

BOOK REVIEW – RECENZE

Lorenzo Zamboni – Manuel Fernández-Götz – Carola Metzner Nebelsick (eds.): Crossing the Alps. Early Urbanism Between Northern Italy and Central Europe (900–400 BC). Sidestone Press, Leiden 2020. ISBN 978-90-8890-961-0. 434 pgs.

The book represents the output of the *Crossing the Alps: Early Urbanism Between Northern Italy and Central Europe (900–400 BC)* conference organised by the University Milano-Bicocca, the University of Pavia, the University of Edinburgh, and the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich in Milan, Italy, in 2019. The opening quote: ‘*The great arc of the Alps to the north, as much as one would expect to the contrary, seems to have been a negligible barrier to communication and trade*’ (Barfield 1971, 9) essentially captures the focus of the entire monograph. While it would seem that much has already been written about urbanism, trade and communication in the Iron Age (see, e.g., Lang – Salač 2002; Biel – Krausse 2005; Krausse – Beilharz 2010; Sievers – Schönfelder 2012; Schumann – van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017; Fernández-Götz 2018; Cowley et al. 2019), it is precisely the complex interconnection between the Italian environment and Central Europe or the Balkans without the traditional ‘art historical’ or ‘centre-periphery’ view (civilised Mediterranean vs. ‘barbaric Central Europe’) that has been absent in the literature to date, with a few exceptions.

The book, thanks to new theoretical approaches and the enormous number of new finds that can no longer be considered as exceptions and ignored, tries to reinterpret earlier approaches and study the mutual interactions between cisalpine and transalpine regions. Proto-urbanism and urbanism is a key theme of the book. In the introduction, the authors note not only the differences between Italy and Central Europe, but also the different approaches to studying urbanisation within Italy itself, especially between the heavily urbanised Central and Southern Italy and the ‘peripheral’ Northern Italy. From the perspective of classical archaeology, the emphasis has naturally been on the study of Greek colonies and Etruscan agglomerations, or the rise of Rome. The aim of the work, according to the editors, is nothing less than to transcend these existing boundaries and to stir debate across regions.

The book contains 26 articles divided into four thematic areas: 1. *Urban Origins and Trajectories Across the Alps*; 2. *Early Urbanisation Processes in Northern Italy*; 3. *Early Urbanisation Processes in Central Europe*; and 4. *Concluding Thoughts and Comparative Perspectives*.

The first part is more of a theoretical and methodological outline of the issue and touches on topics such as *interaction, definitions of cities, urbanism, urban cycles – urbanisation and de-urbanisation, hierarchisation, trade, and long-distance routes*. It includes a carefully crafted introduction to the subject by the editors of the monograph, L. Zamboni, M. Fernández-Götz, and C. Metzner-Nebelsick. The second chapter by M. Pearce masterfully describes the visibility and invisibility of cities in the archaeological sources and discusses the inappropriateness of using Greek, Etruscan and Roman cities as comparative units for Iron Age cities in Europe as specific cases. Interestingly, the author suggests the use of medieval cities to define urban environments, since they better capture urban processes in the Iron Age. He then uses as examples the site of Fratessina from the Final Bronze Age – Early Iron Age and another settlement of the Terramare culture in the Po Valley, Northern Italy. The use of one of the many definitions of medieval towns may seem very surprising, as at least in the Czech environment towns are defined on the basis of a legal framework and so for prehistory the use of a definition seems quite inappropriate. The author uses the definition of *Heighway (1972)*, which instead of the founding charters of cities (cf. *Kejř 1998*; critically for the territory of Bohemia and Moravia, e.g. *Hoffmann 2008*) requires only their “legal recognition” and moreover does not always require the presence of all 12 criteria. Thus, the author believes that these criteria may better reflect the urban setting even for prehistoric proto- and urban centres. This is a very important and sophisticated idea and will certainly need to be addressed in the future. It is key to add, however, that

except for the criteria of coinage and the existence of a market (the most important criterion), a large number of prehistoric sites (i.e. not only hillforts but also lowland settlements) would meet this definition (if we consider the current findings of geophysical measurements or surface collections).

The third chapter by M. Fernández-Götz starts the discussion on the definition of cities and its criteria, thus fully building on the previous paper. It deals with both urban cycles and the well-known phenomenon of princely seats in Central Europe. In particular, he takes a critical approach to the standard ‘classical cities’ of the Greek and Roman style, considering them as only one of many forms of urban manifestations. He argues, for example, for Sumerian cities, medieval cities of Northern Europe, Islamic, Aztec or Chinese cities, etc. He also describes the fluidity of cities as phenomena and their cyclical transformations. He also carefully examines the critique of civilised versus barbaric environments. This part is very stimulating and we realise that especially in the Central European environment we frequently encounter the classical-archaeological approach. The author gives an exhaustive argumentation of urban cycles and their transformations in the Iron Age with a special focus on the ‘Fürstensitz’. This novel and comprehensive approach will hopefully become the cornerstone of research on prehistoric urban structures and, as the author himself states, the ‘*fear of the town*’ will finally be overcome.

The fourth and final chapter of the first section is the work by L. Nebelsick and C. Metzner-Nebelsick dealing with transalpine routes, trade, and interactions with special emphasis on elite settlements and their role in controlling long-distance communications. The leitmotif of the article is then the contacts between the Western Hallstatt culture and the Gollaseca culture in the NW part of Northern Italy. The authors also emphasise the key role of women in the formation of Hallstatt identities north of the Alps. Such a comprehensively oriented approach is significant, and it is perhaps a pity that the authors do not at least partially mention the issue of the Eastern Hallstatt culture, which also has great interpretive potential in terms of the issues mentioned. Indeed, the methodological chapter would have been very valuable.

The second part presents selected case studies from Northern Italy. It is by far the most comprehensive part, representing mostly key Northern Italian sites. The great strength of this part is that all the sites are published together in a comprehensive, coherent manner and in English (which is certainly not standard in the Italian environment). The first chapter in this section, Chapter 5, focuses on one of the most remarkable Italian sites, Verucchio, a settlement with an abnormal amount of amber and a great number of amber workshops located, as it were, on long-distance routes. The site is also renowned for the impeccable preservation of wooden and organic materials in graves, making it a key source of knowledge for us. The authors P. Rondini and L. Zamboni reflect on the complex development of the site and reject the view of Verucchio as an ‘Etruscan colony’. Chapter 6 by J. Ortalli discusses the city of Felsina, today’s Bologna, which Pliny himself describes as the first city of the Etruscan world. The paper discusses graves and social structures, the relationship to the site of Verucchio, urban infrastructure such as canals, fortifications and public buildings, the urban layout of the site and even the presence of shrines and a city treasury. Chapter 7 by C. Iaia is devoted to bronze metalwork and especially axes and their typological and chronological dispersion across regions. It focuses not only on production circuits but also on their storage, ritual treatment and circulation, describing two crucial transregional routes. A crucial insight of the paper is that their consumption and circulation coexist in the same part and do not necessarily intersect, which depends on the social and cultural treatment of the artefacts. With Chapter 8 by the authors E. Gori, Ch. Pizzirani, and A. Gaucci, we come to the Etruscan city of Kainua – today’s Marzabotto. It is one of the finest examples of urbanisation, combining aspects of urban plan or craftsmanship as well as sacred and religious layout, social identities and structures. Moreover, Marzabotto, thanks to its unique location, is one of the best-preserved Etruscan cities. Its extensive research allows us to form a comprehensive image of the Etruscan city with all its components, including the burial. The paper represents fascinating virtual reconstructions serving as a tool for studying and modelling key historical and social issues.

