

CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN IRON AGE EUROPE

Edited by

**IAN ARMIT, HRVOJE POTREBICA, MATIJA ČREŠNAR,
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Front Cover

Digital image showing detail of face of female figure on the Vače situla
(produced by Adrian Evans and Rachael Kershaw, and reproduced
courtesy of the National Museum of Slovenia).

Back Cover

Lidar image showing the Iron Age hillfort of Poštela near Maribor in Slovenia,
and its surrounding landscape (prepared by Dimitrij Mlekuž, and reproduced
courtesy of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia).

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Introduction: Cultural encounters and the ENTRANS Project

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Introduction

This volume stems from a session at the 20th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists, held in Istanbul in September 2014. The session aimed to explore the nature and impact of cultural encounters in Iron Age Europe. In particular, our focus was on those regions occupying the boundaries between the urbanising centres of Mediterranean Europe and the ‘barbarian’ societies to the north. The session drew on a core of papers from the ENTRANS (Encounters and Transformations in Iron Age Europe) Project, funded by HERA and the European Commission, which is examining Iron Age cultural encounters in the East Alpine region (*Fig. 1*) from the perspectives of art, landscape and the body (ARMIT *et al.* 2014).

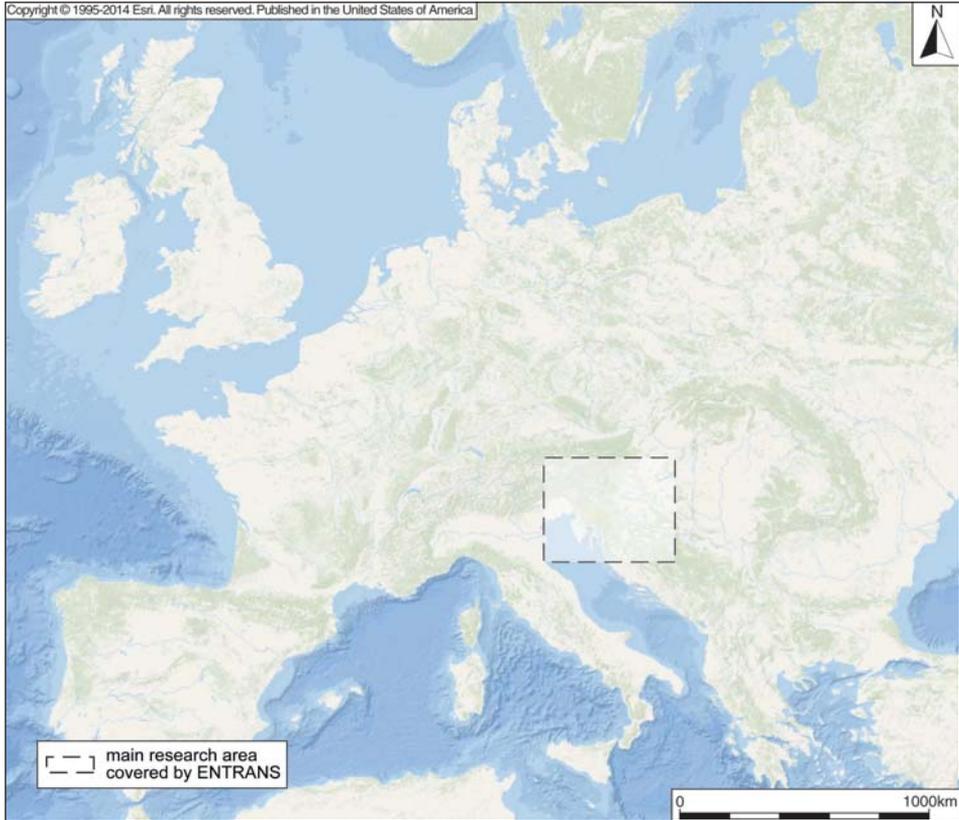
The papers gathered together in this volume include most of those presented at the EAA session, together with some additional invited contributions. The papers from the ENTRANS team represent a snapshot of the ENTRANS Project as it evolves, focusing on method development and preliminary results. The papers from outside the project expand the regional coverage through consideration of a geographically wide-ranging set of contexts where cultural encounters are critical to understandings of Iron Age social development. Together they provide a platform for the ongoing discussion of cultural encounters in an Iron Age context.

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*Fig. 1. Location map showing the main area covered by the ENTRANS Project
(drawn by Rachael Kershaw)*

Cultural encounters: the shadow of the ancient authors

Cultural encounters, at various scales, form a dominant theme in the study of Iron Age Europe. The development of urbanised communities around the fringes of the Mediterranean, and the beginnings of self-conscious colonialism by certain Greek and Phoenician communities, threw cultural differences between groups into sharp focus. This was particularly acute in those ‘interface’ regions where the cultural constructs and ideologies of urbanising Mediterranean civilisations met with the very different lifeways and belief systems of the essentially rural, ‘barbarian’ world.

Traditional interpretations of Iron Age cultural encounters have tended to be top-down in approach. Archaeologists and ancient historians have sought to define named peoples through a combination of (often fragmentary) documentary sources and a culture-historical interpretation of material culture. Much discussion has thus been framed in terms of the origins, evolution and movement of ‘high-level’ groupings, usually perceived as ethnic in character, such as the Romans, Greeks, Celts, Veneti, Illyrians, Scythians, Cimbri, Germani etc. This essentialist approach to cultural identity reflects in many ways the perspectives of the Greek and Roman writers themselves, in whose works identity was generally ascribed at this over-arching, ethnic scale. In following these agendas, archaeologists have often tended to see cultural encounters in terms of the inter-relationships between these presumed ethnic groups, for example through war, trade or migration. Where cultural encounters have been theorised at all, discussion has centred around the establishment of dominance of one large, quasi-ethnic group over another, most obviously through processes that can be characterised as ‘Hellenisation’, ‘Romanisation’ or even ‘Celticisation’.

Yet, is it necessarily helpful to follow agendas set by writers more than 2000 years distant? The position of the Classical authors relative to the phenomena under study was of course privileged, though in relation to the barbarian world their interpretations of people, places and events were still, of course, etc. The prehistoric world of Iron Age Europe was, by definition, non-literate, and our Classical commentators were all essentially cultural outsiders with their own preoccupations, audience expectations and other biases of various kinds. Importantly too, almost all of them wrote about events that had occurred many years (often centuries) before their own lifetimes. While their knowledge and perceptions are important, therefore, they need not be the most appropriate starting point for archaeological analysis.

Alternative approaches to cultural encounters

When the archaeological evidence is examined on its own terms, there is little to suggest that individual or collective identity in this period was exclusively or predominantly ethnic, national or even tribal. The culture-groups we traditionally define in Iron Age Europe, based primarily on the spatial and chronological distributions of certain, more or less diagnostic, artefact types, are essentially polythetic, and do not lend themselves to instant recognition of a prehistoric Celt, Venetian or Illyrian. Indeed, it is debateable how far, in the absence of the

documentary sources, we could reconstruct from archaeological evidence alone, the high-level, presumptively ethnic, groups that we conventionally assume to have existed in this period.

Ultimately, cultures are abstract concepts and encounters between abstract concepts did not occur any more in the past than they do now. What did occur, then as now, are encounters between people, each with their own individual and collective identities. If we are to progress beyond the agendas set by the ancient authors, it is at this smaller scale that we must focus.

The ENTRANS Project has adopted an explicitly constructivist approach, which sees cultural identities as fluid, relational, negotiable and contingent. Individuals have multiple, nested, context-dependent identities which are performed rather than given, and can be shaped by the audience to which they are expressed. While such a perspective is perhaps relatively uncontroversial at an individual level, reflecting a general consensus across the humanities, it may seem more difficult at the larger scale, for example in the study of regional developments within prehistory. We can understand perhaps that households, lineages and small kin-groups might be highly responsive to situation and audience, but how does such fluidity play out in larger collectives – tribes, confederacies, peoples – where concepts and expressions of identity are based less on face-to-face encounters and more on memory and tradition?

Art and encounters

As one example of approaches to cultural encounters and identity within ENTRANS, we can briefly look at the development of situla art within the Early Iron Age in south-east Europe. Situla art is a remarkably unified form of figural, narrative art, found within a relatively limited area centred on northern Italy and the East Alpine region (e.g. BARTOLONI – MORIGI GOVI 1995; MASON 1996, 87–89; TURK 2005; FREY 2011; KRIŽ 2012). Characteristically, it comprises repoussé decoration applied to sheet bronze vessels (the eponymous situlae) and a limited range of other high status objects generally found in cremation graves. Classic situlae have decoration presented in three or four vertically-ordered friezes that include scenes of processions, feasting, physical and musical competition, and a range of other activities associated, for the most part, with the social elite (*Fig. 2*). Although lacking any overtly religious imagery, situlae do feature motifs, including real and fantastical animals and birds, which may be viewed as allegorical or cosmological in character.

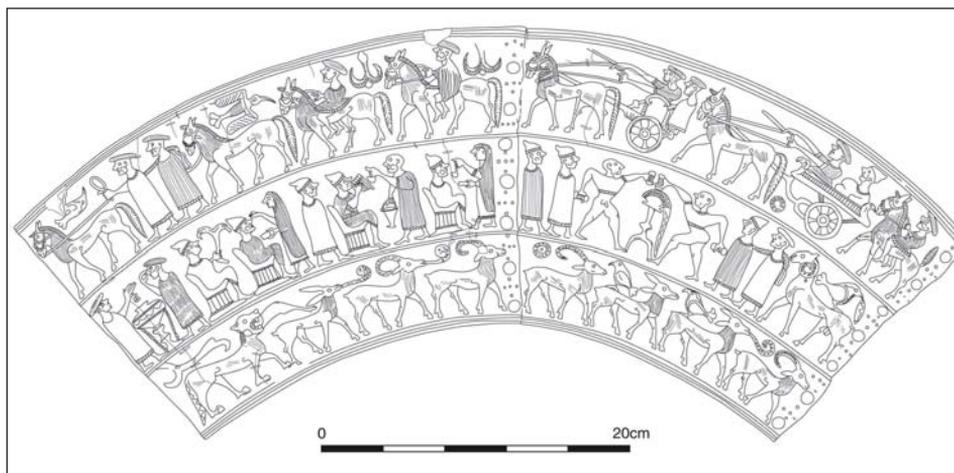


Fig. 2. The Vače situla is an archetypal example of situla art, probably dating to the late 6th/5th century BC. It was recovered from a high status inhumation grave along with a double-crested bronze helmet, two iron spearheads, an iron battle-axe and a belt with an undecorated rectangular bronze belt-plate (BOŽIČ 2013). This drawing shows the decoration on the vessel ‘opened out’ to reveal the overall decorative scheme (drawn by Rachael Kershaw).

Cultural encounters, in the traditional sense, have been at the heart of the rich scholarship that has developed around situla art, and particular attention has been paid to the movement of ideas from the Greek and Etruscan worlds, and the degree to which situla art reflects indigenous or imported cultural norms and values. This has often been founded on highly sophisticated art-historical analysis. Such work has clearly been critical in developing our understanding of the origins, development and iconographic content of situla art. However, to further explore how these objects were understood, why they were adopted and what roles they played in both expressing and constructing Iron Age identities in the East Alpine region, other approaches may be helpful.

One way forward here may be through the use of material-semiotics approaches such as actor-network theory (ANT) as developed by Latour (2005) and others (e.g. LAW – HASSARD 1999), and widely used under a range of guises in studies across the humanities, social sciences and beyond. The lack of any orthodoxy in ANT approaches across the broad range of disciplines within which it has been adopted, obviates the need for any detailed rehearsal of its origins and development; broadly, however, we take it to represent a theoretical/

methodological approach in which interpretation is derived from the analysis of relational ties between actors (human and non-human) within networks across time and space. It is thus potentially highly suitable for the analysis of Iron Age cultural encounters.

The concept of a ‘network’ is particularly useful since in an Iron Age context it does not imply any in-built hierarchical relationships, e.g. between the superior Greek and inferior ‘barbarian’ worlds. Such asymmetries characterised virtually all classical writing about the barbarian ‘other’ and deeply underpinned the development of archaeological approaches. Also important, from an archaeological viewpoint, is ANT’s incorporation of non-human actors as part of social networks; most importantly, for our purposes, the objects found archaeologically in graves, on settlements and in the wider landscape, as well as the physical elements of the landscape itself, such as tombs, houses, roads and enclosures. In a constructivist context, such networks are themselves transient, being constituted only through performance; the interactions of people and things. Without repeated performance, the network ceases to exist, or at least loses certain elements and shifts in size and constitution.

Within these networks we can recognise consistent ‘assemblages’ of relationships which we can heuristically group together as objects, monuments or concepts with varying degrees of integrity and coherence. Situla art, for example, rather than being seen as an essentially derivative art style, can be viewed as a network of relationships; a nexus of diverse attributes that coalesce consistently (but not identically) to create a recognisable, fuzzy-but-coherent, class of objects.

From an ANT perspective, situla art can be viewed as having a distinct trajectory that unfolds from the 7th to 4th centuries BC. It coalesces initially as a network of relationships between pre-existing attributes (for example of form, material, technique and imagery) which combine to create the recognisable, recurrent group of objects we define as situla art. During what we might traditionally think of as the classic period of situla art, in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, we can be fairly confident that the art was conceived as a distinct style or class of object emically as well as etically, given the stylistic coherence of the objects. In terms of ANT, we can see this as an example of punctualisation, where a group of regularly recurring attributes become reified as a thing in themselves (or a ‘token’). In later centuries, this coherence breaks down as the attributes that constitute situla art dissipate and we might suspect that whatever emic category existed to define situla art was either forgotten or else re-imagined as a historical rather than as a living phenomenon.

Another important concept often associated with ANT approaches is that of translation, which can be taken to represent the mutation and reconfiguration of concepts and material forms as they traverse networks. Again, this is a potentially critical part of the theoretical tool-kit needed to understand, for example, the apparent morphing of imagery, familiar in one region, as it appears in adjacent or remote regions. The interplay between Mediterranean and East Alpine imagery and ideas seen in *situla* art, is a prime candidate for this sort of approach.

Decorated *situlae* do not simply reflect an elite identity through portrayal of a high status, leisured lifestyle; instead they can be conceived as acting as social mediators, creating for their owners and users a sense of belonging to an elite group and sharing social bonds with others whom they may physically encounter only on rare occasions. Thus, during the ‘classic’ period of stylistic integrity in particular, they acted both as symbolic referents for the shared notion of an elite East Alpine cultural identity and as key elements in the constitution of that identity (*Fig. 3*); their elaborate decorative friezes presenced what might have been relatively rare and episodic ritual feasting in the daily lives of its participants.

This active role of objects in the creation and maintenance of identity can extend across generations. For example, our digital imaging of the iconic Molnik belt-plate (*Fig. 4*) demonstrates a long and complex biography: an original design, influenced by Greek and Near Eastern iconography, was progressively obscured as the object was repeatedly used, broken and repaired before being deposited, with other valuable items, in the grave of a high status individual. This object was not simply to encode or display wealth or prestige, but rather its changing form mediated the shifting social identities of its (probably successive) owners.

These sorts of approaches are relevant not only to art objects but to all elements of Iron Age material culture. Funerary monuments, domestic settlement layouts, and built landscapes pulled together analogous assemblages of familiar and exotic traits to create and express new identities during the Early Iron Age in south-east Europe.

Structure of the volume

The present volume is divided into two parts. The first comprises a series of contributions from members of the ENTRANS team, presenting some preliminary results and examining some of the main directions of the project. The second comprises a series of papers presenting comparative perspectives on the issue of cultural encounters in Iron Age Europe. There has been no intention to set out

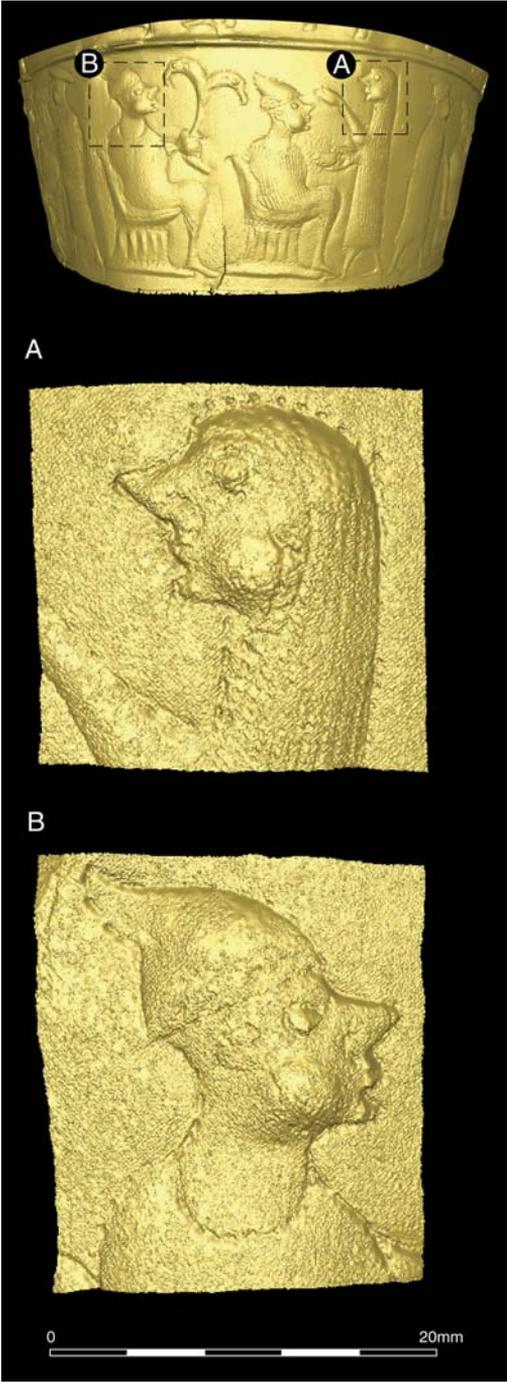


Fig. 3. Digital images showing details of faces from figures on the Vače situla (digital images produced by Adrian Evans and Rachael Kershaw, and reproduced courtesy of the National Museum of Slovenia)



Fig. 4. The Molnik belt-plate: digital image of frontal view of the object in its present form, a.) with natural colour, b.) with artificial metallic colouring, c.) with the elements recombined, to show the original motif (digital images produced by Adrian Evans and Rachael Kershaw, and reproduced courtesy of the Fragmented Heritage Project, University of Bradford; and the City Museum of Ljubljana)

a fixed agenda or theoretical perspective: the ENTRANS approach, as outlined above, is not a template for the volume and would not necessarily be shared by all contributors. Rather the idea has been to open dialogue between researchers working in diverse areas of Iron Age Europe, where the issue of cultural encounters is an important theme.

Part One

The ENTRANS Project explicitly adopts a framework of analysis centred around three major themes; art, landscape and the body. In the first paper in Part One, ‘*Developing the 3D imaging of Iron Age art in the ENTRANS Project*’, Lindsey Büster, Ian Armit, Adrian Evans and Rachael Kershaw explore the development of new digital methods for the presentation and analysis of decorated objects, including situla art. Three papers then tackle the nature of landscape inhabitation in the East Alpine region, as trade and communications opened up the area to an ever wider range of cultural encounters during the Iron Age. In ‘*Encounters on borders of worlds: the Kaptol Group in the Early Iron Age communication network*’, Hrvoje Potrebica and Janja Mavrović Mokos discuss the extraordinary degree to which elite groups in northern Croatia were connected in complex networks of exchange extending over significant distances. Geophysical approaches to the understanding of buried landscapes are addressed in a paper by Igor Medarić, Branko Mušič and Matija Črešnar on ‘*Tracing flat cremation graves using integrated advanced processing of magnetometry data*’, which focuses on a case study of the major hillfort and funerary complex at Poštela, near Maribor in north-west Slovenia. A more theoretical consideration of landscape at a time of cultural encounter and change is then presented by Philip Mason and Dimitrij Mlekuž in their paper, ‘*Negotiating space in the Early Iron Age landscape of south-eastern Slovenia: the case of Veliki Vinji Vrh*’. The latter two papers in particular highlight the impact of new approaches to geophysical and Lidar prospection, that have formed an intrinsic part of ENTRANS.

The final two papers in Part One address the ‘body’ theme of ENTRANS. In the first of these, ‘*Death and the body: using osteoarchaeological methods to investigate the later prehistoric funerary archaeology of Slovenia and Croatia*’, Rebecca Nicholls and Jo Buckberry explore the application of osteoarchaeological techniques to human remains, which have, in the past, been a highly neglected resource. Funerary archaeology across most of Europe, and certainly within the East Alpine region where ENTRANS is focused, has concentrated on the analysis

of grave goods and funerary structures. Sexing of graves has usually proceeded from the nature of the associated material culture rather than the bones of the dead. In part this relates to the poor preservation of inhumed remains (where they exist at all and where they have been retained), and the frequency of cremations, which provide much greater challenges for the osteoarchaeologist. It also derives in part from the historical focus of much of Central European protohistory, where techniques of scientific analysis were relatively slow to be taken up. In the final paper of Part One, *'The use of stable light isotopes as a method of exploring the homogeneity and heterogeneity of diet in Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age temperate Europe'*, Rebecca Nicholls and Hannah Koon explore the methods and initial results of stable isotope analysis of the same populations. Preliminary results, perhaps surprisingly, suggest that communities were relatively homogenous with little sign of the physical movement of individuals, despite the manifest long-distance movement of grave goods and ideas. Combining these bioarchaeological data-sets, detailed osteobiographies for some individuals can trace childhood and maternal health, show evidence for disease, including scurvy, and provide evidence for violent trauma. These powerful techniques provide insights into individual lives, adding new layers of interpretation to a conventional picture based on monument construction and grave goods.

Part Two

Part Two comprises seven papers from colleagues working in other parts of Europe, whose work involves cultural encounters of one kind or another: they are arranged broadly from west to east across a swathe of Europe. The first of these papers, by Alexis Gorgues, *'Trade in a liminal zone: commercial encounter and transformation in the Iron Age North West Mediterranean'*, examines the complex and subtle role of the trader in articulating social relations. This is followed by a contribution by Ana Delgado Hervás and Meritxell Ferrer on *'Feeding an emporion: gastronomies and identities in Empúries, North Catalonia (5th century BC)'*. We move then along the Mediterranean coast to southern France, and specifically the area around the Greek colony of Massalia, for Loup Bernard's paper on *'From the farm to the hillfort: what happens to a Celt when a Greek settles at his door'*. Eastwards again, into northern Italy, we then have Fabio Saccoccio's consideration of *'The Venetic-Etruscan-Celtic encounters in the Po river lowlands'*. Moving northwards into the Alps, Simona Marchesini and Rosa Roncador contribute an analysis of *'Celts and Rhaetians in the Central-*

Eastern Alpine Region during the Second Iron Age, introducing epigraphic and linguistic evidence to the discussion. Yet further to the east, Aurel Rustoiu and Sándor Berecki discuss ‘*Cultural encounters and fluid identities in the eastern Carpathian Basin in the 4th-3rd centuries BC*’, focusing on the social processes underlying cultural changes evident in the La Tène period. Finally, we move to Russia, where Svetlana Sharapova’s paper ‘*It is traced on bone: social identity and bioarchaeological research of Iron Age populations of the Trans-Urals and western Siberia*’ applies the perspectives of an osteoarchaeologist to a region where, even more than most, the huge potential of bioarchaeology has yet to be fully developed.

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