



DARA BAŠTOVÁ

## BURIAL RITE OF THE NYNICE GROUP OF THE FINAL BRONZE AGE AT THE PREHISTORIC NECROPOLIS IN PLZEŇ-RADČICE

**ABSTRACT** — One of the characteristic features of the west Bohemian prehistory is the existence of burial grounds used for many centuries without interruption (Štáhlavy—Hájek, Hrádek u Manětína, Nynice). In the recent years we had to add to the group the hitherto largest locality of this type — the necropolis in Plzeň—Radčice. It covers almost three hectares and since the year 1982 it is subjected to archaeological rescue research, prompted by the construction of a new vegetable producing and processing centre. So far 458 graves have been discovered, 120 of them belonging to the Nynice Group of the Final Bronze Age, representing the so far largest assemblage of burials of the Nynice Group. From field observations and from preliminary analyses of the material follows that all Nynice graves were cremations, mostly situated on the ground level of the period, eventually slightly dug into the ground. Most of them are of circular or oval shape, their diameter ranges from 0.5 m to 5 m, but a grave of a square ground-plan has also been found. Their circumference was marked by stones placed vertically, the burial inside the circle was usually covered with flatly placed stones. The bottom of the graves shows traces of burning in a number of cases. Roughly one-fourth of the graves yielded pottery, between one to nine pieces. The vessels were always concentrated into a small area, mostly at the centre. Besides that the filling of the grave often contains also sherds of living-site vessels. The grave filling proper is formed by the remains of the pyre, it is of saturated black colour and is heavily mixed with charcoals and with minor fragments of charred bones, and sometimes it contains also fragments of bronze artifacts, partially deformed by heat. In most cases they are fragments of pins, bracelets and necklaces, probably belonging to the garments of the deceased, and incinerated together with the body on the pyre. The body of the deceased was in no case incinerated at the burial site proper. In contrast to the eponymous site in Nynice, in Radčice only very few urn burials have been found, the charred bones have been quite evenly dispersed in the filling material. The question of the final arrangement of the Nynice graves has not yet been resolved. In view of the chronological and spatial development of the burial ground and on the base of other indices I am of the opinion that the graves were marked in a less conspicuous way, e.g. with a low grave mound, eventually with a wooden post or post structure. Radčice is so far the second burial ground of the Nynice Group of the Final Bronze Age, contrasting very much with the numerous living-site finds (24 hill-forts and 22 lowland settlements). The explanation to this difference should be looked for also in the hitherto methods applied in the research of polycultural tumulus-type burials.

**KEY WORDS:** Final Bronze Age — West Bohemia — Nynice-group burial.

One of the characteristic features differentiating western Bohemia in the prehistoric period from the neighbouring regions is the existence of extensive burial grounds, in use for many centuries. Let us mention e.g. the burial grounds in Štáhlavy—Hájek, Hrádek u Manětína, Nynice, and the most recent (discovered 7 years ago), and so far most extensive prehistoric necropolis in Plzeň-Radčice. The village

of Radčice is roughly 3 km west of Plzeň, in the wide-open valley of the Mže River, in the warmest, most fertile, and therefore most continuously and densely populated part of the Plzeň Basin already since the prehistoric times.

The site proper is on the western fringes of Radčice, on a gentle slope exposed to the south, at 308—310 m above sea level, on a terrace of the Mže

River. As proved by the archaeological research carried out by C. Čtrnáct in the nineteen twenties and forties, and also by the results of the present salvage operation, the area of the burial ground adjoined in the east, in the south, and partially also in the west, a polycultural settlement, encompassing a succession of Neolithic, Eneolithic, Middle, Late and Final Bronze Age, Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène cultures.

The immediate cause prompting the start of the research has been the construction of a large vegetable growing and processing complex, covering more than three hectares of former arable land. Following earthmoving operations, rescue research and survey gave the possibility to determine with considerable accuracy the extent of the burial grounds as well as its chronological and positional development. From the viewpoint of the informative value the studied area can be divided into the following parts:

a) The area of the large green-house of 120 by 96 metres. At the time of starting the rescue research in the year 1982 besides removing the topsoil of 20 cm from the whole site, in the area of the large green-house a layer of the subsoil was also removed, at places to the depth of 0.5 m. Therefore we found in the area only individual burials dated into the Hallstatt, Late Hallstatt and La Tène periods.

b) In the area of the vegetable processing halls and of the boiler house on the western fringe of the construction site no surface research was made. We followed only the excavations for pole bases and for the supply mains. In this area we registered only two Milaveč-type burials, one of them being inhumation.

c) The area of the internal road (on its southern side adjoining the large green-house), without stripping the subsoil. In spite of the considerable time pressure also in this area more than 120 graves were recognized on a site of 13 by 120 m, among them also the first graves belonging to the Nynice Group of the Final Bronze Age.

d) The area of the cabbage-cutter plant of 0.5 ha on the northern fringe of the locality. During stripping the topsoil six burial mounds were discovered; most of them damaged by ploughing and by earlier excavations. Nevertheless we have managed to secure a burial belonging to the West Bohemian Tumulus culture of the Middle Bronze Age, and the remains of a Milaveč funerary barrow.

e) A rescue survey on the south-eastern and eastern fringes of the construction site; there, over an area of about 1 800 sq. metres, only two Hallstatt and Late Hallstatt graves were discovered. Their position and the continued earthmoving operations in Rolní Street indicated that this is the southern and south-eastern limit of the necropolis.

f) The area north of the internal road researched in the years 1983, 1984, 1987, 1988. We discovered there part of the core of the burial ground, with maximum density of burials (also in superpositions) of Nynice Group of the Final Bronze Age, alongside with Hallstatt and Late Hallstatt funerary barrows.

On the basis of the above facts we can recon-

struct the development of the burial ground in time and space: it is evident that it started in the north (it is quite possible that originally it was connected also with a group of funerary barrows discovered in the year 1987 in the woods some 200 m north of the hitherto known margin of the necropolis) covering a belt oriented quite exactly in the direction N—S, in the width of about 100 m and 300 m long. Its centre was approximately in the area where the graves of the Nynice Group of the Final Bronze Age had been discovered, and it reached its maximum extent in the Hallstatt and Late Hallstatt periods. Parts of the necropolis situated between the Middle Bronze Age and funerary barrows of Milaveč culture, and between the area of the maximum concentration of Final Bronze Age, Hallstatt and Late Hallstatt graves have not been researched.

Up to date we know 458 graves in Radčice, 120 of them belonging to the Nynice Group of the Final Bronze Age, representing so far the biggest known cluster of burials of the Nynice Group. Field studies and preliminary analyses of the obtained material indicate that all Nynice graves were cremations, their majority was constructed on the surface, eventually they were only slightly sank into the topsoil. For this reason they were often disturbed by later ploughing activities. Most of them are of circular or oval shape and their diameter ranges from 0.5 m to 5 m, but a grave of square ground plan was also found. The circumference of the graves was partially fully zined with stones placed vertically inside the circumferential stones, sometimes very carefully, sometimes partially covered with flat stones. Only two burials lay in a simple shallow pit, without stone construction. The bottom of the grave is on the level of the bottom of the circumferential stones, and is either even, or dug-out to bowl-shape, rarely with a shallow pit at the centre. In many cases it bears traces of charring, at the bottom there is a thin layer of red-brown soil, thinning out towards the edges of the grave. It never exceeds the surface limited by the stones, not even in the smallest graves. Hence follows that the deceased was not incinerated on the burial place proper, and the traces of burning are evidently connected with the burial ritual. This conclusion is in contradiction with the finds coming from the eponymous site in Nynice (Šaldová 1965, 69—70), where remains of fireplaces were found in several already closed and completed graves.

Pottery appeared only in about one-fourth of the graves and the number ranges from one to nine vessels. Regardless of the size of the grave they are usually concentrated over a small area, most frequently at the centre (sometimes excentrically) on the bottom of the grave, or in a small pit. Sometimes they are covered with sherds of a large pan of settlement site character. The sherds of settlement site vessels (most often bowls or cups), sometimes with traces of secondary burning, are often scattered in the grave filling, even in cases when no funeral ceramics were placed at the bottom of the grave.

The grave filling is of saturated black hue as a rule, it is profusely mixed with charcoals and minute fragments of charred bones, sometimes there are also

fragments of bronze artifacts showing traces of the effect of heat. Most frequent are fragments of pins, bracelets, lunulas (necklaces), evidently forming part of the clothes of the deceased, and incinerated with him on the pyre. The black layer of the grave, is the thickest at the centre of the grave, reaching sometimes 25 cm, and towards the margins it is thinning out; in large graves it does not reach the marginal stones. If there are vessels in the grave, they are also filled with remains of the pyre. More significant concentrations of charred bones in some of the vessels were found only in few burials. Thus the prevailing majority of the graves of the Nynice group of the Final Bronze Age found on the Radčice site cannot be regarded as urn burials. It is somewhat contrasting with the situation at the eponymous locality in Nynice, where urn burials amounted to half of the total (Šaldová 1965, 69).

Although the Radčice site yielded almost the double of the hitherto known burials of the Nynice group, we have not managed to come to a final conclusion as to the lay-out of these graves. Both hitherto known burial grounds of this culture were situated in fields under cultivation for centuries, where the large barrows originally covering the Hallstatt or Middle Bronze Age graves are not perceptible any more. Therefore we cannot exclude a priori that the Nynice burials were originally also covered by barrows, but in view of their small dimensions and density this is very improbable. In view of the fact that the graves of the Kostelík phase and also earlier pit burials of the Hallstatt Period respect the "Nynice" part of the burial ground, but the later Hallstatt funerary barrows interfere with it, introducing superpositions, it can be supposed that they were marked in a less conspicuous way, with a lower grave mound, not exceeding the stones marking the circumference. Some graves were evidently marked with wooden posts (grave No. 203), or with a post structure (gr. No. 398).

The pottery found in Radčice has, in its shape, ornaments and composition of types direct analogies with the burial grounds of the Nynice group on the eponymous site. An exceptional shape is the bowl on a stalk, found in grave No. 135. The assortment of the bronze artifacts found in the graves is, however, somewhat poorer, compared with Nynice. There appear the above mentioned pins, bracelets, tordue necklaces, their most frequent combination being twisted-wire lunula with pin. The only exception is grave No. 211, in which a set of two pins was found (one with vase-shaped, the other with

spheric head), a lunula, and a bronze artifact of unknown purpose, reminding of the Kelheim siphon (Müller—Karpe 1959, 206). No knives have been discovered in the Final Bronze Age Radčice graves.

Iron artifacts are represented by the sole arrow-head stuck in (shot into?) the stone circumference of grave No. 213. In grave No. 209 a light-blue transparent glass bead was found.

The prehistoric necropolis in Plzeň-Radčice is only the second burial ground, in which the Nynice group of the Final Bronze Age has been found. This is quite contrasting with the fact that in western Bohemia so far 24 hill-forts and 22 lowland living-sites have been discovered, and that they are relatively evenly dispersed all over the prehistoric oikumene. This state of affairs may be partially explained by the hitherto applied methods of researching the polycultural barrow-type burial grounds, where only isolated barrows were excavated. According to our experience from Radčice (and also from Nynice), however, the Final Bronze Age graves seemingly fill up the space between Hallstatt and Late Hallstatt barrows. It will be necessary to study in the future also the barrow-type burial grounds with the method of large-horizontal exposure.

The research of the polycultural burial grounds in Plzeň-Radčice is far from being completed, and its results have not been processed. But even so it is evident, that it is one of the most interesting west-Bohemian localities; with its unbelievable span of one thousand years of continuous settlement and burials it will without doubt contribute considerably to our knowledge of the development of the prehistoric settlement of western Bohemia.

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PhDr. Dara Baštová  
Západočeské muzeum v Plzni  
Františkánská 13  
301 13 Plzeň