Chapter 9 by G. Gambacurta attempts to connect the relationship between cities and necropolises in Northern Italy, particularly using the example of Venetian cities – to name but a few of the sites of Este and Padua. The analysis focuses not only on topography but also on the much needed and often neglected monumentality and ritual sites. Of particular importance in this chapter is the connection between sacred and burial locations and urban places. It is important to remember that even cities are not devoid of sacredness, but when studying such complex structures (as cities undoubtedly are), it is important to keep in mind other key components that may or may not be apparent at first glance – such as sanctuaries or burial sites. The author herself divides urban structures into cities – cities of the dead and sanctuaries. It should be noted here that she could have stayed with its own terminology and called the sanctuaries, for example, ‘cities of deities’. In Chapter 10 by M. Saracino and A. Guidi, we are introduced to the population dynamics of the Oppeano site, today’s Verona. This was a large proto-urban agglomeration exceeding 80 hectares. The authors present its evolution from the Neolithic to the Iron Age and note urban features, such as workshops, ramparts, division and material culture. Based on a detailed study, they then divide the settlement into pre-urban, proto-urban and urban phases. Chapter 11 by A. Vanzetti, M. Bertoldo, F. Di Maria, D. Monti, L. Salzani, and F. Saccocio presents one of the lesser-known (despite having been studied now for 150 years) sites – Coazze near Gazzo Veronese, located on the border of Veneto and Etruria Padana. It is an example of a minor (yet independent) town that can enrich our view of urbanisation as such. The authors consider the site as evidence of a dendritic market system located on one of the long-distance roads.

Chapter 12 by S. Bonomi, M. Ch. Vallicelli and C. Balista outlines the issue of the Etruscan city of Adria and presents, in particular, new preliminary data obtained during 2015–2016 excavations. The site is key not only because of its location in a humid paleochannel, allowing the preservation of organic materials, but also because of the presence of workshops together with the first real coinage, the *aes rude*. The continuity of the site into the Roman Period is remarkable. The site benefited in particular from its strategic position on both land and long-distance maritime routes. The article outlines the different phases of the city and points out that even an Etruscan city may have been primarily composed of wood-earth architecture and thus stone architecture depends on the availability of materials in the local conditions rather than the stage of development. Either way, the presence of the two waterways shows the extraordinary design and planning of the then inhabitants of Adria. The following Chapter 13 deals with another essentially neighbouring and no less important site, Spina. The paper is presented by A. Mistireki and L. Zamboni and refers to the site as an *emporium*. They focus on trade, connectivity and building and settlement layouts. They present the background as well as the fortification and settlement of the Spina site, imports from Greece, the foundation of the town and its development. They also emphasise the site’s key location on long-distance roads and consider it one of the most important trading locations in the whole of Italy. Subsequent Chapter 14 smoothly leads to the site of Forcello di Bagnolo San Vito by R. Komp, T. Quirino and M. Rapi. This is another of the key ports in the Po River area, this time introduced through excavations and non-invasive methods. The paper introduces the different developmental phases of the site and considers the classification of the site as a proto- or urban settlement based on the appearance of territorial organisation and social organisation.

Chapter 15 by R. F. de Marinis and S. Casini focuses on proto-urbanisation around Lake Como and the Ticino River of the Golasecca culture. It presents both the urban structure and the nearby burial sites and their development. This is followed by Chapter 16, again on Como, by F. Welc, L. Nebelsick, C. Metzner Nebelsick, I. Balzer, A. Vanzetti, and B. Grassi. The paper is an extension of the previous chapter and deals with preliminary results of geophysical prospecting at the same site. The last chapter of the second section, Chapter 17, deals with the Bergamo and Parre sites and is written by R. Poggiani Keller and P. Rondini. The sites are presented as important points on long-distance routes that formed boundary points and benefited from their location. The continuity of the sites from the 10th to the 4th century BC is remarkable. The urban phase is then, as at other sites, attributed

to the 6th–5th century BC and the demise of the site is placed at the beginning of the Celtic invasion of Italy. These are key but by no means widely known sites, where their contribution to the debate may be quite pivotal and bring fresh wind to the debate compared to traditional sites.

