

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

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Habilitation thesis

Oppidum as an urban landscape. A multidisciplinary approach to the study of space organisation Bibracte

Reviewer

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I first met Mgr. Goláňová in 2017 when I became a member of the Conseil Scientifique for the Iron Age *oppidum* of Bibracte in Burgundy (F). I have since followed the research that Goláňová has been directing there with much interest and in the course of annual meetings at the Centre Archéologique Européen have had stimulating conversations with her about Iron Age urbanism and her approach to the topic. I was therefore delighted to be asked to review the thesis that she has submitted to fulfil the requirements for her Habilitation, entitled *Oppidum as an urban landscape. A multidisciplinary approach to the study of space organisation at Bibracte*, which presents the full results of her project for the first time. A particular focus of the work concerns the identification and possible uses of seemingly empty spaces inside this 200ha defended site, questions addressed through the application of a novel multi-proxy methodology. As we shall see, the results of the project, funded by the Czech Science Foundation, have not only brought a key neglected element of urban spaces to the fore, but also have significant ramifications for how we should study Iron Age urban sites in the future.

Excluding the prelims and the contents pages, the work submitted by Goláňová comprises 404 pages of text, 249 figures and 70 tables, supported by an extensive bibliography (41pp) and nine digital appendices. The text is organised into 22 chapters, divided into five parts. As with any report presenting the results of a major multi-disciplinary research project, the text includes a number of specialist contributions, but Goláňová is responsible for the bulk of the content, authoring eight chapters and co-authoring three more; I would estimate her contribution as 90,000–100,000 words. In my review, I shall focus on the parts of the text of which she is a named author, essentially Parts I–III and V, but in passing rapidly over the rest of the work, I would emphasise Goláňová's very significant role in coordinating the research and distilling the results into the overarching narrative, a clear indication, in my view, that she possesses the core competencies expected of a research director, from assembling a team with the skills required to deliver a specific project, to the ability critically to evaluate and interpret data generated by different forms of scientific analysis.

Part I provides a general background to the research, starting from the organisation and use of space inside oppida and earlier sites, enclosed and open, before homing in on the recurrence of unbuilt areas of various sizes at sites of different types and date (Ch 1). This is followed by a brief but wide-ranging discussion of possible uses, mainly economic but also

political or cultural, offered by archaeologists for such spaces and the indicators from which these were deduced (Ch 2).

Part II introduces the site on which the research focused – the oppidum of Bibracte in the Morvan uplands of central France. Here, Goláňová provides the most comprehensive published account of the site in English, which will be widely read and cited. The sheer magnitude of the task involved in reading through the vast literature on the site (published and unpublished) to produce an up-to-date synthesis should not be underestimated. Chapter 3 describes the geology and topography of Bibracte, and gives an overview of its long history of archaeological research. The extensive new investigations since 1984, which besides excavation have employed a wide range of scientific techniques (geophysics, palynology, archaeobotany, dendrochronology, etc), made Bibracte an obvious choice for Goláňová's project. Chapter 4 assesses current understanding of the settlement sequence in different parts of the site, which has been much enhanced by the development of a robust absolute chronology, allowing synchronous developments to be traced across large areas.

Part III presents the results of the magnetometer and GPR survey undertaken mainly by the Brno team with the aims of 'ground-truthing' both techniques by comparing the results to excavated and lidar data and identifying undeveloped spaces (Chs 5, 6). Topography, tree cover and geology make Bibracte a very challenging environment for geophysical survey and the results were often indistinct or difficult to interpret, but combining techniques did allow some further unbuilt spaces to be defined. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, so a series of test pits were dug in 'empty' spaces in five areas to recover cultural material and samples for a comprehensive suite of proxy analyses that might reveal past activities; C14 and OSL dates obtained by the project provide a chronological framework. The bulk of Part IV comprises specialist contributions from other team members, with Goláňová leading on the archaeology (Chs 7–10). The results of the multi-proxy analyses are often difficult to interpret let alone combine, but imply a range of functions, including agricultural, for unbuilt areas.

In the concluding Part V, three chapters bring together the various strands of enquiry. Notwithstanding the complex and fragmentary nature of the test pit data and the loss of Iron Age surfaces, they provide invaluable snapshots of the Bibracte environment at different moments in time before, during, and after the oppidum, a key theme being the often localised nature of land use on the hilltop (Ch 20). At the same time, the new absolute dates from the project greatly amplify previous faint indications of activity here earlier in the Iron Age and in the preceding millennia, as well as in late Antiquity (Ch 21). That such a striking hill attracted human attention from an early period is unsurprising, but it is clear that archaeologists have hitherto underestimated the possible scale of such usage, and must now consider the extent to which this previous site history could explain the presence of the late Iron Age oppidum.

In her final chapter, Goláňová combines evidence from different sectors of Bibracte to paint arguably the most detailed picture yet offered of an oppidum as a functioning urban centre, with a focus on the possible roles of different types of empty space in the lives of the inhabitants (Ch. 22). She argues persuasively that the structure and layout of the site and differing land uses apparent in the blank areas point to individual localised decision-making rather than top-down centralised planning. In setting the results in a wider context, she identifies areas of particular uncertainty or deserving more work, ending the chapter by framing specific questions about empty spaces that might be addressed by multi-proxy analysis, which – as she rightly emphasises – must include investigating the use and organisation of space outside the defences as well as within.

Standing back from the detail, this thesis marks an important step forward in the study of Iron Age urbanism on three separate counts. First, its in-depth account of the archaeology of

Bibracte, informed by Goláňová's first-hand knowledge of the site and the work there since 1984 (much of it not yet fully published) will be of immense value not just to students of oppida, but for the study of pre-industrial urbanism in general; on this score alone, her thesis will command a wide audience. Second, the research has highlighted the future potential of supposedly archaeologically void areas for understanding urban space and as a source of information about the nature of a settlement and inhabitants. Unbuilt areas are a recurrent feature of oppida (and sites of other types and periods) and probably had many purposes, be it cultivation, storing or processing foodstuffs and other materials, corralling animals, or waste disposal. And armed with the methodology from this project, archaeologists now have the means to characterise the activities associated with such spaces wherever they occur.

Last but not least, this thesis exposes the pressing need for a new agenda for work on Iron Age urbanism. For too long, our focus has been on the factors or circumstances that brought oppida into being, and whether such sites qualify as urban according to a particular model. Only rarely is the impact of this development on the majority of the inhabitants – rather than the social elite – touched upon, let alone discussed in detail as Goláňová does here. How did urban communities function on a day-to-day basis? How was the mass of solid, organic and liquid refuse they generated managed? How did urban populations feed themselves? Do we see agricultural intensification in the environs? Is greater animal (or human) mobility evident at urban sites? How did living at urban sites impact on health, disease and diet? In the past, archaeologists have largely avoided such questions as too difficult, but thanks to innovative approaches like those pioneered here at Bibracte and other advances in scientific archaeology, this is set to change. Isotope studies have transformed our ability to follow the movement of crops, animals and people across the landscape, and where human remains survive, aDNA may be able to establish whether urban dwellers were biologically related or even what they died from.

These same themes of course apply to the large lowland agglomerations that emerged in previous centuries in many areas of La Tène Europe and the Hallstatt princely centres before them. More work is also needed on the factors responsible for the successive phases of de-urbanisation and de-centralisation highlighted by Czech colleagues. Were these due to external factors or were these societies unable to sustain urban living? And, returning to Goláňová's last point, if we are to understand the essence of urban sites, our research horizons need more effectively to encompass the wider geographical setting, and how these centres were integrated into Iron Age society at large. The multi-proxy strategy applied in this study will surely have an important role in this endeavour.

While there are minor points on which of our views diverge, I have no substantial issue with any of Goláňová's main arguments or conclusions. The research successfully identified and addressed a significant lacuna in our understanding of Iron Age urban settlement structure, and the specific approach and methodology were well suited to the particular conditions at Bibracte. The form and structure of the thesis itself are appropriate to its aims and content, although with the benefit of hindsight, a final chapter summarising and contextualising the principal insights from the research and collecting together various suggestions made throughout the text for future work both at Bibracte and beyond might have been helpful, particularly for readers who are not familiar with the oppidum. Overall the text is clearly written (and moreover not in her first language); admittedly, some sections are quite dense, but with such a complex site, this is difficult to avoid. The illustrations are generally clear and of good quality, although one or two might have benefited from being a little larger for clarity, whilst the extensive bibliography attests to Goláňová's wider command of the subject area.

In sum, it is clear from this highly original thesis that Goláňová is a talented and meticulous researcher, destined to be a leader in her field. The work that she has presented in my view amply fulfils the requirements of a Habilitation in prehistoric and medieval archaeology.

There is no direct British equivalent, but this excellent thesis compares well to Habilitation dissertations than I have examined in France and to UK higher doctorates by publication. Knowing her personally, I am confident that Goláňová will be an effective, stimulating and supportive research director and mentor for PhD students, and will ably communicate her own evident enthusiasm for her subject to the next generation. I have no hesitation in recommending to the board that this work goes forward to a public defence, where I look forward to discussing some of the many interesting points raised by this research.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1. If you were starting the research project again, what would you do differently?
2. What issues do you foresee in the application of a similar multi-proxy methodology for investigating 'empty' areas in unenclosed agglomeration and farmyards at smaller settlements, particularly in lowland settings exposed to modern cultivation?
3. Bibracte is notorious for its poor animal bone survival. What complementary insights might be possible from animal bone at oppida with large faunal assemblages?
4. What personally do you see as the most pressing questions for the study of Iron Age urbanism in the next quarter of a century?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *Oppidum as an urban landscape. A multidisciplinary approach to the study of space organisation Bibracte* by Mgr. Petra Goláňová, Ph.D., **fulfils** the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Prehistoric and Medieval Archaeology.

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Signature: