basin

The matter of the connections between tribes inhabiting the north-eastern part of Austria and the Carpathian Basin area in the late Iron Age has not yet been the subject of in-depth research. Considerable areas of the modern-day Austrian federal states of Lower Austria, Burgenland and Vienna were then occupied by La Tène culture, whose creators can be linked with the Celtic Boii on the basis of written records and numismatic finds. One of the few settlements of this culture which provided data for considering the question of contacts in the area of interest to us and the area of the Carpathian Basin is the settlement of Prellenkirchen (VB Bruk an der Leitha). The settlement is located exactly on the border between the modern-day federal states of Lower Austria and Burgenland, and represents one of the most easterly sites of La Tène culture in Austria (Fig. 1).

Site no. 8 in Prellenkirchen was investigated in 2002 and 2003 during archaeological work on section 310–318 of the planned A6 motorway (Fig. 2). As a result of this research on a surface area of 39,000 m² part of a La Tène culture settlement was revealed (SAUER–CZUBAK 2004; KARWOWSKI–SAUER 2009). This settlement, originally occupying a considerably larger area, is one of the largest sites of this type in north-eastern Austria to be investigated archaeologically. Within the area that was excavated dozens of settlement features were unearthed (Pl. 1). These included in particular pit-dwellings, of which the majority are large dwelling features (even over 4 by 6 m in size), slightly hollowed into the ground, with two post holes characteristic for this type of construction. In some of the features earthen floors were also found as well as pits beneath the houses forming a kind of cellar. In the infilling of one of the pit-dwellings the remains of a human skeleton were found. The remaining features hollowed out in the earth were undoubtedly connected with economic activities, including a pottery workshop with a relatively well-preserved kiln. Numerous post construction features were found within the area of the settlement including houses (the most imposing being about 7 × 16 m in size), several small granaries and one feature of unknown purpose with the stone cobbles preserved, above which rose a construction supported on posts. In the southern and northern parts of the settlement its boundary has been preserved in the form of the remains of the enclosure.

Despite the fact that the La Tène culture settlement in Prellenkirchen has not provided many good finds to date it, its chronology may be determined as Middle La Tène period and the early phase of the Late La Tène period (i.e. from about the middle of the 3rd century to the middle of the 1st cen-

1. Unpublished materials, in press. I am very grateful to F. Sauer from the Viennese department of the Bundesdenkmalamt for making these materials from Prellenkirchen available to me and for agreeing to their publication.

Iron Age Communities in the Carpathian Basin, 2010, p. 333–347
Fig. 1. Location of the site in Prellenkirchen against the background of La Tène culture settlements in the Carpathian Basin in the 2nd century BC (graphics: M. Karwowski; map groundwork: L. Zentai).

Fig. 2. Site no. 8 in Prellenkirchen during research in 2003, view from the north-east (photo: F. Sauer, BDA, Vienna).
tury BC). Amongst the non-ceramic material are predominantly objects made of iron: a fragment of a fibula (with only the spring remaining) most probably of Middle La Tène construction, a massive hammer, an adze with a rectangular sleeve, a hoe or lister with a sleeve, an iron carpenter’s clamp, several knives and knife fragments, and a whole range of less well-preserved objects of indeterminate purpose (presumably fragments of nails, bits, files and perforators). In some of the pits unearthed in the settlement large quantities of iron slag were found. It is noteworthy that there were no bronze objects among the material found at the settlement (only one uncharacteristic fragment was discovered). The finds also include objects made of bone: a well-preserved needle with an ornamented head, a pendant made from a pierced bear’s claw and a skate (or smoothing-tool) made of horse bone. Characteristic finds for La Tène culture are glass ornaments: a fragment of a simple undecorated bracelet of blue glass and a fragment of blue glass bead of the “mask-bead” type. Of the remaining finds, two stone whetstones and a fragment of a lignite bracelet are worthy of note (Karwowski–Sauer 2009, 36–37, fig. 1–8).

By far the largest group of artefacts from the settlement consists of ceramic finds, almost exclusively fragments of vessels. The only exceptions are a fragment of a decorated spindle whorl, a few discs with an aperture made of ceramic shells and a fragment of a crucible. Among the ceramic vessels are forms typical of La Tène culture: mainly bowls, pots and flagons. There is no evidence of painted ceramics at the settlement.

