

## Zoomorphic motifs on La Tène pottery: regular decoration or graffiti?

Zoomorfní motivy na laténské keramice:  
pravidelná výzdoba nebo graffiti?

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*A fragment of a vessel with a zoomorphic motif from the Břežany II site in central Bohemia is one of the rare representatives of figural images on La Tène pottery. A selection of roughly thirty cases from La Tène Europe of the 5<sup>th</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> century BC presents the development of this specific expression of La Tène art from regular decoration to spontaneous graffiti.*

La Tène – pottery – zoomorphic decoration – graffiti

*Fragment nádoby se zoomorfním motivem z Břežan II ve středních Čechách je jedním ze vzácných reprezentantů figurálních vyobrazení na laténské keramice. Výběr tří desítek případů z laténské Evropy 5.–1. stol. př. Kr. předvádí vývoj tohoto specifického projevu laténského umění od pravidelného dekoru po spontánní graffiti.*

doba laténská – keramika – zoomorfní výzdoba – graffiti

### Introduction

Decoration is an independent and closely followed subject in the study of pottery of the Early and Late La Tène periods, be it from a technical, chronological or symbolic perspective. The majority of decorative motifs in this period are geometric or vegetal, whereas figural images, zoomorphic or anthropomorphic, are rare, meaning that each new find receives extraordinary attention. In the case of impressed images on La Tène pottery, both decoration and graffiti are usually considered, albeit without any justification or explanation of the use of this term. The find of a fragment of a La Tène vessel with a zoomorphic motif from Břežany II, central Bohemia, described in this article is a contribution to this topic.

### Find context

The pottery fragment comes from a settlement site in the cadastre of the village of Břežany II (in the former Kolín district). The site is located north of the village on the south facing slope of a flat rise over the right bank of the Týnický stream (coordinates 50.1000478N, 14.804693E; *fig. 1*). Settlement probably continued on this same rise toward the north to the cadastre of the village of Černíky (in the former Nymburk district). The site is located in a chernozem area with the highest soil fertility according to the BPEJ catalogue (<http://>

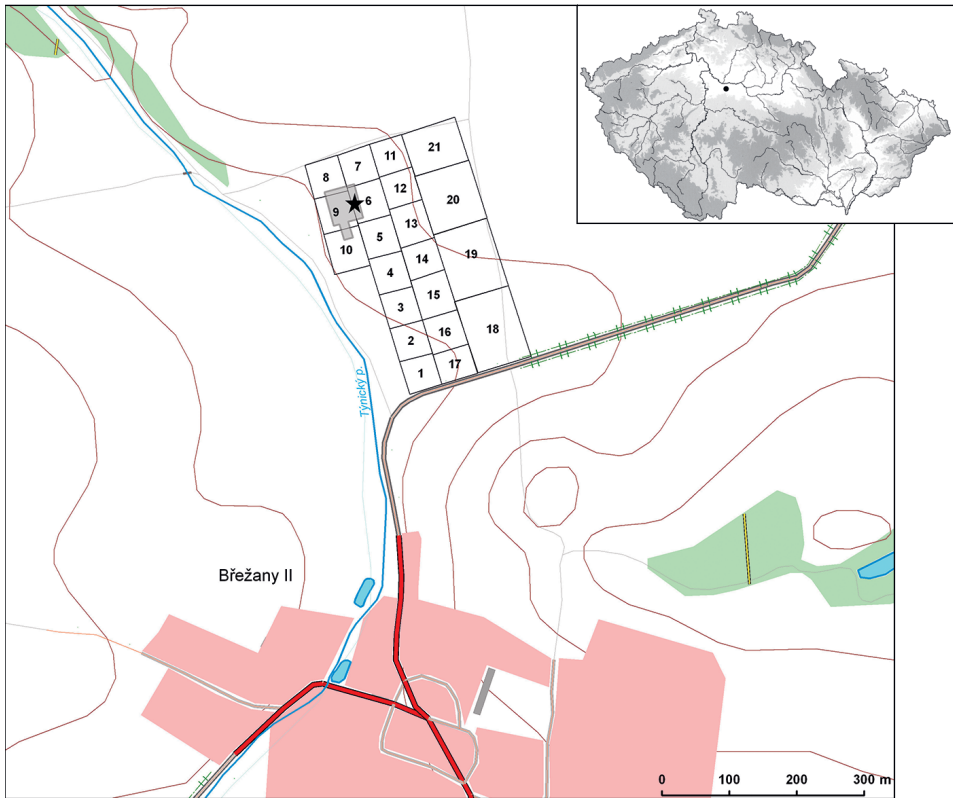


Fig. 1. Břežany II. The site. Asterisk: findplace of the sherd with zoomorphic decoration, 2005. Sectors 1–21: surface survey, 2008. Grey area: magnetometer survey, R. Křivánek 2008.

Obr. 1. Břežany II. Poloha naleziště. Hvězdička: místo nálezu keramického zlomku se zoomorfní výzdobou v r. 2005. Sektory 1–21: povrchová prospekce 2008. Šedá plocha: magnetometrická prospekce, R. Křivánek 2008.

[www.spucr.cz/bpej/celostatni-databaze-bpej](http://www.spucr.cz/bpej/celostatni-databaze-bpej)) and has been intensively farmed for many years. The *Archaeological Database of Bohemia* (ADČ) does not list any archaeological activities or finds before 2005.

**Activities in 2005.** In 2005, Petr Klásek found a fragment of a La Tène pottery vessel with incompletely preserved zoomorphic decoration. This artefact is described below. In the same year, P. Klásek, S. Vencel and N. Venclová conducted a surface survey at the site of the find of the decorated potsherd and its surrounding area (fig. 1). Artefacts documenting activities from various periods were collected from the ploughed field (Klásek – Vencel – Venclová 2009, 21).

Finds: Neolithic: stone fragment (bi-product of drilling); Neolithic to Eneolithic: 4 fragments of silex chipped industry; Middle Eneolithic: 10 potsherds; Eneolithic in general: 3 polished stone tools; Early Bronze Age: polished stone tool; Hallstatt to Late Hallstatt period: 8 potsherds; La Tène period: 6 potsherds; agricultural prehistory: 135 potsherds; High Middle Ages: 1 potsherd. Although sherds reached a size of up to 7 cm, the majority of them could not be dated more precisely than to agricultural prehistory. Only 15.1 % of sherds in the entire assemblage of prehistoric pottery could be classified with greater precision.

Sector	NEOL	ENEOL	BR_Late	HALLST	LT_Early	LT_Late	ROMAN	MIGR	PREHIST	EARLY MED	HIGH MED	POSTMED	POL	CHIPP	DAUB	SLAG
1									14	4	2					
2			1	1				1	19	2						
3									7	7						
4									19	4						
5					1	1	1		94	2		1				2
6		1	3	3	1	1		1	187	1	3	1				
7	2	4		3	3	1			142		4	1	1 NEOL			
8		1			1			1	50			1				
9		1		1					48		1	2		1 ENEOL		
10	1					1			34			1				
11		2		1		1			79		1	2				2
12									73							
13				1	1				70	1	5					3
14				1		2			48	1	2	1				1
15				2					18							
16		1			1				16			3				
17									24		3	1		1 ENEOL		
18			1	2		3			68		3					
19				4		3			40		1	3				
20									6		10					
21									1			4				
OFF														1 ENEOL		
Total	3	10	5	19	8	16	2	2	1057	22	35	21	1	3	6	2

Tab. 1. Results of systematic surface survey, 2008. PREHIST: agricultural prehistory, POL: polished industry, CHIPP: chipped industry.

Tab. 1. Výsledky systematické povrchové prospekce v r. 2008. PREHIST: zemědělský pravěk, POL: broušená industrie, CHIPP: štípaná industrie.

**Activities in 2008.** Another archaeological survey was conducted in 2008, this time on the seeded field following the method of analytical surface survey. The surveyed area comprised 17 square sectors 50 × 50 m, and four sectors c. 100 × 100 m (fig. 1). The survey was performed by 6 experienced persons. Subsequently, R. Křivánek conducted a magnetometer survey within the fieldwalked area. Several less distinct accumulations of finds were observed in the field during the survey with some of these corresponding to the location of anomalies detected by the magnetometer survey or to potential features visible on the orthophoto map (Křivánek 2009).

Findings: Table 1 provides an overview of finds in the individual squares. A total of 1,197 potsherds and 4 stone artefacts were collected along with several pieces of daub and bloomery slag. The very small number of chronologically diagnostic finds is apparent from the table. With only a few exceptions, the potsherds were of small dimensions (max. size of c. 4 cm, average up to 2 cm), that is much smaller than the potsherds collected in 2005. This resulted in a lack of distinguishable diagnostic characteristics, and therefore the majority of prehistoric potsherds had to be classified without precise dating in the general category of agricultural prehistory with only a small number – 6.1 % having features allowing dating with greater precision.

The finds obtained in 2005 and 2008 reveal that the duration of settlement activities at the site mostly belongs to the prehistoric period and that certain activities took place here in the medieval and post-medieval periods as well. In addition to the Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze Age, Roman and Migration, the Hallstatt (Ha C–D1), Late Hallstatt to Early La Tène (Ha D2 – LT A) and Late La Tène (LT B–D) periods are represented. The small number of datable finds, in the case of prehistoric pottery the numbers of which decreased substantially in 2008 over 2005 from 15.1 to 6.1 %, apparently reflects the degradation of surface assemblages, as the reduction in size of potsherds also documents. The difference is not the result of the greater precision of the surface survey nor the dissimilar experience levels of the fieldwalking team members.

The finds in both find assemblages were classified by the same individuals. It is noteworthy that similar results came from analytical collections in the ALRB and Hutná projects conducted roughly a decade apart, in which the proportion of chronologically determinable prehistoric finds decreased from 13 to 6.8 % (*Smrž – Kuna – Káčerík 2011*, 174–175). Finds from the chronological period of the greatest interest at Břežany II, from the Late Hallstatt period (including the Early La Tène period) and the Late La Tène period were represented by 24 specimens making up over one-third of all diagnostic prehistoric finds.

### Fragment of vessel with zoomorphic decoration

**Description.** A fragment of the wall of a vessel was made from finely levigated grey-black clay with a brown surface layer inside and outside; the surface is smoothed and matt. The shape of the vessel can be only roughly reconstructed: it was a large vessel with a rounded body, perhaps flask-shaped, probably wheel-finished. Potsherd dimensions 78 × 60 mm, wall thickness 6.8–8.3 mm, diameter of vessel at the point of the fragment, above the maximum diameter, c. 300 mm. Decoration applied with a blunt tool prior to firing is found on the outer surface. Based on the clean nature of the incisions, that is without signs of clay having spilled over onto the surface (following experiments described by *Andrieu 2017*, 37–40), it appears that the ornament was incised after the clay had dried; the width of the incision is 1–2 mm, with a maximum depth of c. 0.5 mm. Based on these dimensions, the method by which the ornament was applied borders between incision and burnishing (according to the classification in *Venclová 1998*, 91, 348). Depicted on the potsherd is the rear part of an animal's body with two legs and a long tail, and a connected narrow trunk filled with oblique incisions; the front part of the body facing to the right is broken off. An impression made by a stamp in the form of a concentric ring is located in the middle of the creature's haunches which are depicted as an oval. Preserved size of the image is 43 × 38.5 mm (*fig. 2*).

**Interpretation of image.** Although at first glance the oval shape with a concentric stamp in the middle looks like a bird's head with an eye, a closer inspection reveals that the connected lines clearly depict two back legs and a tail with the part of the body on the opposite side. Hence, the depicted figure is the rear part of a quadruped. The long tail identifies the animal as a horse, even though the absence of the front half of the body makes it impossible to rule out some kind of fantastic creature such as are well-known in La Tène art. The rear oval part has parallels in the depiction of animals as on the lenticular flask (*Linsenflasche*) from Matzhausen (references to sources not provided directly in the text are given in *tab. 2*). A stamp need not depict an eye but is a decorative element seen, for example, on a horse from Koryčany at the joint of the front leg, or on a quadruped from Kanín at the joints of the front and rear legs. The haunches of a bronze figure of a horse on the lid of a flagon from Waldalgesheim are also decorated, though with a spiral, not a stamp (*Joachim 1995*, Abb. 23: 5, 6; 26), and the same is true for horses incised on the well-known sword scabbard from Hallstatt (*Frey 2007*, Abb. 1). The body hatched with oblique lines has parallels in zoomorphic images from Matzhausen and is seen again on the horse from Koryčany. A horned creature on the vessel from Metz and animals from Bad Nauheim are fully hatched. The downward angle of the body need not depict a grazing animal as the quadruped from Metz and many other examples demonstrate.

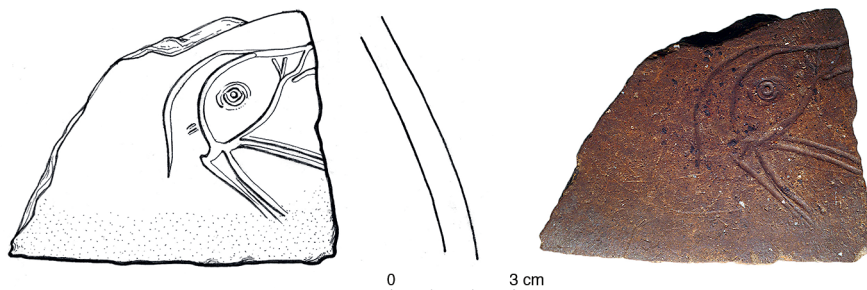


Fig. 2. Břežany II. Pottery sherd with a zoomorphic decoration. Drawing H. Komárková, photo H. Toušková.  
Obr. 2. Břežany II. Keramický zlomek se zoomorfní výzdobou.