The third part presents the most important urban cases from Central Europe. Chapter 18 by D. Krause, L. Hansen, and R. Tarpini is devoted to the most studied and debated site of the Early Iron Age north of the Alps – the site of Heuneburg and its surroundings. It describes the latest excavations, the construction phases and the surrounding rich graves such as Bettelbühl, and especially other surrounding sites such as Alte Burg, Grosse Heuneburg and Bussen, which are gradually entering the literature and scholarly awareness. It also addresses the position of the site of Heuneburg as the first city north of the Alps (described by Herodotus of Halicarnassus in the 5th century BC). Chapter 19 by R. Krause deals with the site of Ipf bei Bopfingen in Bavaria and its hinterland, placing it among similar sites across the Hallstatt and Italian areas and their interrelationships. Chapter 20 by M. Chytráček reflects on current research on early urbanism and the relationships between Northern Italy and Bohemia using several highland and homestead sites as examples, namely Štítary nad Radbuzou, Lhota-Závist, Svržno and Záhořice-Vladař. The elaborate argumentation points to the sites' relations with Northern Italy and their urban processes, not avoiding the theory of chieftaincy and social systems (corporate versus individual mode). It is commendable that this is one of the few works from Central Eastern Europe to appear in the monograph and is by no means less significant than other works in terms of the scope of research and content of the publication.

Chapters 21 and 22 deal with two of the most famous French sites – Vix and Bourges-Avaricum. The chapter on Vix by B. Chaume presents new investigations, new results of geophysical prospecting and new central houses, as well as new concepts of Hallstatt princely seats. The chapter on Bourges by I. Ralston deals with the presentation of excavations of the site and its context between other central places of the Early Iron Age, its surroundings, chronology, and interregional contacts. In Chapter 23, S. Tecco Hvala presents the central site of Most na Soči in the territory of present-day Slovenia. She deals not only with the distribution of the site's structures, but also with complementary activities such as agriculture and breeding, production activities, residences and burials of the lower elite, public places and social diversity, and, last but not least, sacred practices. She concludes that the site, although much smaller in size, is nevertheless comparable to central sites such as Heuneburg or Manching in terms of architecture and material culture, including imports. The third section concludes with Chapter 24 written by H. Wendling, which deals with Dürrnberg bei Hallein. The author sees the importance of this site not only in its natural wealth (salt and copper deposits) but also in its strategic position on the supra-regional roads. He describes the settlement complexity of the site and also discusses imports from distant places. It also provides social models and reflects comprehensively on social and political interactions, structures, infrastructure or individual burial districts in necropolises. Overall, it is a holistic approach that deserves careful study.

In the fourth and final part, we encounter a synthesising approach combining comparison and theoretical modelling. In Chapter 25, C. Riva focuses on the Mediterranean and urban origins. She relativises the Mediterranean-centric perspective and takes into account previously introduced points of views. She emphasises a combined approach in terms of both historical and archaeological sources. She considers it crucial to develop urban categories so that the study of other sites can contribute to the debate on urban structures, especially in the first millennium BC. S. Stoddart concludes the papers with the final chapter – Chapter 26. He summarises the richness of Alpine urbanism and offers their use as examples for further study. He does not shy away from examples from rural environments and considers urbanism as a manifestation of political power.

The team of authors, whose joint work emerged from fruitful exchanges at the Milan conference, deserves recognition and wide acceptance of the monograph for discussion. All the authors, mostly well-known and respected specialists in the field of Iron Age archaeology, argue concisely and factually – and although the book is quite substantial, the whole work comes across as very organic and readable. The ability of the team of authors to present the information clearly and systematically adds

greatly to the value of the book. All contributions are accompanied by relevant diagrams, tables, figures and maps (in colour).

Overall, the collective of authors not only provides a comprehensive and much sought-after summary of information across the Alps, but also brings new perspectives, methodological approaches and innovative ideas. Particularly key are the introductory chapters dealing with theoretical approaches to the study of cities, urban structures and agglomerations and their careful and thoughtful methodological definitions based on different types of sources. The authors are not afraid to break away from traditional approaches and explore Iron Age cities from new angles, which is refreshing and brings new perspectives to the research. I particularly appreciate the discussion of the fluidity of urban forms and cycles of urbanisation. It is a pity that the list of Central European case studies does not include more representation of the sites of the Eastern Hallstatt culture (which can perhaps be attributed to the lack of interest of domestic scholars in this issue and their inability to introduce the issue to a wider audience rather than to the state of research), but otherwise the book has a very diverse and organic feel. Personally, I believe that this monograph is essential for any scholar of the (Early) Iron Age, and it may also be useful to scholars dealing not only with the urban environment in the Middle Ages or other periods, but also with the general study of central places. The monograph brings fresh wind to the debate on Early Iron Age centres, and I personally hope that it will inspire, for example, the treatment of urban planning at selected Bronze Age or Late Iron Age sites, as it brings a wealth of insights and stimuli for further, rich debate. Overall, the book makes a significant contribution to the field of Iron Age urbanism in Europe, especially through its new theoretical approaches and its linking of Italian and Central European settings. Although some of the ideas are innovative, there is still room for deeper reflection and discussion, opening up further directions for future research. I can only add that I hope that a similar debate will not escape the Czech environment in the coming years.

Zuzana Golec Mírová

References

- Barfield, L.* 1971: Northern Italy before Rome. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Biel, J. – Krausse, D. (eds.)* 2005: Frühkeltische Fürstensitze. Älteste Städte und Herrschaftszentren nördlich der Alpen? Internationaler Workshop zur keltischen Archäologie in Eberdingen-Hochdorf 12. und 13. September 2003. Archäologische Informationen aus Baden-Württemberg 51. Schriften des Keltenmuseums. Hochdorf/Enz 6. Esslingen: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege.
- Cowley, D. C. – Fernández-Götz, M. – Romankiewicz, T. – Wendling, H. (eds.)* 2019: Rural Settlement. Relating buildings, landscape, and people in the European Iron Age. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
- Fernández-Götz, M.* 2018: Urbanisation in Iron Age Europe. Trajectories, Patterns, and Social Dynamics. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 26, 117–162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10814-017-9107-1>
- Heighway, C. M.* 1972: The erosion of history: archaeology and planning in town: a study of historic towns affected by modern development in England, Wales and Scotland. London: Council for British Archaeology – Urban Research Committee.
- Hoffmann, F.* 2008: Středověké město v Čechách a na Moravě. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.
- Kejř, J.* 1998: Vznik městského zřízení v českých zemích. Praha: Karolinum.
- Krausse, D. – Beilharz, D. (eds.)* 2010: „Fürstensitze“ und Zentralorte der frühen Kelten. Abschlusskolloquium des DFG-Schwerpunktprogramms 1171 in Stuttgart, 12.–15. Oktober 2009. *Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg* 120. Stuttgart: Konrad Theiss Verlag.
- Lang, A. – Salač, V. (eds.)* 2002: Fernkontakte in der Eisenzeit. Konferenz Liblice 2000. Praha: Archeologický ústav AV ČR.
- Schumann, R. – van der Vaart-Verschoof, S. (eds.)* 2017: Connecting elites and regions. Perspectives on contacts, relations and differentiation during the Early Iron Age Hallstatt C Period in Northwest and Central Europe. Leiden: Sidestone press.
- Sievers, S. – Schönfelder, M. (eds.)* 2012: Die Frage der Protourbanisation in der Eisenzeit. Akten des 34. internationalen Kolloquiums der AFEAF vom 13.–16. Mai 2010 in Aschaffenburg. *Kolloquien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 16. Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt.