

THINGS AND THOUGHTS

Central Europe and the Mediterranean
in the 4th-1st centuries BC

Jan Kysela

Studia Hercynia, monographs 1

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Jan Kysela: Things and Thoughts. Central Europe and the Mediterranean in the 4th-1st centuries BC

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*Dedicated with infinite gratitude to all those with whom I spoke
over the last twelve years about things other than archaeology.*

This book is the result of numerous twists and turns of research carried out over the last dozen years. Its core formed part of a PhD. thesis written *en cotutelle* between the universities of Prague and Strasbourg in 2008–2013 under the direction of Anne-Marie Adam and Vladimír Salač. The title of the thesis is irrelevant here – little remained of its final structure, nothing from its original concept. Other studies – earlier, later, and collateral – complemented the text to bring it to the state in which it is now.

Throughout the various stages of my research I enjoyed institutional support by the Institute of Classical Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, mainly under the direction of Peter Pavúk, and UMR 7044 Université de Strasbourg. Various parts of my research were carried out thanks to the hospitality of the École Française de Rome which accorded me a one-month scholarship, the Römisch-Germanisches Museum Mainz, and first and foremost Bibracte, Centre archéologique Européen.

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Prague, Glux-en-Glenne
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But Turgon remembered the city set upon a hill, Tirion the fair with its tower and tree[...B]y the guidance of Ulmo he discovered the hidden vale of Tumladen in the Encircling Mountains, in the midst of which there was a hill of stone[. Thereupon he began] counsels to devise the plan of a city after the manner of Tirion upon Túna, for which his heart yearned in exile.

J.R.R. Tolkien *The Silmarillion*.

Reasons for a book

Books should have reasons, though many don't and look happy anyway. This book is about relations between Central Europe and the Mediterranean world in the Middle and Late La Tène period illustrated by Bohemia and – partly counter to my original expectations – there are some reasons for it to exist.

I started working on some aspects of the topic reluctantly, convinced that everything had been done already in such an attractive theme. And yet, after a dozen years' work, I still consider this text rather an intermediate report in this enormously rich field of study. In fact, I soon realised that although references to the Mediterranean were abundant in Central European Iron Age archaeology, the topic has never really been treated as a subject on its own – the material to investigate was plentiful and yet many of its aspects were seriously under-investigated, others lacked proper contextualisation on the Mediterranean side, synthesising statements were not lacking but were often based on partial evidence and sometimes on misunderstandings. For quite some time I relished treating partial aspects of the topic and I will gladly continue doing so in the future, but these small stories do not exist in isolation – some do not make enough sense and some do not make any sense at all until combined with others, and many of them respond in various ways to a single question; but mainly, only exposing the complete totality of the evidence will enable us to relate the overarching story which, after all, exists and is worthy of being told.

My principal reference in what follows is Czech, and more specifically Bohemian, archaeological evidence as well as research and the ways Mediterranean connections have been treated in it. It is not that I consider Bohemian research by itself to be in this respect more prone to analysis or to criticism; it is simply that Bohemia is where I come from, where I am imbedded in research and cultural networks and where I feel most confident to discuss these issues in a complete and the most possible objective manner. If I appear excessively critical at some points, it is not because I consider Bohemian scholars to be in this respect the only wrongdoers in European protohistoric research but because I believe that it is up to Slovak, Austrian, Bavarian or French scholars to be equally reflective of their own research history.

To come back to the actual theme of this study, there are three main domains of evidence to work with: 1) objects of Mediterranean origin in find contexts of transalpine La Tène cul-

ture; 2) local innovations based on Mediterranean models; and 3) the history of research in these matters.

The last point is the right place to begin our discussion. The Mediterranean – the Greek and Roman world – has always been the natural point of reference for the archaeology of the Bronze and Iron Ages in temperate Europe. Mediterranean written sources provided a (no matter how vague and self-centred) narrative framework, in rare cases also suggesting names of peoples and places or hints at events. Finds of transalpine objects in the Mediterranean area or *vice versa* became pivotal points of relative chronologies and of considerations of cultural interaction between the two regions.

According to the formulation repeated *ad nauseam* by many scholars, the Iron Age of Central Europe ‘entered into the light of written sources’. It was seldom added how dim this light was in actual fact and how little able it was to advance our knowledge. As far as the diverse categories of Mediterranean evidence are concerned, it was the information from the written sources that the archaeologists cared most about in the early stages of Bohemian research. It will be shown in detail in the chapter on the historical setting (chapter I.1) that their chief goal was to identify the historical peoples occupying the territory of the Czech lands in the Iron Age. The objects of Mediterranean origin excited them far less. Already Píč in his publication of the oppidum of Stradonice (Píč 1903 – regardless of its flaws one of founding works of the Late La Tène archaeology of Central Europe) was aware of the foreign origin of most categories of objects treated in this text. He, however, rarely referred to them explicitly as ‘Roman’ but rather ‘Roman provincial’, partly because at that time publications of material from Gaul and the eastern Alps (Gurina) were much more available than from actual Mediterranean contexts, partly due to his personal research agenda when he tried to prove by all possible means his argument that Stradonice was the seat of the Germanic ruler Maroboduus with close cultural links to the Roman world and (according to Tacitus *Ann.* II, 62.3) frequented by Roman traders. Mediterranean objects enjoyed less attention from the scholars of the next generation. Some ignored them completely (NIEDERLE 1900; 1909; ŠIMEK 1923; 1934¹), others (SCHRÁNIL 1928; 1940; BÖHM 1941; FILIP 1948) duly listed the Mediterranean/‘Roman’² finds from Stradonice without however exploiting them for more than at most a statement of the site’s involvement in long-distance trade. Discussions of interaction between the transalpine and Mediterranean world usually did not go beyond enumerating Celtic clashes with Greeks and Romans, and recognition of Greek and Roman inspiration in the Celtic coinage. In this atmosphere of general disregard for Mediterranean matters the remarks made by Jaroslav Böhm concerning the similarities between the Late La Tène oppida and Mediterranean towns (BÖHM 1941, 426–449; BÖHM 1946) stand out. Böhm pointed out that while the concept of urban settlements may have come to central Europe as a result of Mediterranean inspiration, ‘this external impulse did not get lost because the indispensable [economic and social] premises for the creation of towns had already been put in place by the Celts themselves’ (BÖHM 1941, 427). Böhm then went on to analyse these premises and never came back to the role of Mediterranean influences which he apparently viewed as completely marginal. Later on (BÖHM 1946, 29, 37–39) he even vehemently argued against the idea of Mediterranean inspiration for the oppida ascribing it to ‘insufficient knowledge of European archaeology, typical of the last century’ (unfortunately without referring to a specific work or scholar).

1 Šimek’s silence in this regard is somewhat stunning considering at what length in the same works he discusses bronze vessels of the 1st century AD (ŠIMEK 1923, 59–73).

2 Their precise origin is not a subject of curiosity by these scholars and it often gets blurred by the commonly used unfortunate term ‘antique’.

This state of affairs took a new turn with the work of Jan Filip (1900–1981, professor at Prague University in 1948–1980), almost the only archaeologist of the previous generation also active after WW2. Filip replaced the strictly material-based approach of the pre-war generation with a very particular and rather unfortunate method in which archaeology and a heavily reconstructed (and in some parts quite imaginary) grand historical narrative backed each other's flimsy hypotheses. However, even though largely dependent on Greek and Roman written sources and not averse to stretching their evidence, Filip remained rather restrained – perhaps unimaginative or even disinterested – when it came to assessing the interaction between the two sides of the Alps. Focused primarily on the La Tène Culture itself and viewing pre-Roman Europe basically as an arena of a power struggle between the ethnic blocks of Celts, Germans, and Romans, Filip felt little urge to account in detail for the nature of Roman influence in Central Europe. In passing he mentioned the (in his opinion possible) Mediterranean inspiration of Late La Tène painted pottery (FILIP 1956, 508); he claimed a growing Roman influence on the oppida in their latest phases without specifying on which grounds other than historical conjecture (FILIP 1956, 329–330). In dealing with the actual Roman imports in Stradonice (FILIP 1956, 331) he was happy to come back to Píč's ideas that since the site in his opinion survived down to the period of Maroboduus, the finds testify to the presence of Roman traders at that time.

In a work for the general public, Filip touched for the first time upon the idea of connection between Bohemia and the migration of the Boii from northern Italy to central Europe (FILIP 1960, 61), though not implying any historical or archaeological consequences of this. This narrative scheme, based on a mention by Strabo (v, 1.6) was first introduced by German and Austrian numismatists in the 1930s (PAULSEN 1933, 21–23; PINK 1936, 18–19; PINK 1960, 20–21) and soon after Filip's mention was embraced wholeheartedly in Slovakia by Eva Kolníková (1963). In 1966, Libuše Jansová explicitly invoked the migration of the north Italian Boii to Bohemia as the cause of the foundation of oppida in Bohemia (JANSOVÁ 1970, 329, 335).³ Shortly before Wolfgang Dehn had published a study comparing formal features of oppida with Mediterranean towns (DEHN 1961; see also DEHN 1977) but Jansová did not refer to it even implicitly and we have seen that Böhm disputed such hypotheses as early as 1941. The idea must have been around though never formulated in print.

These voices remained rather isolated. After Filip's work, major culture historical matters were considered settled and Czechoslovak research of the 1950s–1980s focused more on fieldwork, material studies, and broadly economic issues. The Mediterranean was in no way a theme in the major synthesis of the whole of Bohemian pre- and protohistory from 1978 (PLEINER – RYBOVÁ eds. 1978), apart from an innovative but rather bland and vague statement of 'experience gained by contact with the advanced regions of the Mediterranean' contributing to the development of La Tène civilisation (PLEINER – RYBOVÁ eds. 1978, 590); the only element

3 'Les influences méditerranéennes à propos de l'origine des oppida celtiques et surtout à propos de leur fortifications avec un agger derrière les murs en pierres et avec les portes aux ailes et retour d'équerre avaient été envisagées déjà auparavant par quelques auteurs. Les influences romaines à propos des substructions en pierres sèches des habitats celtiques, surtout à la fin du 1^{er} siècle av.n.e. ont été supposées aussi par J. Filip. On ne doit aussi oublier que les Boii, après avoir été repoussés au 2^{ème} siècle par les Romains de l'Italie du Nord, auraient pu – comme l'admet J. Filip – trouver une nouvelle patrie sur le territoire de la Bohême où ils sont historiquement attestés au premier siècle av.n.e. Ce fait aurait pu leur faciliter l'adoption d'une façon plus évoluée de bâtir les habitations qu'ils pourraient avoir appris à connaître dans les cités étrusques de leur ancienne patrie, p. ex. Marzabotto, [...]'. Only one year earlier her attitude in this matter was very close to that of, for instance, Böhm (JANSOVÁ 1965, 11–12).

of interest for our study is the already obligatory overview of southern imports from Stradonice brought there 'by trade' (PLEINER – RYBOVÁ eds. 1978, 614, 623). A similar sober tone was characteristic also of the first publications of research into Czech oppida – even those intended for the general public: e.g. BŘEŇ 1966; MOTYKOVÁ – DRDA – RYBOVÁ 1978a; MEDUNA 1980, 164.

Only in the 1980s did some of the key categories of imports start to be published. Apart from the study of the only surviving Stradonice intaglio (ONDŘEJOVÁ 1981), glass imports (vessels and ring ornaments) were published by Natalie Venclová in 1990 in her overview of *Prehistoric Glass in Bohemia* (VENCLOVÁ 1990). The most significant publication in this respect was the overview of 'antique imports' in the last two centuries BC in the MA thesis of Helena Svobodová (1981) published later in two articles focused on bronze vessels (SVOBODOVÁ 1983) and other import categories (SVOBODOVÁ 1985). This study unfortunately suffered from several drawbacks outside the author's control: the limited availability of the actual finds (some unpublished, some inaccessible to study, some kept in Vienna, beyond the reach of Czechoslovak students in the 1980s) and therefore the need to study them mostly on the basis of sometimes inadequate publications; the limited availability of appropriate publications (Svobodová's studies came quite early in the history of research and were to some extent pioneering, though on the flipside there was little bibliography to work with – all the more so in 1980s Czechoslovakia); and finally, under these circumstances, it was difficult if not impossible to take the important step of comparing the Czech facies with imports from other parts of Europe and trying to interpret them. This stage of research was summed up in an article by Jan Bouzek finally dedicated entirely to (the most significant part of) the topic of our study – Bohemian oppida and the Mediterranean (BOUZEK 1989).⁴ The text is extremely dense and not always specific but still it is the most concise and clear overview of the rather restricted opinions expressed so far, not deviating from them in any particular way: the oppida do resemble Mediterranean towns (it is not specified whether and in what way they were inspired by them; p. 129); the numerous imports indicating contacts with Italy, presumably via the north Italian Celts since many of these artefacts find analogies in sites like Ornavasso; fibulae on the other hand document shared fashions between both regions (p. 130); there were technological innovations coming from the south including also e.g. rotary querns and the potter's wheel (p. 131); 'writing was probably not limited to Roman traders' whose presence is thus implicitly assumed (p. 131); the migration of the Boii from Italy headed exclusively to the Middle Danube area (p. 132). The upcoming 1990s were to bring a major interpretational upheaval to these sober attitudes.

The idea that the north Italian Boii had a role in the cultural development of Iron Age Bohemia was in the meantime, while hibernating in Bohemia proper, being further developed in Italy and France by Venceslas Kruta (KRUTA 1978, 174;⁵ KRUTA 1980b, 199–201; KRUTA 1988, 288;⁶

4 The first version of the paper (BOUZEK 1982) focused specifically on imports abstaining almost completely from interpretations.

5 'On peut se demander dans quelle mesure la diffusion de la nouvelle mode [d'habitation en Europe centrale] n'a pas eu pour principaux agents les groupes boïens qui quittèrent en 191 la Cispadane. Dans le cas où l'hypothèse d'une relation entre ce phénomène et le développement proto-urbain pourrait être confirmée par des arguments moins subtils que ceux dont nous disposons actuellement, les Boïens de Cispadane auraient pu avoir joué un rôle de premier ordre dans l'apparition des oppida transalpines.'

6 'La disfatta dei Boi e il ritorno di una parte almeno dei loro effettivi Oltralpe, è documentata da tutta una serie di indizi di forti e dirette influenze peninsulari che rendono probabile una loro partecipazione attiva allo sviluppo degli oppida, le prime formazioni urbane dei Celti transalpini.'

Kruta In: *Formazione CdM* 1988, 315;⁷ KRUTA – MANFREDI 1999, 195–196; KRUTA 2001, 341–343; Kruta In: KRUTA – LIČKA eds. 2001, 68–69; 123; Kruta In: KRUTA – LIČKA – CESSION-LOUPPE eds. 2006, 205–207 and *passim*; KRUTA 2018). Kruta based his hypothesis almost entirely on historical considerations and very confidently asserted, but very selectively documented, ethnic affinity between the populations of southern Bohemia and northern Italy. As to the actual archaeological evidence, he relied mainly on Middle La Tène period artefacts to support his view of an almost constant flow of people and ideas between Italy and Central Europe. Evidence from Bohemian oppida, let alone the Mediterranean objects there, does not form part of his arguments. In this respect he relied on a synthesis of the Bohemian Iron Age published by Petr Drda and Alena Rybová (DRDA – RYBOVÁ 1995; 1998; DRDA – RYBOVÁ 1997, 109–113), whose main points were extremely complementary with Kruta's.

This synthesis is centred on the oppidum of Závist through which the authors, the excavators of the site, view all the major processes and even events of the Bohemian Iron Age. It is here that they bring the newcomers from northern Italy (the authors duly describe this migration as hypothetical but attribute it an indispensable role in the story) to establish here the first oppidum beyond the Alps. This romantic account, bearing excessive similarity e.g. to Tolkien's neomythologies quoted at the head of the chapter, was supported with only some doubtful circumstantial evidence (an unexpectedly high chronology for the foundation of Závist corresponding roughly with the supposed arrival of the newcomers 'in ca 175 BC'). Material proof of this narrative is limited exclusively to a series of local vessels imitating, in the authors' opinion, Mediterranean forms. Apart from a few marginal voices (POLIŠENSKÝ 2003; JANČO 2003), the idea was endorsed especially by Jan Bouzek (BOUZEK 2007, 136, 143–145; BOUZEK 2011a, 146; BOUZEK 2011b, 69; BOUZEK 2011c).

Bold as it is and notwithstanding all the criticism it duly deserves (and which will be exposed below), this hypothesis has been so far the most coherent if not the only comprehensive approach to the issue of Mediterranean connections in the later Iron Age of Bohemia and Central Europe. Over the last few decades, new evidence of Mediterranean contacts have started piling up and new statements and hypotheses in this respect have become more and more common: the discovery of the lowland agglomeration in Némčice nad Hanou with its numerous finds of Greek coins opened a new chapter in assessing contacts in the pre-oppida period (ČIŽMÁŘ – KOLNÍKOVÁ – NOESKE 2008; KOLNÍKOVÁ 2012); the excavations on the Castle Hill of Bratislava (MUSILOVÁ – BARTA – HERUCOVÁ eds. 2014) and more recently in Vienna (ADLER-WÖLFL – MOSSER 2015; MOSSER – ADLER-WÖLFL 2018) have shed a completely new and unexpected light on the latest stages of the La Tène period about which we previously believed we had a very complete picture based on both archaeological and written sources – neither of them made us anticipate these new discoveries. The remarkably swift development of numismatic research (cf. MILITKÝ 2015a; 2015b; 2018a; 2018b; SMĚLÝ 2017) has shown more vividly than ever before how dynamic, multifaceted and profound the Mediterranean connections were from very early on; new finds of both individual objects (e.g. KYSELA *et al.* 2017) and entire find assemblages (e.g. KYSELA – DANIELISOVÁ – MILITKÝ 2014; ADLER-WÖLFL – MOSSER 2015) from sites known and unknown before have broadened the available corpus... And yet, not even the finds collected in Stradonice in the 19th century have been fully published and properly analysed and contextualised.

7 'L'esperienza urbana che i gruppi celtici acquisirono vivendo per quasi due secoli a contatto con le popolazioni italiche costituì al momento dell'occupazione romana della Cispadana e del conseguente ritorno oltr'Alpe di una parte dei Boi (Strabone V, 1.6), un fattore di primaria importanza per lo sviluppo e la diffusione degli oppida transalpini.'

While the Mediterranean fascination of late 19th and early 20th century scholars translated mostly into their reliance on written sources and their painstaking efforts to project these mentions into a passive archaeological reality, in the second half of the 20th and in the early 21st century, mentions of the Mediterranean role in the Middle La Tène period cultural transformation (e.g. VENCLOVÁ ed. 2008/2013; DANIELISOVÁ 2011) and of long-distance trade between Mediterranean and Central Europe in the Late La Tène period (e.g. SALAČ 2004; VENCLOVÁ ed. 2008/2013, 144; DANIELISOVÁ 2011) have almost imperceptibly become commonplace (though not always a significant factor) of archaeological discussion whether arguing in favour or against it. And yet the explanatory models available to Central European archaeologists who wish to go beyond a mere statement of Mediterranean imports, influence, or simply ‘contacts’, are ultimately those present in their interpretational toolbox since the times of Filip if not Píč: returning Celtic mercenaries (but were the Celts from Central Europe ever involved in such enterprises? Did mercenaries ever return?); the *Heimkehr* of the Italian Boii (corroborated by nothing but wishful thinking); Roman traders in the oppida (a model going back ultimately to the times when Stradonice was believed to be Maroboduus’ seat)... Most importantly, these topics have often been treated in isolation without sufficient concern about their context both in Central Europe and in the Mediterranean. At this point a synthesis of the available – written and archaeological – evidence on what we know about the mutual relations between Central Europe and the Mediterranean in the 4th–1st centuries BC may turn out to be useful.

Throughout this quick overview of the history of research, we should realise that a common feature of dealing with Mediterranean evidence in Central Europe has been overstatement and misrepresentation due to overrating narrative and individualised (*événementiel*) aspects of a past reality, as if the Mediterranean evidence was (by virtue of it being Mediterranean?) more able to structure this than the local archaeological data.

In the past, I have expressed critical and polemical opinions about some of these approaches (KYSELA 2009; 2011; 2015a; 2018/2019a). This is not the place to repeat my criticisms, not because I have grown more conciliatory in these respects but because the point of this study is not to engage in polemics with particular interpretations but rather to produce evidence, judge it, and advance hypotheses on the basis of this evidence itself (though it will not prevent me from occasional reference to previously expressed opinions).

It brings us to the question of what this book will actually be about, what will be the main material of this study and how it will be treated. Its main part (chapters II.2 and II.3) will consist of a rather old-fashioned typochronological and contextual study of the corpus of objects of Mediterranean origin discovered in Central European contexts of the 4th–1st centuries BC with an emphasis on trying to obtain a full and complete picture. The situation in Bohemia will be set in a broader picture by comparison with two neighbouring regions in Central Europe. The method may seem unsophisticated. I will gladly agree that such positivism should not be the ultimate step in the intellectual development of mankind, but I firmly believe it to be the most adequate approach for this material at this stage of research and somewhat superior to the previous impression-based storytelling.

Some adaptations of the method will be indispensable for the subsequent chapter (II.4) in which I will try to judge, on the basis of several selected examples, the scope and impact of technological innovations of Mediterranean origin on the transalpine world. Both large scale phenomena and individual specific cases will be treated, once again in a broader geographical context.

Throughout this study I want to follow one principle – my ultimate aim is to study past communities (and their mutual relations) as archaeological units. In order to do so, I do not need to know their names. I don’t believe in Celts, I don’t believe in Boii and I don’t care about

them; I care about the inhabitants of Central Europe in the last few centuries BC and about their material remains and it is through their material remains that I want to read their stories. I do not believe that other sources are even partially capable of helping me in this effort and I hope to be able to demonstrate this later on (chapter I.1).

Before finishing, it is important to make some quick comments about how I actually use some of the terms mentioned above. I abstain completely from the word 'Celts' unless its use in the context is justified by the ancient written sources (along the lines of COLLIS 2003/2010; cf. KYSELA 2018/2019a); the term 'La Tène Culture' in my usage is not intended to be (as is sometimes the case) a politically correct whitewash for the concept of 'Celts', i.e. a set of essential traits inherent to an individual or a community. No one was ever born a Latènian... In my view, it is just a simplistic tag for our own means of classification. I do not understand a 'La Tène Culture' or the Mediterranean as monolithic blocks of essential properties, nor as analytical units on their own, or as actors in our studies, but rather as very general settings, a background against which we can project our material, a gauge of what is normal and what is unusual. They are for me mere artificially circumscribed aggregates of material features within a spatial continuum in which two neighbouring cultures (e.g. the La Tène and Italic cultures in northern Italy) may seem closer to each other than the two extreme ends of this single culture (e.g. La Tène in northern Italy and in Britain). We may of course assume that the shared material traits reflect also some shared values and social or economic models but we must assume them to be as dynamic and changeable in time and space as the material features. Both material culture and social strategies are direct products of human societies and therefore they are naturally maintained as long as it is advantageous for these societies, and transformed or replaced when it stops being the case, no matter whether it is for economic reasons or of prestige. These quite basic principles of human agency should be of no surprise to anyone but I find it useful to lay them out. Their principal point is that unlike some previous approaches and in spite of the seemingly bipolar terminology I use (La Tène/Central Europe vs. Mediterranean) we are not going to approach the evidence as a part of a large-scale narrative in which collective actors ('Celts', 'Boii', 'Romans') play out a drama of two civilisations clashing with each other. Europe of the last few centuries BC was, as I will try to demonstrate in what follows, a loose continuum of small self-contained worlds, each defined by, as well as co-defining, the underlying archaeological cultures and geographical areas, each in their own specific way, each with fluid and highly permeable borders; each of these small worlds has its own ways of dealing with elements of single archaeological cultures (that is of living culture of which little remains for us to judge), accepting, rejecting or passing them on to other regions. Our impression of what an entire archaeological culture is depends largely on these dialogues and intersections within the single small worlds and between them.