**Dating of the decorated sherd.** The accompanying material obtained from surface survey as established above documents a site occupied, in the Iron Age, in the Late Hallstatt including the Early La Tène period (Ha D2 – LT A) and in the Late La Tène period. The Late La Tène assemblage contains graphite pottery generally dated to LT B–D (cf. *Hlava 2008*) and non-graphite combed pottery, but no fragments of coarse ware with a roughened surface or black coating. Roughening is characteristic of La Tène pottery from the end of LT C1. Since that period, roughening typically occurs in central (and eastern) Bohemia (*Venclová ed. et al. 2013*, 105) and the same is true for black coating. Their absence in the assemblage is striking and is circumstantial but nonetheless strong evidence for the absence of occupation at the site from the latest phases of the La Tène period and instead points to local settlement activity in LT B lasting no later than the beginning of LT C1.

The technique of wheel finishing, the thickness of the wall and the character of the fabric of the vessel from Břežany II are consistent with fine pottery of the Early La Tène period, LT A (to LT B1). To see whether the decoration on the vessel corresponds to this dating it is necessary to establish from an iconographic and technical perspective an overview of zoomorphic motifs on pottery in the La Tène period.

### Zoomorphic motifs on La Tène pottery

Zoomorphic and also anthropomorphic decoration on pottery is relatively rare in the La Tène period, even if one accepts that its absence can be partially caused by a lack of attention during laboratory processing and the documentation of pottery (fragments of decoration are typically hard to see and can remain unnoticed). However, examples of such decoration are currently on the increase. Only zoomorphic images produced by stamping, incision or relief animals on pottery, despite the fact that examples of such decoration from both the Early and Late La Tène period are remarkable (e.g., Bohemia: Radovesice, *Waldhauser 1977*, 170, tab. I: 1; Mochov 3, *Waldhauser 2001*, 341; Auvergne: *Guichard 2003*; *Loughton 2005*; *Deberge 2010*; Iberian Peninsula: *Kruta 2001*, 232). However, there are some rare cases which include painting as supplemental decoration (Brion) or even as the fill of an incised zoomorphic image (Mez-Notariou).

Period	No.	Site	Image	Technique and arrangement	Vessel form	References
LT A-B1	1	Libkovice (CZ)	hare	stamps, in a frieze	bowl	Filip 1956, 183, obr. 8; 1, tab. 106; 11; Schwappach 1974, 123–127, Abb. 13, Taf. 16; 1; Megaw – Megaw 2010, 316–317, fig. 10a
	2	Kanin (CZ)	dog/wolf	stamps, in a frieze	Linsenfiasche	Megaw – Megaw 2010, fig. 1; Goláňová 2012, 240, Abb. 2: 2
	3	Prat (F)	bird	stamps, in a frieze	flask-shaped vessel	Gomez de Soto 2005, 493, fig. 1, 2
	4	Châtellerault (F)	bird	stamps, in a frieze	titula-shaped vessel?	Gomez de Soto 2005, 493–495, fig. 1, 3
	5	Koryčany (CZ)	horse	drawing and stamps, in a frieze	Linsenfiasche	Schwappach 1974, 116–123, Abb. 9, 10: 1, Taf. 10; Goláňová 2012, 240, Abb. 2: 3
	6	Chotovenka (CZ)	bird?	drawing, in a frieze (?) together with stamps and compass-drawing	flask- or titula-shaped vessel	Giesecke 1942, 51, Abb. 7d; Schwappach 1974, 131–133, Abb. 16: 2, Taf. 20: 1
	7	Polešovice (CZ)	bird	drawing, compass-drawing and stamps, in a frieze (?) together with stamps and compass-drawing	Linsenfiasche	Schwappach 1974, 128–131, Abb. 16: 1, Taf. 18; Meduna 1980, 277, Taf. 80: 2; Goláňová 2007, 132, obr. 2: 3; 2012, 240, Abb. 2: 5
	8	Sobůlky (CZ)	bird	drawing and stamps, in a frieze together with stamps	bowl	
	9	Modrá (CZ)	griffon	drawing and stamps, in a frieze together with stamps	bowl	Goláňová 2007, 132, obr. 2: 2, tab. 3: 3
	10	Matzhausen (D)	deer, roe-deer, boar, wolf, hare, bird	drawing, in a frieze	Linsenfiasche	Kersten 1933, 154, Abb. 9a; Megaw 1970, 53–54, no. 27, fig. 1; Megaw – Megaw 2010, fig. 2
	11	Brion (F)	bird	drawing and relief elements, in a frieze	bowl-shaped strainer	Gomez de Soto 2005, 495, fig. 4
	12	BŘEZANY II (CZ)	horse	drawing and stamps, in unknown order	flask-shaped vessel?	this publication
	13	Bucy-le-Long (F)	horse	drawing, in two friezes	titula-shaped vessel	Desenne et al. 2009, vol. 1, fig. 197; vol. III, 149; Olivier 2014, 43, fig. 5: 4a
	14	L'Épine (F)	horse	drawing, in a frieze	vase caréné	Duval 1989, 64, no. 20; Olivier 2014, 43, fig. 5: 4b; Schwappach 1974, 534, Abb. 9
	15	Mez-Notariou (F)	horse?	drawing and painting, in unknown order	undetermined form	
	16	La Cheppe/Suippes (F)	griffon	drawing, in two friezes	vase-shaped vessel	Le Bihan et al. 2007, 645, fig. 23
LT B2-C1	17	Guntramdsdorf (A)	deer	stamps, in a frieze	titula-shaped vessel	Duval 1989, 64–65, no. 20 Urban – Teschler-Nikola – Schultz 1985, 48–49, Abb. 39
	18	Sajópetri (H)	hare, dog/wolf	drawing, in friezes?	flask-shaped vessel?	Szabó et al. 2007, fig. 53, pl. 117–118, 126; Megaw – Megaw 2009, 169, fig. 11; Szabó 2013
	19	Lábatlan (H)	deer, roe-deer, wolf	drawing and stamps, in a frieze	flask-shaped vessel	
	20	Metz (F)	deer/roe-deer	drawing, in a frieze	flask-shaped vessel	Szabó 1973
	21	Châtres (F)	deer?, dragons?, griffon?, bird and human	drawing, in a frieze	vase-shaped vessel	Fichtl – Lefebvre – Brunella 2005, 371–372, fig. 10: 8
	22	Montépreux (F)	horse	drawing, in a frieze?	goblet	Zipper – Dupéré 2010
LT CZ-D	23	Staré Hradisko (CZ)	bird	drawing, in unknown order	beaker-shaped vessel	Kruta Pappi 1999, 111, no. 155
	24	Neubau (A)	boar and human	drawing, in a frieze?	titula-shaped vessel	Meduna 1980
	25	Manching (D)	deer, lion?	drawing, in unknown order	S-profiled pot	Gruber 2013, 88, Abb. 11
	26	Bratislava-Hradný vrch (SK)	boar	drawing, in unknown order	titula-shaped vessels and bowls	Gellenbrügge 1992, 89–90, Abb. 44; Krämer 1996; Sievers 2017, fig. 11
	27	Lectoure (F)	bird	drawing, in no apparent order	undetermined form	Cambal 2004, 22–23, Tab. 7: 5
	28	Bad Nauheim (D)	roe-deer, bird?	drawing, in unknown order	flask-shaped vessel and other forms	L'art cellitique 1983, 161, no. 181
	29	Clermont-Ferrand – Le Pâtural (F)	horse, boar?	drawing, in unknown order	high forms	Vogt 1994, 528–530, Abb. 2
	30	Roanne (F)	horse, boar?	drawing, in unknown order	undetermined form	Deberge 2007, 126, Fig. 111: 5, 6
	31	Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat – La Grande Borne (F)	horse and human, boar, wolf, bird, turtle, fish etc.	drawing, in no apparent order	S-profiled and other forms	Guichard 1997, 141, fig. 120
	32	Trisov (CZ)	boar	drawing, in no apparent order	titula-shaped vessel	Périchon 1987, Pl. 1–8; Andrieu 2017, 42–43, fig. 18
				rouletting and stamps, in a frieze		Hlava 2007, obr. 1–2

Tab. 2. List of stamped, incised and burnished zoomorphic images on La Tène pottery.

