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ROMAN BRONZE BULL STATUETTE FROM RYMÁŇ AT SVÁROV, DISTRICT KLDADNO. NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE KNOWN ARTEFACT AND NOTES ON FURTHER FINDS FROM BOHEMIA

ABSTRACT: The bronze statuette of a bull from the Roman Period, which was according to B. Svoboda located nearby Rymáň at Mníšek pod Brdy (Svoboda 1948: 197, obr. 38: 2), belongs to the finds that has repeatedly been cited in the Czech, scholarly literature. The presented paper provides analysis of the artefact as well as a specification of the find spot. At the same time, the aim of the text is to summarize the knowledge about Roman bull statuettes in provincial and Italian environments and briefly characterize other similar finds from Bohemia.

KEY WORDS: Bronze statuettes of bulls - Roman Period - Roman provinces - Imports - Barbaricum - Bohemia

INTRODUCTION

A small bronze statuette (*Figure 1: 1*), which is the key object of the presented paper, has been repeatedly cited in Czech scholarly literature. It was probably found close to the end of the 19th century nearby so-called Rymáň and under unknown circumstances was later included in the collection of Štěpán Berger. It was then

purchased by the contemporary Museum of Bohemian Kingdom (later National Museum).

The presented paper focuses not only on the analysis of the find itself, but also on specification of the find spot. The goals of the authors are to date the statuette, and to place it within Italian, provincial and barbarian contexts. The latter is the reason why other Czech finds are included in the study. The final interpretation of this

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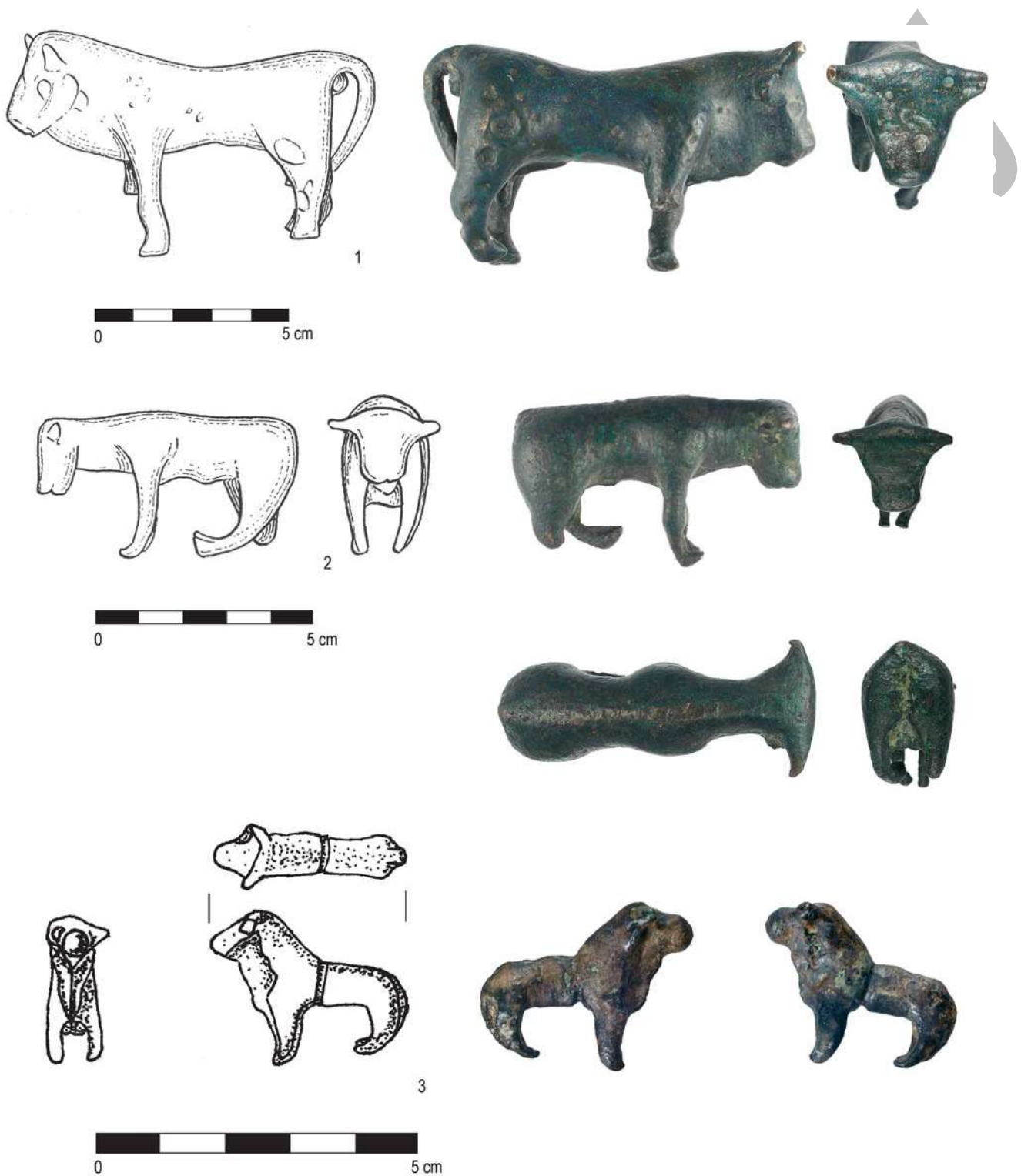


FIGURE 1: Statuettes of bronze bulls: 1, Rymář, c. a. Svárov u Unhoště; 2, Hainburg, Bezirk Bruck an der Leitha; 3, Třebosice, district Pardubice (drawing: V. Vokolek, Národní muzeum and F. Kašpárek, photo: J. Zeiner and V. Maryška).

type of the Roman bronze object coming from the middle European Barbaricum is based on comparison to other finds from different parts of the Roman world and its north-eastern peripheries.

Location of the object's find spot

General and scholarly public was first informed about the unique find of the bronze bull statuette in 1919. It was mentioned in Schráníl's paper about prehistoric art in Bohemia (Schráníl 1919: 23, obr. 1 – from Rymář, cf. Schráníl 1928: 258 – Rymář), although V. Sakař in his monograph wrongly stated the first reference of the artefact by J. L. Pič (1905: 308). The first and correct determination of the exact location of the find spot was presented by J. Böhm who located the statue in the area of Rymář, cadastral area Svárov u Unhoště (Böhm 1941: 464, 577, 601, tab. 77: 8). However, seven years later, B. Svoboda and J. Filip presented a different opinion, which identified "Rymář" with a small village of Rymaně near Mníšek pod Brdy, district Prague – west (Svoboda 1948: 195–196, obr. 38:2, Filip 1948: 302, Sakař 1970: 40, 69 – Rymář, district Příbram; Jančo 2003: 121 – Rymář, district Příbram; Korený 2004 – revision of the results). Both of the latter authors probably based their conclusion on a later inventory of Berger's collection by A. Stocký, which is still faulty in many cases. If the initial condition is to locate Rymář in Central Bohemia, there are further possibilities: Rymář, cadastral area Strážnice, district Mělník or a local name Rymář, cadastral area Radotín, Prague-16. Where does the statuette actually come from?

The solution is offered by the primary source – so-called mensurational catalogue of Berger's collection by Jelínek a Fiala dated to 1897–1898 (the archive of the National Museum (NM), Registratura of the NM, box 51, inv. number 929). The catalogue was acquired after the death of Š. Berger as a result of the approved purchase of his collection by the National Museum (Hlava 2017a: 236–241). The inventory is a valuable document not only due to enumeration of the finds and the information concerning their location but also for keeping the original structure of Berger's collection as it was exhibited in Berger's mansion in Svatý Jan pod Skalou.

First of all, let us pay attention to the formal aspects of the inventory. Its authors followed two simple rules – the information of the location is listed first, followed by the numeric list of all showcases and tables in which all the finds from the site were placed. The description to all the finds was supplemented by the information

about the price of the artefact. The names of the sites were written in nominative except for one case. That is the showcase number 41, page 20. The artefacts exhibited there were: a gold container, three blades of swords from Roudnice (nad Labem), two swords from Rymář (written in genitive) and one bronze bull. While the items from Roudnice were priced separately (gold-bronze?), the price of the items from Rymář was calculated as the sum as all of them were made of bronze. Despite a certain difference in the form of registration compared to the rest of listed items, it is clear that the location "from Rymář (genitive form)" clearly applies also to the bronze bull listed in the line below. The record does not seem to fit the sum of the object, but it is only an error in the line with swords from Rymář, where the original (unfinished) letter "Z" [Note: Czech preposition "Z" is translated as "from"]. The preposition is typical for genitive was by mistake changed to the number "2" (cf. other records in the inventory, *Figure 2*). According to the style of writing, it is clear that the author originally intended to write letter "Z" (from Rymář /genitive form/ similar to the entry "from Roudnice" two lines below) but for some reason changed his mind, "Z" was not finished and was adapted to number "2". However, number at the first glance creates an optical illusion and the information is usually read as "3" (we would like to thank M. Hlava from the Faculty of Arts, Palacky University in Olomouc for providing copies of archival documents and valuable notes). The information is then briefly repeated in page 23, where there are 7 items in the showcase "41", "Rymář and Roudnice". Their price is estimated for 685 guldens (zlatých).

The suggested location is then evidently specified and confirmed by data published in early 1880s. The above-mentioned swords from Rymář came from the depot dated to the late Bronze Period (stage HB3), which was found in 1880 somewhere close to the farmstead of Rymář, cadastral area Svárov, district Kladno (Smolík 1882–1884: 325–326, 328; Kytlicová 2007: 307 p. lit.; Winiker 2015: 74 p. lit.). The National Museum was firstly given one bronze ring, then other four ones and a sherd of a ceramic vessel (with uncertain affiliation). At that time, it was already known that a "tutulus" (can probably be connected to another piece of coiled ironwork: Kytlicová 2007: Taf. 147:3) and two swords (Smolík 1882–1884: 326) acquired by Š. Berger before 1894 (Richlý 1894: 130, Taf. 32) were an integral part of the depot. These items with the complete collection were purchased for the National Museum after Berger's death.

Nonetheless, it is not apparent when Štěpán Berger obtained the bronze bull from Rymář. [Note: Here, however, lies the issue of localization stated above. We cannot ignore the fact that we only learned about the sculpture from the list and there is utterly no information about its earlier history. Some information could be learned from the statuettes from "Jaroměř", which are of an Italian origin, and they are placed in the collection of Š. Berger. However, it is probably a recent import, which was additionally "localized" before being placed on the antique market. Jaroměř has been famous for early La Tène finds since 1857 (more in Barresi, Kysela 2015: 136, Hlava 2017b: 300–301, 303–304). A similar situation might have occurred in Rymář near Svárov. Firstly, there was discovered an original, authentic depot from the late Bronze Age, it gained some fame and probably only then a statuette of an ancient origin appeared at the same collector, supposedly from the same site, but it may only be a recent import somewhere from the territory of the Roman Empire]. For the sake of completeness, we present remaining artefacts from the collection found mostly nearby Rymář from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century. Firstly, it is a ring with knobs dated to the La Tène Period (?) from Svárov (or its environs?). It was granted to the National Museum by F. Melichar from Unhošť in 1889 (inv. number 81662; Hlava 2015: 277–278). Sometime in 1911, Mr. Urban donated a sherd from La Tène bowl to the National Museum. The item had been placed in an inhumation grave close to Rymář (inv. number 399494, old number 1437; Vokolek 2004: 90, tab. 156: 6).

Description, artefactual analysis and significance of the find

The analysed artefact is a bronze statuette of a bull with a slightly bowed head. One of the front legs is damaged. The tail is tucked between its hind legs. Overall rendering is plastic, but abstracted. Details are missing. There is no hole on the top of the head between horns for placing a solar discus. The surface is polished, slightly uneven with small dimples. Patina is dark green. Dimensions: 9.6 × 5.5 cm, in the inventory of the National Museum as Rymaně (near Příbram), former n. A1834 (Berger's collection), current n. 552148 (*Figure 1: 1*).

Unfortunately, the finding of the bull from Rymář lacks closer finding circumstances. The fact notably complicates its dating. We are thus primarily

dependent on a comparative method which will be based on a comparison with material published in publication on Roman "bronzes" from western provinces as well as in catalogues. Further difficulties rest on low numbers of published stratified findings which would help to refine the dating.

Based on its form, the analysed object is close to a piece from the Trivulzio collection, which was by M. Bolla (1997: 63, tav. XVII: 38) identified as the Apis bull. Similarities can be seen mainly in the plasticity of the design with the two pieces differing in the inclination of the neck and their dimensions. Other similar specimens can be traced in the collections of the museum in Lyon (Boucher 1973: 174, n. 306) and in the National Museum in Prague. The latter houses a statuette found in Hainburg, Austria (inv. n. 552149, dim.: 6 × 3.7 cm, *Figure 1: 2*) which was donated by Colonel Novotný in 1916 (unpublished).

The above-mentioned examples differ from the statuettes of animals with victoriously lifted heads and sometimes also a leg (cf. e.g. Kaufmann-Heinimann 1977: 87–88, Taf. 93: 90–92, Bánki 1988: Abb. 11–16). These are, in some cases, referred to as the Gallo-Roman deity Tarvos Trigaranus or the Egyptian Apis. The additional specific attributes for such an identification are the third horn or placement of the sun discus on the top of the head (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1977: 87–88). However, the identification of these bull statuettes with Tarvos Trigaranus has not yet been unequivocally confirmed by written sources (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998: 166). The characteristic feature of the above mentioned deities is a dignified appearance which is also clearly evident in small scale artwork, such as bronze statuettes (cf. Mitten 1975: 186).

The Egyptizing representation of Apis, which is typical for its above mentioned attributes as well as for a typical alternation of legs depending on models from Egyptian art and engraved attributes on its back, belongs to a separate category (Bánki 1988: 347, Abb. 5). If we compare the Rymář bull with the statuettes of Apis, we probably have to reject the original interpretation of B. Svoboda (1948: 197). The reason for such rejections is the absence of attributes typical for the iconography of the deity.

Function in provinces and uncertainties in Barbaricum

In the case of the Rymář bull, it is necessary to mention the function of small bronze bull statuettes in the Roman world, of which we know much more than of the Roman pieces imported to the European Barbaricum.

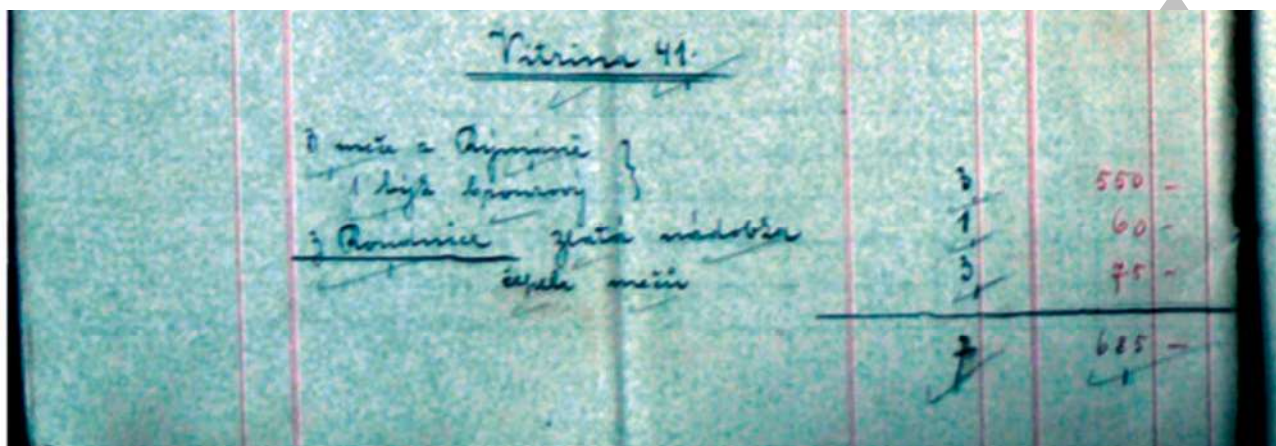


FIGURE 2. Part of the mensurational catalogue of Berger's collection, 1897–1989, detail of the entry (Archiv Národního muzea, fond Registratura NM, karton 51, inv. č. 929).

The described group of artifacts is sometimes traditionally perceived as depictions of bull deities (Tavros Trigaranus, Apis) which may have formed a part of lararia (Bánki 1988: 348). However, the direct sources come only from the area around Mount Vesuvius (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998: 226, Tab. I: GFV47, Kaufmann-Heinimann 2002: fig. 1), and from some contexts in Augst (Augusta Raurica). Yet, any statuettes in situ were found at this site thus these are only assumptions of the author processing the material (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998: 97, 106, 111, n. 91, 92, S49, Abb. 112).

The importance of bronze bull statuettes in the public cult is mainly shown by depots interpreted as a storage of cultic and votive objects from shrines and temples. These were buried in the ground in times of danger (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998: 166, 204, Abb. 142, Tab. II, Kaufmann-Heinimann 2002: 100–12, fig. 4, 5, 6). In different parts of the empire, small bronze bull statuettes often served as votive gifts. Such statuettes were stored in provincial shrines (Bánki 1988: 347, Warden 2002: 129). Popularity of the tradition can be traced back to the period of classical Greece where votive inscriptions from Kabeirion, Thebes dated to the 5th century BC provide us with specific examples (Comstock, Vermeule 1974: 56, no. 57–58, Bánki 1988: 347, note 8).

It can't be excluded that bronze statuettes of bulls might have been a part of sculptural groups consisting of more figures. From this point of view, the connection of statuettes with the depiction of Jupiter Heliopolis can be taken into account as the deity is

regularly depicted between two bulls in a heraldic position (see Gassner, Steigberger 2011: 245, Abb. 258). Beef meet also played an important role in ritual ceremonies in honor of this deity and we can assume that cattle were among sacrificial animals. These conclusions have been proved by the latest discoveries in the temple of Jupiter Heliopolis in Carnuntum (Gassner, Steigberger 2011: 242, Gassner 2013: 273, Abb. 10).

However, we can exclude its connection with Jupiter Dolichenus as the bull statuettes always have traces of deity's feet attachment on their backs. These are not evident in case of Rymaň and Hainburg pieces.

A symbolic significance is probably the reason for placing bronze bull statuettes in graves in Roman territory and its peripheries. Valuable examples from Roman provinces and western, island Barbaricum come from Bulgaria and England. The first one is an extremely rich mound tomb n. 6 from the site Čatalka in current Bulgaria (province of Thracia) (Bujukliev 1986: 26, 87, Tav. 24: 324 6) which can be dated to the second half of the 1st century/the beginning of the 2nd century (Raev 1977: 632, 636). The second example is another noble burial from the site Lexden, England. The tomb is dated to the Augustan Period from 15 to 10/0 BC (Foster 1986: 58–61, 178, pl. 10, fig. 21:3, Bolla 2013: 11–12, Ist. 3). We cannot exclude prestige as the reason for owing the statuettes. The artefact thus could also have played the role of status object. However, the custom of placing bronze bull statuettes in graves is not very common especially compared to other representations of animals in graves

(Bolla 2013: Ist. 3, Bolla 2015: 141, fig. 4). The territory of Bohemia is not an exception. Let us now mention the find of a heat-damaged bronze bull statuette with three horns from Černuc, district Kladno (*Figure 3: 1-4*). The statuette was placed in a ceramic urn together with the currently unpreserved deformed iron sword (Felcman 1893: 458, 461-462, de Baye 1893: 685, Pič 1905: 299, obr. 78, Svoboda 1948: 195-196, obr. 38: 1, Sakař 1970: 3-4, 68-69). J. Felcman and then B. Svoboda considered the statuette to be a depiction of Apis but the presence of three horns and the absence of typical attributes contradict this identification. J. de Baye (1893: 685) correctly pointed out to classify the finds to the group of Gallo-Roman bull deities, in which some scholars see Tarvos Trigaranus. His short study with numerous analogies was then forgotten and wasn't taken in consideration. E. Droberjar (2002: 242 - mistakenly "Tavros Trigonaros") has recently applied the interpretation in his popularising encyclopaedia. The statuette itself shows an elaborate plastic rendering arising from Greco-Roman artistic tradition. Similar finds are typically dated from the 1st to the 2nd century AD with a possible longer lifespan (cf. Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998: 111, n. S49). For dating the whole assemblage, it is currently possible to use only s-shaped bowl vessel (*Figure 3: 5-6*). Based on the comparison to shapes and decoration of the ceramic material coming from necropolises in Plotiště nad Labem /gr. 1103/ (Rybová 1979: 376, Abb. 21: 2), Pňov /gr. 16/ (Rybová 1970: 57, 81, Taf. VI: 7), Opočno /gr. 128/ (Pleinerová 1995: 26, Taf. 27: 2), Dobřichov - Třebická (Pič 1892: 571, 573, tab. XXXII: 2, XXXIII: 5) and Pflingstberg /gr. 353/ (Gaedtke-Eckardt 1991: 54, 187, Taf. 50: 353), it is possible to date the artefact to the half of the 3rd century, although it is necessary to state that the usage of such a shape and decoration lingers to the second half of the 3rd century AD.

The application of the bull motif in other areas of arts and crafts in the Roman Empire is somehow put aside from the cult and status significance. Statuettes of bulls often decorated bronze fittings of carts. This group of artefacts can be identified by the statuette being attached to a sockets or square fittings. The objects from the National Museum in Belgrade (Ratković 2008: 808, Fig. 13) and the Archaeological Museum in Córdoba (Pozzo 2002: 140, fig. 3) are illustrative representatives of such artefacts. The depiction of bulls is attributed to the symbolism of prosperity (Ratković 2008: 797-798, 808, Fig. 13).

Roman bronze statuettes do not belong to a very common finds in the area of Germania Magna. The

finding circumstances of this group of artefacts are also in most cases problematic, as they rarely come from well-dated archaeological contexts (Stupperich 1991: 179). As for the area of former Czechoslovakia, there are only few objects that can be connected to precise contexts (e.g. Bouzek 1984: 59-62, Varsik 1995: 352-353, Kvetánová 2008: 111, note 1, Rajtár 2019: 494).

Only the above-mentioned bull sculpture from Černuc can be taken to consideration as there is a confirmed sepulchral origin (Felcman 1893: 458, 461-462). However, the dating of the disturbed assemblage is based only on the presence of the vessel dated to the 3rd century with the optimum occurrence in its half. From an interpretative point of view, the presence of an unpreserved sword is important. Swords together with Roman imports, drinking horns and ornaments prevail in richer cremation graves (Steuer 1992: 238). Thus, the torso of the bull statuette may have been an indicator of status, as it is a rare item in Barbaricum and does not belong to the usual grave goods. With regard to the dating of the grave, it can neither be excluded nor confirmed that the bull statuette could have been a legacy passed on in the family. It may have been acquired during the Marcomannic war, when an extensive amount of Roman products streamed into this area (Jílek 2013, 2020).

Bull-shaped pendants, which we know both from funeral (Devín, grave B, Kolník 1991: 83, Abb. 6: 6) and settlement contexts (Zeman 2017: 131, obr. 35: 4), are a specific group of finds in Barbaricum. The determination of their provenance is not unambiguous and their identification with La Tène cultural tradition cannot be excluded (Varsik 1995: 352, Pieta 2008: 301, obr. 137: 4, F. 42: 1-2, Zeman 2017: 131).

Another questionable find, which was discovered with the use of a detector, comes from a polycultural settlement in Třebosice in the Pardubice region. It is now stored in the collection of the East Bohemian Museum in Pardubice (dim.: length 3.2 cm, height 2.4 cm, inv. n. AR5317; *Figure 1: 3*). In this case, it is a very simplified depiction which as well may represent other species. The fact that it was obtained without being attributed to a certain context and in the site where settlements from the Hallstatt, La Tène and Roman periods have been confirmed, complicates its chronological classification. The presence of a groove on its body may indicate its usage as a pendant (cf. CRFB-D6: 85, Taf. 102:6, VII-10-25/1.18). Its stylistic classification is hindered by a significantly simplified design. A similar item has not yet been found.

Roman bronze bull statuette from Rymaň at Svárov, District Kladno. New interpretation of the known artefact and notes on further finds from Bohemia



FIGURE 3: Finds from the cremation grave in Černuc, district Kladno: 1-4, bull sculpture (1 – according to Svoboda 1948), 5-6, ceramic bowl vessel, different measuring scales (photo: Národní muzeum, Olga Tlapáková).

CONCLUSION

Roman bronze statuettes in Barbaricum represent a rare category of Roman products (Figure 4). They often lack information about the finding circumstances. That is also valid for the bull statuette from Rymář at Svárov, which was earlier identified to be representing Apis. However, due to the absence of characteristic attributes of the deity this hypothesis can be rejected. The second statuette of a three-horned bull from Černuc was part of grave goods dated to the 3rd century AD, more precisely to phase C1b and stage C2 (earlier part). The identification with Apis has also been rejected. Presence of a Roman sculpture in a barbarian grave is not one of the typical examples of grave goods in the Central European Roman Period. The occurrence of this exotic item can be interpreted as an evidence of status of a deceased warrior. This is indirectly supported by

the presence of similar items in the graves in Roman provinces (Čatalka) and in the western Barbaricum (Lexden Barrow).

As for the Apennine Peninsula, the motif of a bull can be traced back to the Archaic Period, where the cult of a bull gave probably the name to the ancient tribe of Italics (Greek Italoí). The Greek term was used by Aristoteles while translating the name of the tribe settled in the southern part of the Apennine Peninsula, the so-called Viteloi (Aristotle, *Polit.* VII.10). The Viteloi tribe (greek "from a bull", latin "vitulus") was mentioned by Varro, who explains the name on the basis of a sacred bull which was worshiped by the people (Varro, *Re. Rust.* II. 5,9). The worship of a bull is later associated with the cult of Mars. Mars himself is not only the god of war, but also the protector of agriculture and crops. These two elements are two fundamental characteristics of newly emerging Rome (Altheim 1996: 22, Devoto 2019: 187). The deity itself is then perceived as the

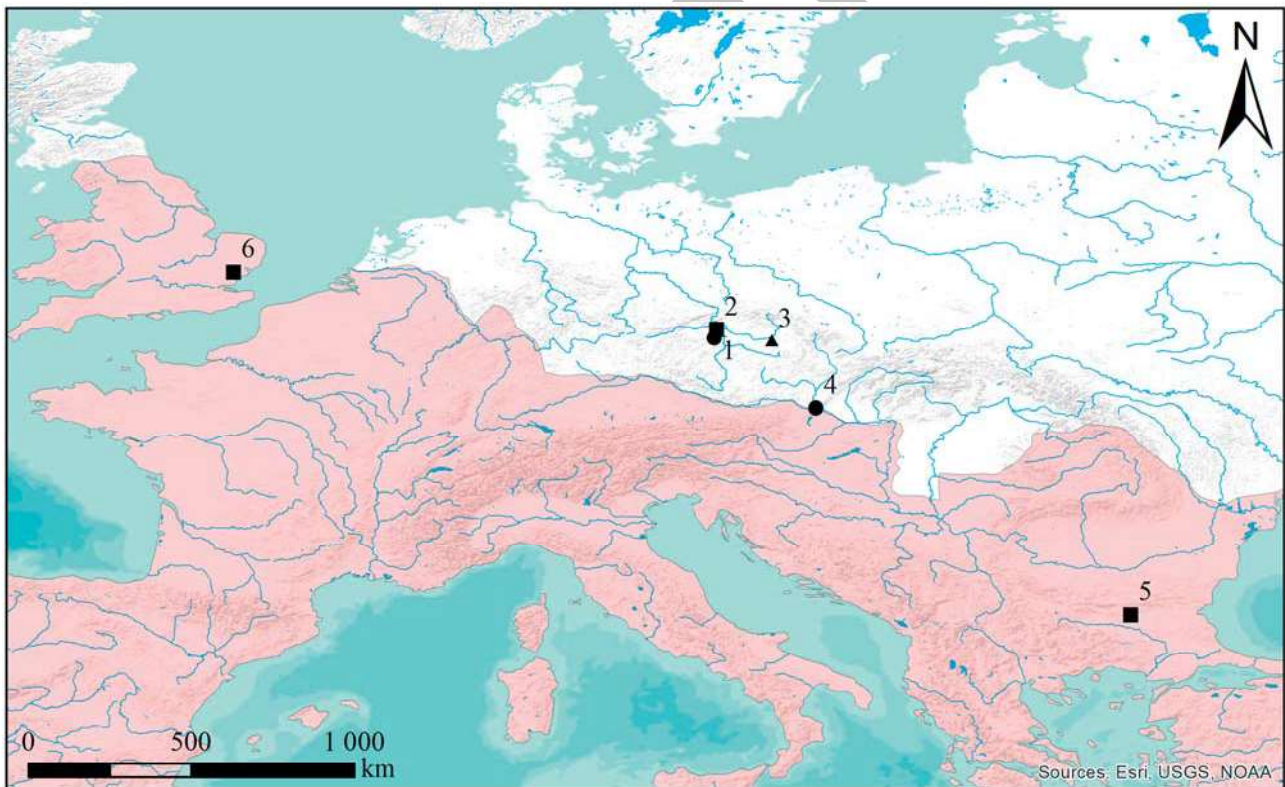


FIGURE 4: Distribution of bronze bull statuettes: 1, Rymář, c. a. Svárov u Unhoště; 2, Černuc, district Kladno; 3, Třebosice, district Pardubice; 4, Hainburg, Bezirk Bruck an der Leitha; 5, Čatalka/Bulgaria; 6, Lexden/Colchester. Black circle – isolated finds, black square – grave finds, black triangle – settlement find (author: P. Urban).

mythical founder of Rome through his children Romulus and Remus. The importance of a bull in the Roman religion and cult is also evident in its inclusion in the typical sacrifice of "suovetaurelia", but also in the ritual of marking the boundaries of the territory/estate. The bull as Mars' attribute then enters Roman households, where it refers to inner strength, prosperity and protection (Bolla 2013: 17), which is guaranteed by Mars himself. For this reason, statuettes of a bull are placed in household lararia. Numerous specimens were found mainly in the area of the Gulf of Naples (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998: 226, tab. I: GFV47, Kaufmann-Heinimann 2002: Fig. 1).

Nonetheless, the popularity of bull could also emerge from the Celtic influence coming from the northern Gallia and Britannia, although those bulls are in a crouched position and horns decorated with a discus (solar?). Such models appear as early as the 2nd century BC. In the Celtic iconography, bull was taken as a symbol of domestication and subjugation of its strength (Bolla 2015: 141).

If we try to reconstruct the symbolism of studied objects, we can reach our limits. Barbarian products, which were inspired by bull symbolism, may serve as indirect sources for explaining the meaning of these statuettes. German and Polish research has provided us with numerous examples of small scale art depicting bull motifs (fibulae, metal fittings of rhytons, ceramic sculptures) (Duleba, Schuster 2012: 393). The interpretation of the symbolism is, of course, hypothetical. According to the current state of knowledge, it is associated with hunting initiation rituals, well-being and fertility (Schanz, Schirren 2019: 56).

To complement the incomplete knowledge, it is possible to derive from later material from the Late Roman Period – The Great Migration Period. Specifically the statuettes of bulls of barbarian provenance, which we know from Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Scandinavia and recently from Lesser Poland. These highly abstracted statuettes come mainly from settlement contexts or are documented as isolated finds (Schanz, Schirren 2019: 50). The information thus points to the importance of bronze bull sculptures in Barbaricum, whose incorporation to funeral rites and rituals may have been limited by hypothetical ritual regulations. However, this hypothesis is based on the current state of knowledge and the absence of bull statuettes in grave goods may be only regional characteristic.

SOURCES

Description of the inventory of the archaeological-prehistoric collection from the estate of Judra. Stephen Berger, purchased by land and entrusted to the custody of the King's Museum. Czech. Saved: Archive of the National Museum – collection Register of the National Museum, box 51, No. 929. [Opis inventáře archaeologicko-praehistorické sbírky z pozůstalosti Judra. Štěpána Bergera, nákladem zemským zakoupené a svěřené k opatrování Museu král. Českého. Uloženo: Archiv Národního muzea – fond Registratura Národního muzea, karton 51, č. 929].

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