Worthy of particular note among the ceramic material from Prellenkirchen is a small group of fragments of vessels made without the use of a potter’s wheel. Such ceramics among material dated to the Middle and Late La Tène period are rare in north-eastern Austria, although individual finds are known from a range of sites (Karwowski 2008, 485–486, fig. 7, footnote 2). There are a total of 47 fragments of vessels made by hand among the ceramics from Prellenkirchen, which is 1.9% of the ceramic finds from this settlement (Karwowski 2008, 485, fig. 6). Only five fragments of handmade ceramics were made of clay with an admixture of mineral graphite typical of La Tène culture pottery. From among the remaining fragments classed as “rough” ceramics the majority are completely uncharacteristic parts of the bellies of vessels. In only a few cases these are more characteristic fragments of straight (vertical or slightly inclined) or S-shaped edges as well as flat vessel bottoms. On these ceramics there are also raised elements in the form of handles, horizontal bands or bosses. In only one case was it possible to reconstruct almost the whole vessel out of the surviving fragments – it is a flat-bottomed bowl with straight, slightly inclined sides and a straight rim. Only a fragment of the belly together with part of the rim and the base are missing. It is not impossible that there was a handle placed low down. All of this material was made of lightly fired clay, grey, dark grey and brown in colour with a strong mostly coarse-grained admixture. The surface of the vessels retains only traces of being crudely smoothed (Pl. 2 and 3).

It is worth noting that there are practically no cases of vessels from Prellenkirchen or from other sites in north-eastern Austria being made by hand in the form that is characteristic of La Tène culture vessels. Here very simple forms of vessels are represented, which are found in different areas over a wide chronological scale. Their significant characteristic is the presence of raised bosses, horizontal bands (also decorated) or handles, in other words, elements which are practically absent in the traditions of La Tène pottery. In La Tène culture they can be treated as the survival of certain local Hallstatt traditions or as foreign influences or even imports. Practically all of the features – typological and stylistic as well as technological – observed on the handmade ceramics under discussion here have their counterparts in the Carpathian Basin, mainly in the Dacian culture but also in the La Tène culture, where they are considered to be direct Dacian influences. In that pottery tradition it was common to produce handmade ceramics with a handle and a whole range of raised elements in the form of bosses and horizontal bands. Also characteristic for those vessels made without using a potter’s wheel are all the forms occurring in Prellenkirchen – straight rims, slightly S-shaped vessels, and various types of bowl (cf. Crişan 1969; Crişan 1978, 109–140).

When analysing the ceramic material from Prellenkirchen it is worth noticing that some of the forms of vessels made on fast-revolving potter’s wheels with high quality clay also indicate a distinct link with the Carpathian Basin. These are mainly wide bowls and tall flagons. It should be stressed that both forms of vessels are very common in La Tène culture settlements in its middle phase and the issue of the local peculiarity of individual varieties undoubtedly requires further research. Some of the vessels we are dealing with from Prellenkirchen have analogous vessels on sites in modern-day Hungary, while at
the same time being very rare in north-eastern Austria and southern Moravia (cf. Filip 1956, 208–209; Čižmářová 2005, 20). This is especially the case with bowls with high cylindrical necks and the largest bulge of the belly placed low down (Pl. 4) (Horváth 1987, pl. 23/10; Kelemen 1987, pl. 15/2; Szabó–Tankó 2006, 339–340, fig. 10/5; Szabó Et Al. 2008, 205, fig. 20/3–4; 22/5, 8; 27/3; see also Ferencz 2006, 122, pl. 4/G5; Ferencz 2007, 96, pl. 31/2–3). Bowls of this shape are characteristic also of areas on the lower Drava and Sava occupied by Celtic Scordisci (Sladić 1986, pl. 7/9; 11/4; 18/6; Popović 2001, 92, fig. 5/6, 15; Dizdar 2007, 132–136).

Particular attention should be paid to the series of flagon-shaped vessels from Prellenkirchen of which the majority was found in the infilling of pottery kiln. The ceramics found in this feature are relatively homogeneous both typologically and technologically. Apart from a few fragments of wide-necked vessels there are above all tall vessels – flagons – with very characteristic triangular-shaped edges in profile (Pl. 5 and Fig. 3). All of them are made of the same type of good quality clay (called fine ceramic), but mostly lightly fired, which indicates incomplete firing. These vessels were therefore undoubtedly produced locally. The flagons of the type described are not known in north-eastern Austria and southern Moravia, while stylistically seeming to draw on the pottery traditions of the north-western areas of the Carpathian Basin (cf. Horváth 1987, pl. 15/10; 18/12; 20/1, 7; 21/9; 24/17; 39/10; Kelemen 1987, pl. 10/5; 21/5; Vadász 1987, pl. 1/1, 4; 2/6; 5/3; 6/1, 2, 5; Zeiler 2003, 40–42, pl. 75; 79; 80; see also Tomanič-Jevermov–Güstin 1996, fig. 5/9; 6/2; Vaida 2000, fig. 6/22–23; Ferencz 2007, 93, pl. 31/4; 74/2).

Another interesting object is the kiln itself where the flagons were most probably fired (Pl. 6). It is part of the concentration of constructions in the central part of the settlement and structurally seems to form a whole with the pit-dwelling adjoining it on the western side. On the south-western side of the whole construction traces of posts have survived suggesting the existence of additional roofing. The kiln had an oval firing chamber covered in a dome, whose remains have survived on the grate. The lower chamber, the fire-box, was covered with a well-preserved horizontal grate. The clay grate was supported on a stone partition dividing the fire-box into two parts. In the north-western direction an elongated service channel led from the kiln. It was a double channel (two circulation chambers) and probably lined in clay for a considerable distance. It is interesting that there is no typical deep kiln-side pit either by the channel itself or at the end of it. On the basis of the preserved remains it is difficult to say unequivocally where the furnace itself was, but it was probably within the service channel, or even in the first (only?) part of it. The use of this type of long double channel made it possible to obtain a more uniform rise in temperature and a smoother flow of hot air. This was helped by the clay-lined, well-heated walls of the service channel. The lower chamber, the fire-box, covered with the grate, was divided into two parts by a stone partition whose purpose was to support the grate but also to facilitate the flow of hot air brought in from the channel by two openings. Both kidney-shaped parts of the chamber were also lined in clay.

Finds of pottery kilns on sites of La Tène culture in the region of the central Danube, and in general in Central Europe, are fairly common (cf. Zeiler 2003, 133–135, fig. 60; Pieta 2008, 177–179, fig. 85). They are known basically in two forms: as a group of kilns, usually in groups of three (e.g. Čižmár 1987, 217–220, fig. 14; 15; Preinfalk 2005, 104–105), or as individual features (e.g. Reschreiter–Tuzar 1995; Čižmár Et Al. 2003, further literature there). The individual kiln from Prellenkirchen stands out from the majority of the remaining features of this type through the lack of a large characteristic structure.

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2. These ceramics are uniform in respect of colour, without discolouration, but very brittle and tending to crumble in damp conditions. These vessels were undoubtedly not completely fired, but it is difficult to say what caused the interruption in firing.
kiln-side pit. An analogy to this may be feature 151 (a kiln) from nearby Sopron in western Hungary (Zeiler 2003, 104–107).

Apart from the ceramic material discussed above, one more very interesting find from the settlement indicates a distinct link with the Carpathian Basin. This is a small fragment of a bead made of blue glass with the representation of part of what is probably a human face preserved (Fig. 4). Such mask-beads are mainly known from La Tène culture sites from the Carpathian Basin, with a fairly clear concentration in the region of the upper Tisza (Fig. 5). In La Tène culture only individual examples occur outside the Carpathian Basin. Moreover, an interesting concentration of the artefacts under discussion comes from territories occupied by Japods situated on the northern Adriatic in Croatia. More mask-beads come from the area of the Geto-Dacian culture in Romania and the area of the Thracian culture in Bulgaria. Numerous other mask-beads come from the western and northern coast of the Black Sea, mainly from Greek colonies (Karwowski 2005, 165–167).

The chronological occurrence of mask-beads covers a relatively long period. Black Sea finds are dated to the 4th century BC, or possibly the turn of the 4th and 3rd centuries. Presumably at least some of the beads from the region of the Lower Danube and from Croatia should be similarly dated. Specimens known from La Tène culture complexes, on the other hand, are dated to the beginning of the Middle La Tène period (i.e. about the middle of the 3rd century BC).

As was mentioned in the introduction, the issue of links between Celtic Boii and the Carpathian Basin has not so far been discussed widely in the literature, apart from publications in the form of short communiqués. This is connected with the state of research, mainly with the very small number of fully
investigated settlements from the Middle La Tène period. This is a period for which we do not have burial finds for the majority of La Tène culture areas. The next problem is the possibility of identifying the features of the finds which would allow their occurrence to be connected with specific geographical areas.

In this context the presence in the settlement in Prellenkirchen of handmade ceramics, which are undoubtedly a foreign element for the Boii on the Danube, is significant. These materials, both in the settlement in Prellenkirchen and in a few other La Tène culture settlements in north-eastern Austria, seem to testify to the fact that contacts between the Boii and the Dacians must have taken place long before the armed campaign of Burebista, well-known from written sources, which took place in the mid–1st century BC. The finds dated to the 2nd century BC (in other words, the Middle La Tène period) which are obviously Dacian in character – not only ceramics but also coins – are known from the north-western part of Hungary (Visy 1970, 27; Visy 1994, 9–10; Visy 1995, 100–101; see also: Bónis 1969, 188–191; Horváth 1998, 68–71) and south-western Slovakia (Crişan 1970; Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1982, 32; Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1997, 745–748; Pieta 1982, 36–37; Bednár Et Al. 2005, 149; Luštíková 2007). This early wave of Dacian imports may be connected not only with the intensification of Celtic-Dacian contacts, but also with minor migrations of the Dacian population in the northerly direction. The number of this type of finds rose rapidly from the second half of the 1st century BC. In this case we are probably dealing with archaeological traces of the victorious Dacian campaign under the leadership of Burebista. In the contact zone between the Celtic and Dacian cultures, mainly in eastern Slovakia, Dacian materials are widespread. Also in this period they spread to the Hungarian Lowlands. It is worth noticing that in north-eastern Austria there are practically no finds representing this later influx of Dacian materials (cf. Karwowski 2008, 448, footnote 5).

Contacts and connections between the inhabitants of the settlement in Prellenkirchen and the areas lying to the east and south-east are also visible in the ceramics made technically in the Celtic tradition. This concerns forms of vessels that are not typical of the areas inhabited by the Boii. It is interesting that there is a possibility that Scordisci participated in these contacts, their links with Dacian tribes from the Carpathian Basin being confirmed both by archaeological material and by written sources. The propagation of the potter’s wheel in Dacian circles is considered to be direct proof of such links (Crişan 1969, 140–141, 178).3

The glass mask-bead found here also fit into the context of the “ceramic” links discussed here of the settlement in Prellenkirchen. This find also combines within itself Celtic and Dacian elements connected with the Carpathian Basin.

The Celtic-Dacian character of the vicinity which took on various forms of mixing and co-occurrence of the elements of both cultures in many areas (see recently: Iaroslavschi 2000; Sârbu–Florea 2000; Costea–Crişan 2006; Pop–Pupeză 2006; Vaida 2006; Sârbu 2006, and further literature there) makes it possible to suppose that in north-eastern Austria too it must have left traces which are perceptible in archaeological material. It should be stressed here, of course, that the area of interest to us was not a direct “border” zone and that the exchange of materials could have taken place in a very limited way. The finds presented here coming from features of La Tène culture in the settlement of Prellenkirchen seem to bear witness to such an exchange.

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3. See also: Zirra 1976; also comments on Dacian painted ceramics: Crişan 1966; and on vessels in the form of situla: Gheorghiu 2000. It should, however, be noted that the potter’s wheel was known – albeit in a limited way – to local potters in the period preceding the arrival of the Celts, both in the Carpathian Basin and in the Central Balkans. The influences coming from the Greek world should therefore not be underestimated (Zirra 1976, 777–779; Romsauer 1991; Djordjević-Bogdanović 1994).
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