Tab. 2. Soupis kolkovaných, rytych a vhlazovaných zoomorfních vyobrazení na laténské keramice.



Each new find of zoomorphic decoration on La Tène pottery vessels attracts such great attention that this decoration is repeatedly studied, especially as one of the manifestations of La Tène art. In his study of the Early La Tène period, *F. Schwappach (1974)* addressed, among others, zoomorphic images on pottery using examples from Central Europe drawing attention to earlier finds from Koryčany, Libkovice, Sobůlky and Chotovenka in Bohemia and Moravia. Schwappach agreed with previous ideas on the proximity of the depicted motifs to situla art and Este culture and compared them to better known (at the time) zoomorphic scenes from Matzhausen and Lábatlan.

*U. Vogt (1994)* returned to the study of La Tène pottery decorated with zoomorphic motifs twenty years later when his interest was attracted to sherds from at least three vessels with incised animal motifs at the Late La Tène site in Bad Nauheim in Hesse. To these Vogt added a list of pottery vessels with incised zoomorphic motifs from the whole of the La Tène period which contained not only several of the aforementioned finds but also expanded the inventory both geographically and chronologically (Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat, La Cheppe, Manching, Staré Hradisko).

Subsequently, *W. Krämer (1996a)* published figural engravings from Manching, where at least three depictions of animals and some other illegible motifs not preserved in their entirety were identified. In connection with Manching, he also recalled an incised crane from Staré Hradisko first published by *J. Meduna (1980)* and zoomorphic images from Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat (*Périchon 1987*). Krämer sought Hellenistic and Roman models for all of these images. In her study of the Early La Tène period, *P. Goláňová (2007, 132–133)* summarised zoomorphic motifs on pottery from the Morava River region and later compared them to zoomorphic stamps from Bohemia (*Goláňová 2012*). In his publication of a vessel with rouletted and stamped decoration from Třisov, *M. Hlava (2007)* included additional examples of pottery with incised animal images from the La Tène period.

*O.-H. Frey (2007)* dealt with zoomorphic motifs on Early La Tène pottery in an art history context, connecting incised and stamped elements from Matzhausen, Koryčany, Libkovice and Kanín with the Venetic region. *J. V. S. Megaw (1981)* surveyed bird motifs in La Tène art, including images on pottery. Numerous works exist on zoomorphic ornamentation, including motifs used on vessels (for example *Kull 1997*). *I. Boike (2004)* addressed depictions of deer, including images on pottery. *J. V. S. Megaw* and *M. R. Megaw (2010)* placed the stamped vessel from Kanín in a European context with a thorough stylistic analysis suggesting the ornament's connection with the Este culture.

Stamped, incised or burnished zoomorphic images on pottery are known from more than thirty sites in La Tène Europe (*tab. 2; figs. 3–5*). *Figs. 3 and 4* are schematic illustrations of zoomorphic motifs from all of these sites, while for assemblages with more than one motif, only the one zoologically closest to the animal from Břežany II is depicted.

The chronological development of zoomorphic decoration during the Early and Late La Tène period can be divided into three phases.

Based on technique essentially two types of zoomorphic ornament appear in the LT A–B1 period: a) zoomorphic stamps; b) incised or burnished lines. The ornament is always applied prior to firing. The first type, zoomorphic stamps, is represented in Bohemia by an image of a hare from Libkovice and an unidentified carnivore – dog/wolf from Kanín (the interpretation of the Kanín animal by *Goláňová 2012* is accepted here contrary to *Megaw – Megaw 2010* where the figures are regarded as horses). Other examples are stamps in the form of heads of raptors from Prat and Châtellerauld in western France. Zoomorphic stamps are placed in continuous horizontal friezes and are usually accompanied by other stamps or compass-drawn motifs in the same or parallel friezes. Their arrangement does not differ from plain stamp decoration in friezes on Early La Tène pottery.

In contrast, the execution and arrangement of the second type of zoomorphic ornament is very free and creative. Incised or burnished, it is composed of individual motifs, even though these are still part of the decoration arranged in friezes or perhaps even radially.

