

Celtic Borderlands? A Study of La Tène Culture Settlement and Economy in Silesia.

(Popular science summary)

The people of the La Tène culture, commonly identified with the Celtic tribes mentioned in numerous ancient historical sources, played a remarkable role not just in the prehistory of Silesia, but also in the prehistory of all of Central Europe. The Celts formed a very dynamically developing civilization that changed the spiritual and material culture in vast areas stretching north of the Mediterranean Basin. Consequently, the appearance of Celtic settlers in the south of modern-day Poland marked the beginning of distinct civilizational changes. The relatively high number of Celtic imports found at sites inhabited by local communities registered in central and northern Poland demonstrates that the people of the La Tène culture in Silesia and Lesser Poland exerted a profound influence on the entire basin of the Oder and Vistula rivers. This influence applied to the material as well as spiritual culture. Paradoxically, despite the importance of this topic in the context of Iron Age studies in Poland, it has never enjoyed significant interest from Polish researchers. Throughout the past several decades, Iron Age archaeology in Poland has been focused on typological and chronological research. Studies of the economy, settlement patterns and landscape archaeology largely remained the domain of Neolithic and Bronze Age researchers. The proposed project aims to overcome this division. This goal is all the more important considering the fact that La Tène people effected a marked civilizational shift in the territory of modern-day Poland. The Celts ushered in new technology used in the manufacture and processing of metal, pottery, the manufacture of glass ornaments, and the manufacture of high-quality weapons and agricultural implements. It was the Celts who developed the trade that clustered around the so-called Amber Road, and who left behind such artifacts as the oldest coins minted on the territory of modern-day Poland. The sudden development in many branches of manufacturing and crafts resulted in large part from the Celts' highly advanced farming and animal husbandry techniques. This created a surplus of food, allowing highly-specialized groups of craftsmen and manufacturers to exist in local communities. The people inhabiting the village settlements typical of the area of Central Europe probably combined their farm work with various manufacturing work to meet their own needs and, possibly, those of their neighbors. It appears that only a small part of the community worked exclusively as craftsmen. This group largely comprised those who had mastered the most advanced, and thus most time-consuming, crafts, such as pottery, metallurgy, coin minting, etc. Our knowledge of the economy of La Tène societies in Silesia remains very limited. New archaeozoological and archaeobotanical analyses are necessary to provide more information on their basic economy. Also needed are new data about the estimated local population, the sizes and layouts of their settlements, and their advanced technology, which is often manifested in the traces of their manufacturing work. This will make it possible to ascertain whether the territory of Silesia in the La Tène period functioned as a sort of "borderland" for the settlement of Celtic tribes, or if it was equal to other areas of their dynamic expansion in terms of its strategic relevance.