



Project Gallery

Němčice: research at a key La Tène site in Moravia

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The central agglomeration of Němčice in Moravia was one of the most important archaeological sites of the La Tène period in Central Europe. This article presents current interdisciplinary research on the site, including the discovery of the earliest glass workshop in Transalpine Europe.

Introduction

The site of Němčice is situated strategically near the centre of Moravia, directly in the corridor of the Amber Road, on the Roseldorf (Lower Austria), Němčice (Moravia) and Nowa Cerekwia (Upper Silesia) route (Figure 1A).

Artefacts from an exceptionally large assemblage of thousands of finds acquired only recently demonstrate contacts with relatively distant areas and represent several types of local production activities. The importance of the site was recognised only in 2002 by Miloš Čižmář (Čižmář *et al.* 2018: 12). Over the following decade, long-term surface surveys (mainly using metal detectors) were performed, producing a remarkably large collection of Celtic coins (more than 2000 pieces, especially from La Tène (LT) phase C1–LT C2, *c.* 250–150 BC), glass bracelets and beads, and bronze artefacts, including amulets and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines. Systematic geophysical measurements conducted at the site have contributed to a better understanding of the structure of settlement spread over 36ha. Sunken huts (features used, among other things, for craft production) have been identified, along with other adjacent structures clustered in areas separated from each other by empty corridors, apparently representing paths. Production facilities have also been recognised at the site, while the most striking situations consist of three square areas designated as sanctuaries.

The results have, for the most part, already been published in several comprehensive monographs focused on specific types of artefacts and in numerous other studies (e.g. Čižmář *et al.* 2008; Venclová *et al.* 2009; Křivánek 2014; Venclová 2016; Čižmář *et al.* 2018).

Research on a trade and production centre

The goal of our research project (The *Central Agglomeration Němčice nad Hanou: Interdisciplinary Research of a Key Site of the La Tène Period in Moravia* project) is to provide the professional community with a better understanding of this renowned site from the third and second centuries BC, the importance of which extends beyond Central Europe in many respects.

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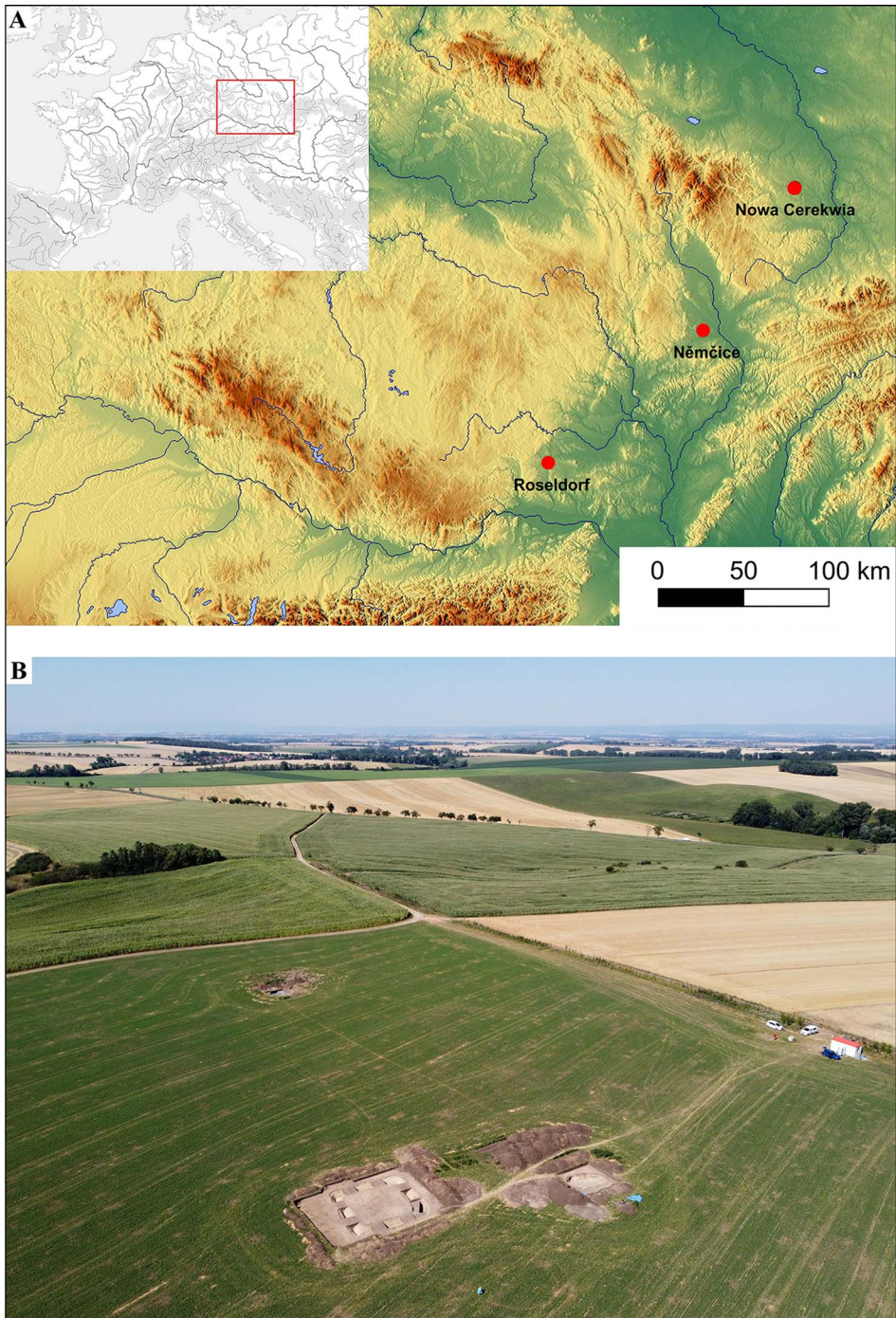


Figure 1. A) Location of Némčice in the Central Danube region; B) aerial view of the site from the south-east (compiled by I. Čižmář).

The research potential of the site in terms of non-destructive archaeological methods is virtually exhausted, and therefore it is necessary to build on the finds made thus far using other research methods and to capitalise on the efforts and resources already invested in the research on the site. Three main objectives were established and are highlighted below. Because of their importance and uniqueness, each had to be verified by exploratory archaeological investigations. Excavations have been conducted at the site in 2021 and 2022 (following seasons will depend on future project funding), while analyses of collected samples are ongoing. The data are being processed and the results will be gradually published.

Investigation of the glass workshop

The localisation and identification of the glass workshop—the first and oldest documented in Transalpine Europe—is of primary importance. Among other things, the systematic surface surveys captured the existence of a production area in the northern part of the site, based on numerous semi-finished products and rejects of glass beads and production waste concentrated repeatedly in a circular area measuring over 40m in diameter (Figures 2 & 3). The first Central European find of a reject of glass bracelet was found at the site (Čižmářová 2020: 283); production of these artefacts at Němčice had always been assumed only on

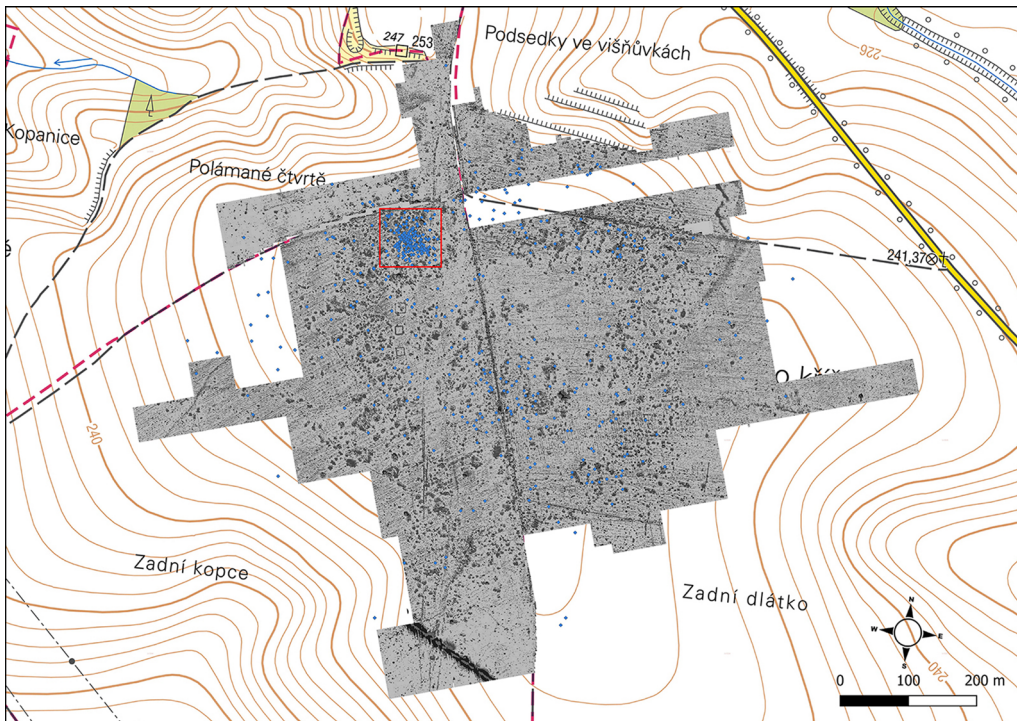


Figure 2. Distribution of glass artefacts at the site with the marked heavy concentration interpreted as a glass workshop (compiled by I. Čižmář).

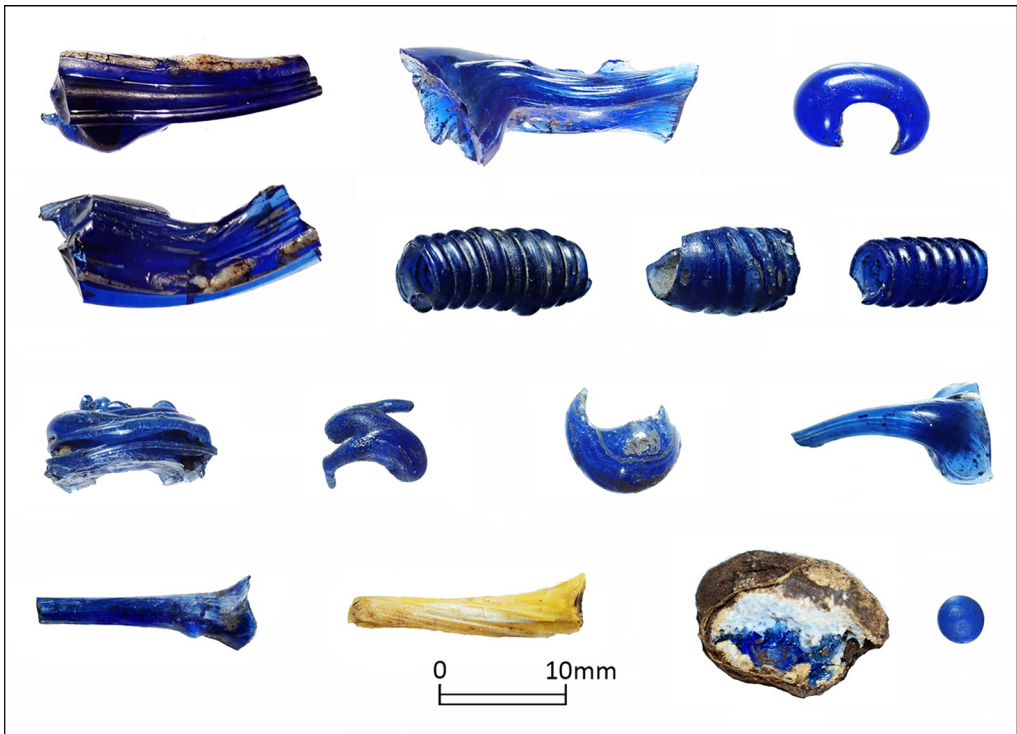


Figure 3. Evidence of glass production and secondary processing from Němčice (compiled by I. Čížmář).

the basis of their unusually high concentration—direct evidence had been missing (Venclová *et al.* 2009: 384).

The excavation was targeted directly on the spot of this concentration, with the goal of identifying traces of production features and pyrotechnological equipment essential for the processing of glass. Thanks to this, it was possible to clarify the original production methods, which had previously been unknown (cf. Putzgruber *et al.* 2016; Rolland 2021). The acquired glass artefacts were subjected to non-destructive analyses and the results will now be compared with previously known data from the site and with the results of similar analyses from other sites across Europe.

Investigation of two sunken huts (discovering the character of settlement at Němčice during LT C2)

Two sunken huts were selected for investigation based on the results of geophysical measurements (one of them explored in 2021; Figure 4). First, a standard evaluation of the shape and quantitative representation of the individual types of retrieved ceramics will be carried out. A comparison of the pottery from Němčice, an important centre of La Tène settlement during LT C2, with finds from Staré Hradisko, a central site of the Late La Tène period (LT C2–D1, c. 150–50 BC), will make it possible to define possible dissimilarities that could help us detect developmental differences between LT C2 and D1; this could be helpful in dating other



Figure 4. Aerial photograph of the excavation in 2021, with sunken hut (photograph by I. Čížmář).

settlement sites. Scientific analyses will help resolve issues concerning the sources and use of raw materials for pottery production. From the perspective of finished products, issues relating to production technology, distribution and import will be addressed.

An equally important part of the research is the collection and scientific evaluation of important environmental data (osteology, micromorphology, and palaeobotany, including anthracology and palynology), which will then be compared with data from other Moravian settlements. Finally, a comprehensive dataset will be available from a site that was of fundamental importance in the development of La Tène settlement in Moravia.

Investigation of enclosed area ('sanctuary')

Another objective of the planned exploratory excavation is not only the clarification of the standing of the site in the broader Central European territory, but also of its functioning and of life at the settlement in connection with the socio-cultic sphere—a very important aspect of the life of every society. The recent discovery of a square structure (Figure 1B & Figure 5)—one of three identified by archaeomagnetic survey in the central, highest part



Figure 5. Aerial photograph of uncovered sanctuary (photograph by I. Čižmář).

of the site—could contribute to a shift in knowledge in this direction. Analogous situations have been uncovered at a site of comparable character in Roseldorf, Lower Austria, where such structures are interpreted as ritual features (Holzer 2014a, 2014b). The presence of these likely sacred features at Němčice indicates the character of the site not only as a trade and production centre, but also as a seat of an elite and a ritual centre.

We envisage Němčice forming part of a planned, broad-based Central European network of contemporaneous major centres distributed along the Amber Road (Roseldorf– Němčice– Nowa Cerekwia; cf. Rudnicki 2014: 434)—an important trade route linking the Baltic coast with the Adriatic region. The existence of these centres testifies to a boom in Central European economy and society in the Middle La Tène period, which is perhaps related to influences from the south and south-east, from the Mediterranean region, but especially to specific Central European developments. At the same time, this situation foreshadows a similar development in the creation of centres—oppida—in the Late La Tène period, namely their planned establishment on trade routes.

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