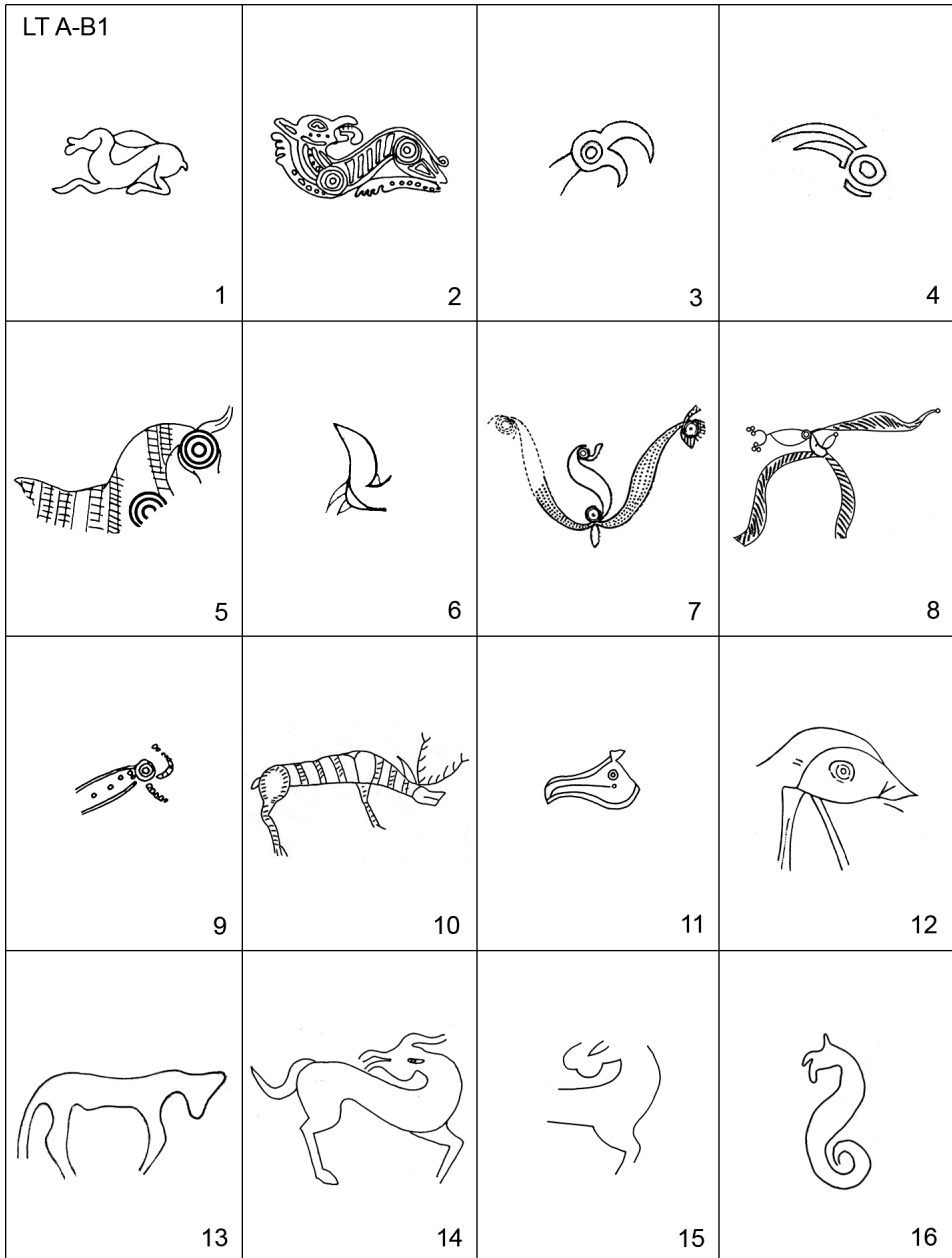


Fig. 3. Stamped, incised and burnished zoomorphic images on La Tène pottery, LT A-B1. Schematic drawings. Compiled by J. Minarčíková and E. Čepeláková. See *tab. 2* for site identification.

Obr. 3. Kolkovaná, rytá a vhlazovaná zoomorfní vyobrazení na laténské keramice, LT A-B1. Schematické kresby. Lokality: *tab. 2*.



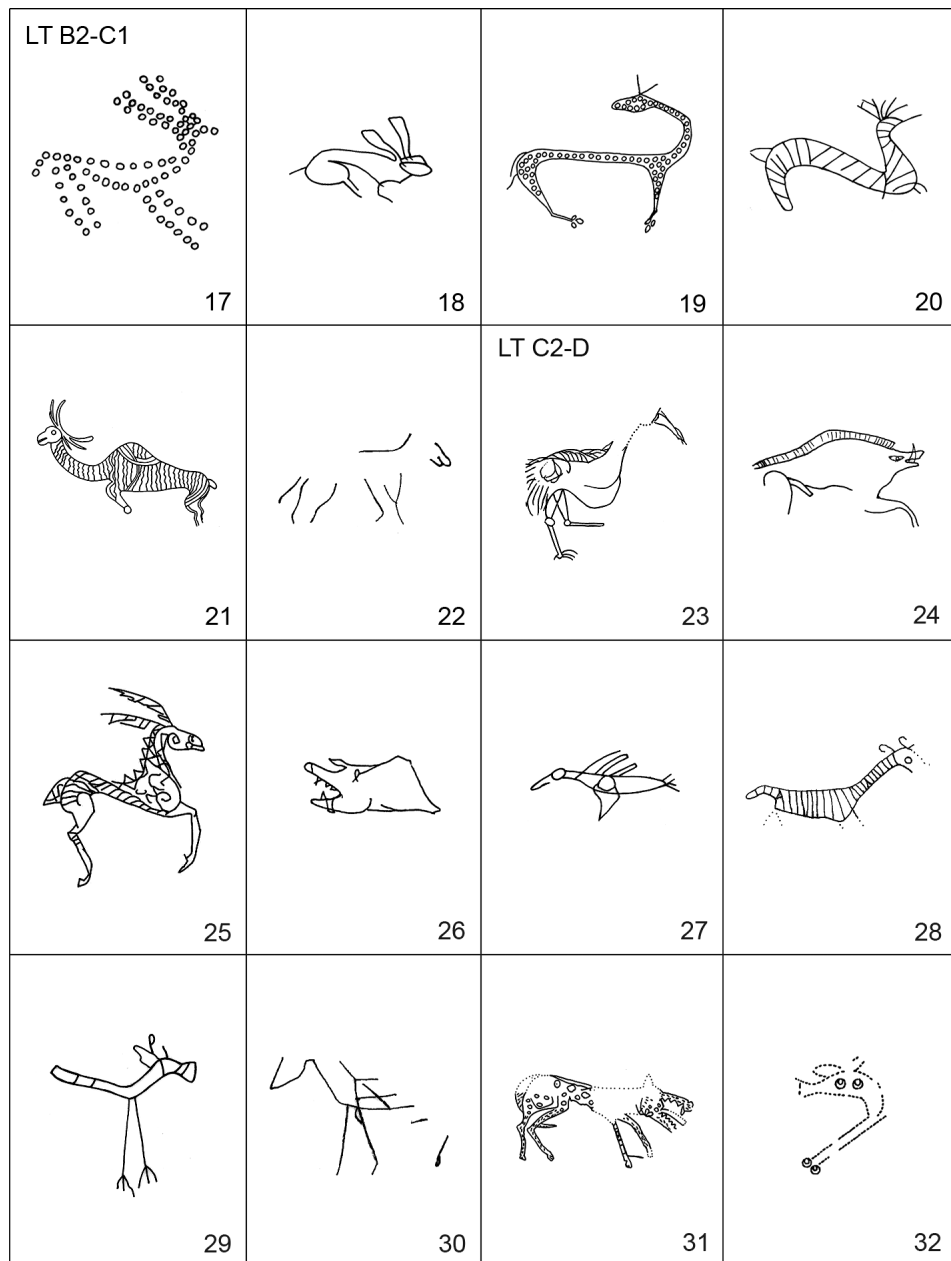


Fig. 4. Stamped, incised and burnished zoomorphic images on La Tène pottery, LT B2-C1 and C2-D. Schematic drawings. Compiled by J. Minarčíková and E. Čepeláková. See *tab. 2* for site identification. Obr. 4. Kolkovaná, rytá a vhlazovaná zoomorfní vyobrazení na laténské keramice, LT B2-C1 a C2-D. Schematické kresby. Lokality: *tab. 2*.

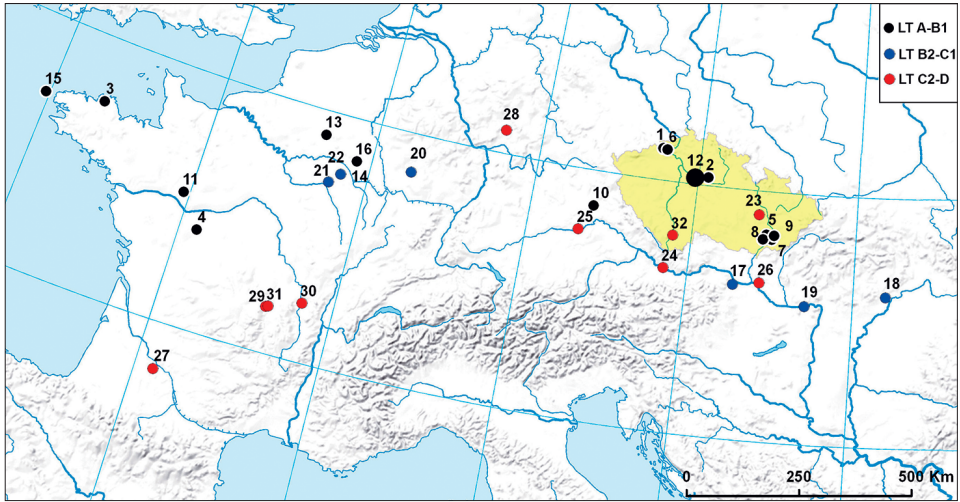


Fig. 5. Stamped, incised and burnished zoomorphic images on pottery in La Tène Europe. See *figs. 3–4* and *tab. 2* for site identification.

Obr. 5. Kolkovaná, rytá a vhlazovaná zoomorfní vyobrazení na keramice v laténské Evropě. Lokality: viz *obr. 3–4* a *tab. 2*.

Typical examples are incised simplified birds/gryphons or other mythical creatures as seen on vessels from Polešovice, Sobůlky and Modrá, all from a single region in Moravia. The incised ornament is created both free-hand or with a compass and is accompanied by stamps in the shape of concentric rings or small simple rings. Concentric rings can be used to depict eyes but also in other ways. Likewise, the simplified head of a very incompletely preserved bird (?) from Chotovenka in northwest Bohemia represents a free-hand creation accompanied on the vessel by compass-drawn motifs. Standing out among these images is a horse from Koryčany in Moravia that appears to be very consistently and realistically rendered, again with the use of stamped concentric rings and apparently part of a row of various zoomorphic motifs. A frieze of schematised animals created free-hand without the use of a compass and surrounded by stamps is also found on a lenticular flask from Matzhausen. An incised bird's head from Brion, France, again accompanied by a row of stamps, is part of intricate painted and relief vegetal decoration on a ceramic strainer.

Additional examples of Early La Tène incised zoomorphic decoration come from Western Europe (Champagne, Brittany). The vessel from L'Épine (a location previously designated as La Cheppe/Suippes) features a frieze of horse (?) figures with their heads turned back placed between two friezes of incised geometric decoration. A nearly identical quadruped appears on the vessel from Mez-Notariou on the Ile d'Ouessant, which is extraordinary for its execution: the incised outline of the animal is filled in with paint. Another example, perhaps in this case actually from La Cheppe/Suippes, is composed of 'dragon heads' or gryphons looking in opposite directions concealed in incised S-shaped motifs in two friezes one above the other. This motif is highly unusual on pottery but has a counterpart in 'pairs of dragons' or 'zoomorphic lyre' on sword scabbards and other objects in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and later (*Megaw – Megaw 2001*, 126–128; *Kruza 2015*, 142–143). On a carinated vase from

Bussy-le-Long rows of schematically depicted horses are also placed in two friezes alternating with crescentic or pelta-shaped motifs and bordered by friezes of geometric motifs.

If it is possible to deduce from the relevant vessel fragments, the LT A zoomorphic ornament was always accompanied by stamped or compass-drawn decoration common in that period, or by friezes of other non-figural decoration. Zoomorphic decoration is placed either inside bowls, typically around the omphalos on the bottom (Libkovice, Sobůlky, Modrá), or – in the case of higher vessels – on the outer surface on the shoulders as on *Linsenflaschen* (Kanín, Koryčany, Polešovice, Matzhausen) and flask-shaped to situla-shaped or vase-like vessels (Prat, Châtellerault, Chotovenka, L'Épine, La Cheppe/Suippes, Bucy-le-Long), in an exceptional case on a strainer (Brion).

It is necessary here to mention another potential impressed zoomorphic decoration from this period, one that can be hidden within intricate 'vegetal' stamped and compass-drawn compositions (as noticed by *Goláňová 2012*, 238–240), where zoomorphic motifs are anticipated or imagined in leaf ornament reminiscent of wings or beaks, and in circular stamps evoking eyes. Examples include Rataje (*Schwappach 1973*, Bild 31: 1); Vyškov (*Čížmář – Lečbych 2013*, 105), Trnava – Horné Pole (*Bartík – Březinová 1996*, tab. V: 2) or Dobrovíz (*Pecínovská 2017*, Abb. 16: 1, 5). The same is observed in engraved decoration on bronze artefacts, e.g. from Waldalgesheim, Hoppstädten (*Schwappach 1973*, 99, Bild 6: 4, 32: 4,5), Glauberg and Reinheim (*Frey 2002*, fig. 168: 1; 169). It is also worth noting that on the reverse of a sword scabbard from grave 1 at Glauberg birds' heads are already explicitly rendered in S-shaped motifs (*Frey 2002*, fig. 168: 5). Compass-drawn pairs of arcs evoke stylised birds, especially when accompanied by additional elements in the place of the 'beaks' (cf. Libkovice – compass-drawn motifs on the reconstruction of a vessel with a zoomorphic stamp: *Schwappach 1974*, Abb. 13; Bucy-le-Long, BLH 332–09: *Desenne et al. 2009*, vol. III, fig. 179–180). Is it possible that stamps in the form of leaves with palmettes at their ends on a vessel from Kallmünz (*Uenze 1986*, 85–86, Abb. 46: 2) could in fact depict fish? Ambiguity of ornament is a typical trait of La Tène art where only some images and symbols can be identified today; others apparently remain hidden to us, despite having certainly been entirely legible to their creators and users at the time.

Although few examples are available for the following period of LT B2–C1, it is now possible to observe the continuing schematisation of animal figures which are still rendered in a relatively disciplined manner and arranged in a frieze. Stamps are used to fill and supplement incised and free-hand ornament (compare the frieze of animals filled with circular stamps from Lábatlan) or the animals are, albeit only exceptionally, very carefully constructed from small circular stamps (Guntramsdorf). Zoomorphic images can also occur in a frieze without stamps. Standing out in the assemblage from this period are friezes of graceful creatures, though it remains unclear what animals, deities or symbols they represent (Metz, Châtres). And yet, quickly sketched animals also now occur, including from Sajópetri, Hungary a hare and a dog/wolf perhaps arranged in a vertical frieze, or a schematic horse from Montépreux, France. All vessels with zoomorphic figures in this period bear decoration applied to the outside surface prior to firing and mostly on flask-shaped situla- or vase-like vessels and in one case a footed vessel.

Incised motifs appear more often on pottery in LT C2–D than in earlier La Tène phases. With only one exception (Třisov), they are free-hand drawings made on the outer surface of vessels after firing, thus raising the possibility that the artist was not the producer of the

vessel but rather the user, either of the intact vessel or its fragment. One could therefore consider that the images were hasty sketches rather than skilfully executed drawings, but this is not always the case. The drawing of a bird – possibly a crane – on a vessel from the Staré Hradisko oppidum in Moravia is carefully and realistically rendered, as is the scene with a boar from Neubau in Lower Austria. The same is true for a masterful and highly realistic drawing of a lion from Manching (*Krämer 1996a*, 365–367, Abb. 3: 1). The current assemblage of finds suggests, though, that sloppy and hasty drawings are more common, as is seen on other vessels from Manching, the earliest of which is perhaps a drawing of a deer (*Krämer 1996a*, 362–365, 367–369, Abb. 1; 2; 4; 5: 1 or 5: 2, 6). Incised images from Bratislava – Hradný vrch and Lectoure can be labelled as careless but realistic, those from Bad Nauheim, Clermont-Ferrand – Le Pâtural and Roanne as naive and schematic. Images from Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat are a special case in which several of the more or less hasty sketches overlap.

Where their forms can be reconstructed, incised zoomorphic ornament appears in this period on high flask- to vase-like vessels. Decoration in a frieze is rarely found, though usually the overall design cannot be discerned. The placement of an image following the vessel shape is found only in Lectoure, where the drawing of a bird decorates the neck of a flask-shaped vessel. Relatively numerous finds of individual potsherds with drawings of animals and humans (or with letters and symbols), rendered after firing, raises the question of whether the drawings were made on intact vessels or on potsherds, as was the case with *ostraca* in the classical world (*Krämer 1996a*, 361–362).

The schematic decoration of a vessel from the Třísov oppidum is extraordinary in the LT D context. The decoration was applied before firing using a roulette and a circular stamp and was probably arranged in a horizontal frieze.

Where does the zoomorphic image from Břežany II fall in this artistic-chronological system? The fact that the ornament was applied prior to firing points to LT A-B1. The advanced schematisation of the drawing, which is still quite disciplined, and the sparing use of the stamp suggests the end of this period. It is true that concentric stamps are not limited to LT A-B1 but also occur, albeit with a much lower frequency, in the later phases of the La Tène period (*Hlava 2007*, 425; *Valentová 2013*, 41–42). However, the technical and stylistic qualities of the Břežany potsherd make it possible to date the vessel to the Early La Tène period, if in its final phase.

It is not possible to interpret the meaning of the zoomorphic decoration on the vessel from Břežany II. Executed prior to firing, the artist is likely to have been the potter (cf. *Vogt 1994*, 535), and it is also likely that it would have been applied with a clear intention, perhaps to a specific order. In other words, it is not a sketch secondarily and spontaneously scratched on a fired vessel or even on a potsherd. It is not possible to determine whether the vessel was intended to be used in a profane or sacred context, though as fine pottery it certainly did not have a common (kitchen) function. The vessel from Břežany II as well as other examples of vessels decorated with zoomorphic images have been found, where context has been recorded, at common rural settlements of the Early La Tène period (for Bohemia and Moravia see *Goláňová 2012*, 240), and at hillforts or oppida as well as at open settlements in the Late La Tène. Such vessels were also found in burial contexts throughout the entire La Tène period, at L'Épine, La Cheppe, Bucy-le-Long, Lábatlan, Guntramsdorf, Metz, Châtres, Montépreux and Lectoure. With only a few exceptions, graves

with pottery featuring zoomorphic decoration do not have inventories or arrangements considerably exceeding the norm, although an investigation of the status of the individuals buried in these graves would require a separate study. Apart from the latest burial context (*puits funéraire*) from Lectoure, decoration was always applied before firing, that is intentionally during the production of the vessel. However, it is not known whether the burial (ritual) use of the decorated vessel was intended from the start.

The aim of this article is not to present a detailed study of the iconography of zoomorphic motifs in the La Tène period, which today is a topic receiving attention from historians of La Tène art (see *Megaw – Megaw 2010; Kruta 2012*; all with refs.) and mythology (*Green 1992; Aldhouse-Green 2004*). Only a basic overview of represented animal species and their significance in the La Tène world will be provided. The motifs are dominated by birds (12 cases), followed by horses (9), wild boar (7), deer (6), dog/wolf (6) and hare (3). A possible lion and turtle occurred once, and the rest are fantastic depictions of gryphons/dragons. With the exception of horses, these are wild animals, all of which, besides the uncertain lion from Manching, are species commonly occurring in La Tène Europe. This is even possible in the case of a turtle (Autun). Neither cattle nor sheep are represented.

Birds were regarded as messengers between the world of the living and dead (the incised bird on the vessel from Lectoure executed after firing could have evoked a message from the survivors to the deceased in the afterlife), while various roles were ascribed to individual species – raptors, cranes, swans, etc. (see *Megaw 1981; Green 1992, 171–181*). Pottery from LT A-B1 in particular is characterised by the bird motif, which then appears less often in later periods. The horse is one of the most frequent motifs in La Tène art, be it for ritual or prestigious reasons, as indicated by images of riders or warriors as the heroic ideal connecting the world of the élite to the world of the gods (*Kruta 2012*). Horses occur regularly in our sample. The importance of horses is also documented by coin iconography and a large number of three-dimensional images (e.g. *Gebhard 1991; Metzner-Nebelsick 2007; Vial 2014*). Although they are often depicted as hunted game, deer also had their place in the ritual sphere: the god Cernunnos with antlers is prime example (*Boike 2004, 37–43, 52*). Likewise, specific painted motifs of deer (or related animals) on Late La Tène pottery from Auvergne are regarded as symbols of the deity or its attributes (*Deberge 2010*). Wild boar, also very popular and depicted on pottery in LT C2-D (with one earlier exception from Matzhausen), symbolises bravery in battle and was a military insignia. Numerous figurines also point to its ritual significance (*Gebhard 1991*). The hare was an attribute of fertility and belonged among game animals also in the context of ritual hunting (*Szabó 2013, 845–847*). Dogs accompanied men and were helpers during hunts. Images from Matzhausen, Lábatlan and Sajópetri show a wolf/dog attacking another animal, i.e. an actual hunting scene. Hunting could have been closely tied to ritual behaviour and religion (*Green 1992, 60–65*). The majority of zoological species recorded on La Tène pottery had a place in the mythological world.

In the case of certain animal images on Early La Tène pottery (Libkovice, Kanín, Sajópetri) and their arrangement in friezes where they formed a type of procession (especially Matzhausen, Lábatlan), an influence is assumed from the area of Este and the iconography of situla art, possibly also from Thracian and Scythian art (*Schwappach 1974; Kull 1997; Frey 2007, 781–783; Szabó 2013*). Hellenistic models have been sought for Late La Tène motifs (*Krämer 1996a*).

Why were zoomorphic motifs applied to La Tène vessels? The so-called ‘decoration’ on pottery was never a purely ornamental matter in prehistoric times but rather an expression of some type of symbolic system within the ideology valid for the given culture. If this also holds true for geometric or vegetal decoration, then perhaps figural motifs including zoomorphic images held an even higher position in this symbolic system. It has been pointed out that most of the depicted animals had ritual meanings as attributes of deities and heroes or of the élite with their emphasis on warfare and hunting. Fantastic animals and other undefinable images that sometimes accompany them belong to the sphere of the symbolic world, and their meaning must remain a matter of conjecture for modern observers. This is also true of the unique anthropomorphic figure escorting animals on the vessel from Châtres. This is considered a depiction of a deity rather than a human, and an astronomic interpretation is suggested for the seven accompanying circles (*Zipper – Dupéré 2010*, 86–87, 91).

### Regular decoration and graffiti in the La Tène period

In the case of organised and repeating figural images on pottery from LT A to LT C1 arranged in a certain system respecting the shape of the vessel and applied prior to firing, there is no doubt over its intentional decorative purpose. The situation is different in the case of incised images on Late La Tène pottery, which are sometimes referred to as graffiti. The following is an attempt to determine whether this label is justified. The definition of the term ‘graffiti’ has developed over time up to the present day, and its original meaning outside of the academic environment has been completely lost in favour of sprayed inscriptions in public space.

*Ottův slovník naučný* – Otto’s Encyclopaedia (1896) defines graffiti as ‘ancient coarse inscriptions or drawings incised on walls, pillars, memorials, etc., found in large numbers on the foundations of Roman buildings ..., especially in Pompeii and the Roman catacombs’. This definition remained valid for many years: ‘graffito – drawing or writing scratched on a wall etc., esp. on ancient wall as in Pompeii’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English 1951*). As knowledge increased, it was found that graffiti also existed in other parts of the ancient world, that it could be not only incised but also painted, and was applied on a broad range of bases, including on pottery vessels. According to *Hoops Reallexikon* (1996), graffiti is private and spontaneous drawings made secondarily on a base that was not originally meant to be drawn on. In the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11<sup>th</sup> ed. revised 2006), graffiti is defined as ‘unauthorised writing or drawings on a surface in a public place’.

Using the assemblage of pottery and clay artefacts from the Athenian agora, *M. Lang* (1976) understands graffiti as ‘informal inscriptions’ and includes, apart from epigraphic, also anepigraphic (figural, vegetal and geometric) and numerical graffiti in this category. Graffiti in the La Tène material was also recognised. *W. Krämer* (1982) originally included only epigraphic inscriptions on pottery under graffiti but later added figural incised images (*Krämer 1996a; 1996b*). *M. Andrieu* (2017, 33–36), who has studied Gallo-Roman graffiti from several pottery assemblages in Gaul, but was also aware of several pre-Roman finds, summarises the history of the understanding of graffiti according to Francophone research and settles on the following definition: graffiti (on pottery) is rendered by engraving on the fired vessel, is spontaneous (unofficial) and is not integrated with the base. It can be epigraphic or anepigraphic.

This definition can also be applied to drawn (incised) zoomorphic images on Late La Tène pottery. These images are secondary, as they were applied after the vessel was fired. This testifies to the fact that the incised image was not intended or assumed at the time of the



vessel's production, or that that vessel was not originally intended as a base for this image and therefore is not an integral part of the vessel. Graffiti is not composed in a regularly arranged scheme respecting the shape of the vessel (perhaps with the exception of the bird on the neck of the vessel from Lectoure). It is true, however, that the original placement of drawings found on fragmented vessels is usually not known, leaving the question of whether the drawings were subsequently made on potsherds unanswered. The spontaneity of the incised drawing is evident in the cursory and loose execution, sometimes creating the impression that images were simply roughly scribbled. The typically carelessly incised drawings from Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat and Roanne and other examples from LT C2-D may certainly be classified as graffiti.

It is noteworthy that zoomorphic motifs (or animal species) do not differ greatly, regardless of whether they are part of regular pottery decoration from the Early La Tène period or are applied as graffiti on Late La Tène pottery. The repertoire in both cases is composed of horses and wild animals, including birds; unique images of a lion, turtle and a fish were added to the list in LT C2-D. It is remarkable that fantastic animals are absent in our assemblage of graffiti in the late La Tène period, although they do appear in regular painted ornaments on pottery at this time (Deberge 2010).

The few cases of figural other than zoomorphic graffiti on Late La Tène pottery should also be mentioned. Very rare anthropomorphic images are represented by drawings from Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat (warrior on horseback) and Neubau (female and wild boar). Also depicted are artefacts, apparently with symbolic meaning, including a wheel with rays (Le Pâtural: *Deberge et al. 2007*, 127, fig. 111: 7; the same symbol also accompanies zoomorphic motif on the vessel from Třísov, though not as graffiti) and fibulae (Clermont-Ferrand/Aulnat: *Périchon 1987*, pl. 7; *Krämer 1996b*; *Staré Hradisko: Čižmář 1992*; Clermont-Ferrand – Le Pâtural: *Deberge et al. 2007*, 126, fig. 111: 4).

Other types of graffiti applied to pottery vessels or their potsherds occur in La Tène Europe. Clear epigraphic records in the Greek alphabet were found, either as whole words or, more frequently, as letters. Examples are known from Manching (LT D pottery: *Krämer 1982*), Bibracte (pre-Augustan pottery: *Lambert – Luginbühl 2005*), Clermont-Ferrand – Le Pâtural (*Deberge et al. 2007*), perhaps also from the Stradonice oppidum (*Valentová 2013*, 66, fig. 24; *Trefný 2016*, fig. 1–3). Other incisions have a linear form and it is not always clear whether they are part of epigraphic, anepigraphic (figural) or numerical compositions (Manching: *Krämer 1996a*, 369, Abb. 2–7; Clermont-Ferrand – Le Pâtural: *Deberge et al. 2007*, 126–127, fig. 111: 1–2). Particularly difficult to interpret are images and lines preserved on fragments of vessels or on disks carved from potsherds where it cannot be identified if they are part of the image created on the vessel before its fragmentation or perhaps numerous marks on game pieces (*Varadzin – Venclová 2007*, with refs.).

It should be noted that a special type of potential epigraphic image that, however, does not belong to the category of graffiti are marks on the base of graphite and other vessels, be they alphabetical characters or not. These marks were applied before the firing of the vessel, they are related to its type, form and size and probably belong to the category of maker's marks designating the products of individual workshops or customers (*Zeidler 2003*; *Hlava 2008*; *Venclová – Valentová 2012*, 68).

As with *Krämer (1996a, 361–362)*, there are still questions concerning the creators of graffiti that can be asked and which cannot now and perhaps never will be answered.

Are they profane sketches by producers, traders and users, or do they belong to the ritual sphere? Did their authors belong to the same group that left inscriptions in the Greek alphabet at Manching and elsewhere in the La Tène world? Were they local residents or foreigners? The situation was probably much more complicated than might at first be imagined, and clear answers are impossible.

## Conclusion

Zoomorphic images on La Tène vessels can be understood as the creative work of craftsmen and artists at the time, surpassing the usually strictly respected canon of elements and motifs of decoration. Besides several cases from the earlier part of the La Tène period when zoomorphic decoration reflects the ambiguity of the La Tène art style in its individual development phases with its fantastic images (gryphons/dragons, zoomorphic motifs encoded in vegetal compositions), the depictions were more or less realistic. While their rendering can be schematic, as is the case with the horse from Břežany II, animals are drawn quite explicitly and with perfect knowledge of their anatomy. Individual animals, their processions and entire scenes clearly had from the beginning both decorative and symbolic meaning, whereas over time informal images, real graffiti, appeared. But while the Late La Tène graffiti were rendered spontaneously, from a thematic perspective they do not differ greatly from the motifs regularly used for decoration in the earlier phases of the La Tène period. The choice of figural themes apparently still followed rules that had to be respected. One may imagine that La Tène graffiti at least occasionally provides some insight into everyday life, but unlike some ancient graffiti, this is not the case.

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