



EVA ČUJANOVÁ-JÍLKOVÁ

SOME PECULIAR FEATURES OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BARROW CULTURE IN WEST BOHEMIA AND IN ITS WESTERN VICINITY

ABSTRACT — Besides normal cremation and inhumation burials, mostly totally weathered, the West Bohemian Barrow culture developed a special method of burying only a part of the skeleton, namely bones of the skull together with fragments of the long bones, in either cremated or uncremated state. In one case only bones of the upper part of the trunk were found. Small dumps of charred animal bones, or mixed animal and human bones with grave goods also appear. Similar cases can be found also in the Bavarian Barrow cultures from the Middle Bronze Age, and they are reflections of certain features characteristic of clan societies.

KEY WORDS: West Bohemian Barrow culture — Middle Bronze Age — Weathered skeletal burials — So-called two-level burials — Charred human and animal bones.

The west Bohemian Barrow culture, traditionally but not quite accurately called Bohemian Upper Palatine (Böhmisch Oberpfalz) culture is biritual from its very beginnings to the end of its independent existence. Both burial methods had their firm and carefully observed rules. Skeletal burials were used predominantly with women at the middle period of the Barrow culture (Jílková 1961, 200), but in the later period they were used also with men, buried with weapons and golden artefacts, though there were also exceptions to the rule in both cases. Almost without any exception is the position of grave goods; jewellery and other ornaments were situated at various places of the body and on the clothing, tools and weapons were laid along the trunk, vessels were found at the feet, and sometimes behind the head or within the reach of hands. It is generally known that non-cremated skeletons, above all teeth, bones of the skull or long bones are preserved very seldom in the delimited forest soils of western Bohemia; they

have been preserved in some cases imprinted in the earth, or in places in contact with bronze artefacts. Thus frequently only the position of grave-goods enables us to distinguish a consumed skeleton grave in questionable cases; this holds not only for research, but also as a possible interpretation of old finds.

On the other hand cremation burials ranging from the Old Barrow Period to the transitory Tumulus—Milaveč period are noted for a far bigger variety in numbers, type and place of laying the grave goods. However, as it seems today, there is a single rule, but applied without exception, i.e. to lay only some specific parts of all cremated, and additionally perhaps also crushed bones, by pouring them on a certain place in the barrow, eventually on a pad of organic origin (wood, bark). Vessels, bronze and other artefacts that had not passed through the heat of the pyre laid right on the charred bones and their surrounding. The reciprocal ratio of cremation and inhumation burials is close to 60:40 %.

The biritual burial method, including the above-mentioned rules appears in all Barrow cultures on the territory west of Bohemia, i.e. in the Upper Rhineland-Palatinate, in the Lower- and Upper-Bavarian, Franconian and Württembergian-Albic Barrow cultures.

Perhaps in all these territories appear also finds representing exceptions to the rules of burying the non-cremated body. In Upper Bavaria 13 barrows were excavated by J. Naue in the years 1898–9 near Machtlfing site, on a hill at the west side of the Ess Lake (Starnberg region). It follows from his primary publication (Naue 1906, 1–4) that the barrows contained skeletal burials, but in eight of them there were only skeletons without skulls, and in two there were only skulls without other bones, although pottery was also found in all of them. A catalogue of Upper-Bavarian barrow finds was published in the year 1981. The finds from the above mentioned territory and information on the barrows in Machtlfing were subjected to a critical analysis by Harald Koschik. In the analysis published in the catalogue (Koschik 1981, 209) although he pictures certain finds, he regards them as Naue's "thinking full of phantasy", and he bluntly refuses the view that only non-cremated parts of the bodies were buried in this way by saying that Naue was unable to discern secondary damaging of the barrows.

In the Middle-Franconian and in the North-Bavarian regions were found completely unusual finds during lumbering operations near Thalmässing-Appenstetten (B. A. Hilpolstein) in the year 1919. The research was realized by members of the Anthropological Section of the Natural History Society in Nürnberg. From the results of the research, as published by K. Hörmann (1926, 251 an) it follows that the burials fitted with stone lining contained either agglomerations of human bones, or human bones put so that on opening the burial there were well perceptible skeletons in stretched or in almost crouched position, only a closer examination showed that the bones were not situated anatomically, e.g. the bones of arms and legs were mixed, or of the skeleton as a whole only a small fragment of well preserved bones have been preserved. All these burials contained grave goods, bronze artefacts and pottery, but also retouched blades and hornstone end-scrapers, animal teeth, almost everywhere there were charred fragments of bones, but it is not clear whether they were human or animal ones. All these bones were surrounded by a dark-black layer of organic origin.

The anomalies appearing in the Middle Bronze Age burials in Appenstetten, but also in the Late Bronze Age localities in Central Franconia are ascribed by Hörmann to a special burial rite, to the so-called "zweistufige Bestattung" (two-stage burial): the dead were not inhumated immediately, but after some time, when the soft parts of the body had already decomposed. At that stage the bones were collected, cleaned and only then they were buried. This has been the cause of non-anatomical sequence of bones in the burials, their dumping on heaps at the centre of the grave, eventually their putting into

the ground in organic wrappings. The black layer on the bones may be formed by the remains of these organic materials. Hörmann mentions also some ethnographic parallels, mostly from the Pacific region. The above conclusions concerning two-stage burials and their interpretation were subjected to criticism by W. Torbrügge (1959, 54, Note 174). Both Koschik's criticism of Naue's research and Torbrügge's views concerning Hörmann's conclusions may be accepted as justified in view of the time of research, and perhaps of the methods applied by the researchers of that period, nevertheless the results of the latest research realized in west Bohemia with the use of advanced methods cast somewhat different light on the whole problem.

The earliest of these finds comes from the year 1896, when F. X. Franc investigated a barrow burial in the forest called Hustá Leč, near the village Všekary (Domažlice District). He excavated three big barrows, and his attention was caught by barrow 2 (Franc 1906; Čujanová—Jílková 1970, 113–115, Figs 44, 45). Besides a stone construction found empty, the southern half of the barrow yielded at various places several groups of artefacts, mostly of bronze, but also vessels, six of them containing also teeth and cranial bones. Franc did not mention either the number of teeth, or their types, and he does not mention whether the bones were charred. His interpretation of the find is "presumably mass burial of unknown number of people". Each of these find groups excludes the possibility of containing a complete, even though consumed skeletal burials. The situation and the size of the finds makes it impossible. The extraordinary character of this group is underlined also by the fact that at the centre of all groups containing parts of teeth and skulls there were placed 10 vessels at one place. A total of 14 such vessels have been found (and glued together) in the barrow. All the positions yielded a total of more than 30 bronze artefacts. No skeletal remains have been preserved.

In the years 1947–48 the forest with barrow burials in Plzeň-Nová Hospoda was parcelled out, and a rescue research was launched by the Plzeň Museum in co-operation with the Archaeological Institute, under the leadership of J. Kabát. He researched barrow 47, one of the biggest of the cemetery. According to Kabát's find report (Archives of the Archaeological Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences No. 4117/48; Jílková, 1958, 322) the barrow was mounded up only of clay. Its diameter reached 23 m, and the height at the centre did not exceed 1.80 m. In spite of its considerable size the barrow contained only a few finds. Close to the centre, at the height of about 50 cm above the ground a poorly preserved skull was found without mandible, and a part of a long bone which seemed to be a fragment of humerus in its vicinity. Around the skull the clay was coloured white. There were no further bone finds, only a bronze dagger was found near the skull. At two places traces of pyres were found. The amount of ashes and charcoal fragments indicate that large quantities of wood were burnt there. The fragments of human bones have

been recently examined by Dr. Chochol. In his view the finds include parietal, occipital and temporal fragments of a braincase, in poor state of preservation, alongside with several completely consumed parts of upper limb bones, presumably of a humerus, but they are only slight cohesive remains sticking to the clay filling. The remains belonged to a young adult (adultus I — of about 25–30 years of age), more probably to a male than to a female.

The research in Nová Hospoda continued in the years 1954–57 under my leadership. In the year 1955 barrow 35 was excavated (Jílková 1957, 31) erected near the above-mentioned barrow 47, and also belonging among the biggest of the cemetery. The clay mound covered two stone constructions, both without finds, and two cremation burials without stone lining. Besides that the NW part of the barrow, closer to the centre and about 0.20 m above the original ground level, a deficient skeletal burial was found. The grave covering a small area of 65 by 80 cm was excavated by Dr. Chochol. The 1.20 m thick layer covering the grave was completely undisturbed, from above, and also from the sides, thus we can exclude any secondary interference. The bones formed a heap comprising deficient remains of a skull (part of the right temporal bone, parts of both zygomatics, loosely scattered teeth of the maxilla (a canine tooth, a premolar, two 1st and two 2nd molars), parts of the trunk (a fragment of the body of a thoracic vertebra, fragments of ribs, of both clavicles, a fragment of the acromion (or the spinous process?) of the left scapula, a fragment of the pelvis), and of the upper limbs (the body of the right radius, the right ulna without its distal end) and some fragments difficult to determine laid without anatomical sequence; the bones were of brown-yellowish hue with dark spots. On all fragments there were well perceptible traces of superficial corrosion of varying intensity, caused by the excessive aggressivity of the soil. Due to these corrosive effects the fragments of bones were in very poor state of preservation and it was impossible to draw any conclusions from their surface. There was a continuous black layer sticking to the skeletons from below, and in some places also from above. It evidently arose through the decomposition of organic matter, either of moss, leaves or needle-leaves, or of the wrapping of the bones. Among the bones corroded remains of bronze rivets or their fragments were found, alongside with particles of bronze wire, two sherds and lumps of fired clay (Jílková 1957, 58). The morphological characters of the bones have made it possible to conclude that we have to do with a burial of fragmentary remains of the upper part of the skeleton of a young male of about 18 years of age and of comparatively robust stature, and the burial contained bones in perfect skeletal state. This feature of the find from barrow 35 in Nová Hospoda fits well into analogous features in central Franconia, mentioned by Hörmann. There too, the putting of the skeleton into the barrow followed at the earliest after three to five years of temporary burial, or just being dumped somewhere. It is thus a secondary burial, or to use the generally accepted term the second phase of a two-

state burial. Besides ritual reasons we might take into account also purely non-ritual reasons, some unknown reasons, having their roots in the social structure and banning the burial of certain members of the community or strangers (in the sense of the period) immediately after their death. I do not know any ethnographic parallels mentioned by Hörmann and Torbrügge and thus I cannot comment on it.

Besides central Franconia we know similar cases of original burials of disarranged bones instead of normal skeletal burials in many localities in the area of Ries near Nördlingen (Ludwig-Lukanov 1983). Let us mention a further find in the Württemberg-Albic region, from the well-known Middle Bronze Age cemetery in Hundersingen (Pirling, Wells-Weyrauch, Zürn, 1980, 75). A small barrow covered a robust skeleton oriented S–N. The crushed skull laid on the right side of the trunk, and a bone of lower limb was laying across it. The burial contained only several sherds, but no grave goods.

Several unusual finds have been recently discovered in western Bohemia. In the years 1972–81 four barrow cemeteries were partially investigated in the cadastre of the village Podražnice near Horšovský Týn in the Domažlice District (Čujanová—Jílková 1981, 300; Čujanová—Chochol 1982, 293) and in one of them, in a hitherto not published cemetery, in Podražnice-Kocourovský les (Archives of the Arch. Institute of the Cz. Academy of Sciences Prague No. 2238/87a-b) there were excavated several barrows with deviations from the usual burial rites. Barrow 24 was one of those forming the northern border of the cemetery, nevertheless it was one of the smaller barrows (with a diameter of 11 m and with a height of 0.80 m). It was mounded almost exclusively of clay, containing only a few groups of smaller stones whose original function has not been explained. Closer to the centre on the ground level there was found a small amphora without ornaments, respectively its low-half, standing on its bottom. Roughly 1 m to the east, almost at the very circumference of the area covered by the barrow there was a wide small pit of 15 cm in diameter and 10 cm in depth full of a filling of light hue. It contained several fragments of cranial bones and various fragments of long bones. In the opinion of Dr. Chochol they are fragments of the braincase and agglomerates of chalky and cremated femurs which more likely belonged to a female than to a male. According to the unusual character of the remains (size of the fragments and the presence of various bones) and also according to the extraordinarily intense cremation of the bone surface we can conclude that it is not a normal cremation burial.

Barrow 32 from the same cemetery was built at the NW perimeter of the place, it had a diameter of 9 m and at the centre it did not exceed the height of 0.80 m. The originally rather uneven terrain sloping from the north to the south was levelled. At the central part there was mounded an artificial block of 2.5 m in length and reinforced with several layers of stones from both sides. From above it was

covered with several flat stones, protecting the skeletal burial put on compact earth. From the non-cremated body only the lower parts of the arms (radii and ulnae) have been preserved, with bronze bracelets on them. The position of the bracelets indicates that the hands were crossed at the wrists (the left hand over the right one). As no other bones or their imprints were perceptible, samples for the detection of the presence of P_2O_5 were taken from the clay of the whole area limited by the stones. The analysis of the samples has reliably proved that once there was lying a human body in stretched position. As part of one of the bones of the left forearm in the bracelet with its distal end pointed to south-east, it seems that the skeleton was oriented from NW (head) to SE (feet). East of the SE side of the stones lining the grave there was a block of heavily fired clay of red-brown hue, reaching down to the original ground level. In its upper part there were found 2 vessels (a bowl and a small cup in it), i.e. originally they were at the feet of the dead. Besides the bracelets the burial contained also a pin; only a part of it — three fragments without the head — has been found. The pin was among the stones of the SE lining, i.e. again at the feet, although pins are always at the head. The block of the burnt clay conspicuously differed from the loose soil below and around the consumed skeletal burial east of the vessels. The material of the block differed in hue, consistence, hardness and contained many charcoal particles. The skeletons were almost perfectly cremated, nevertheless the clay contained also charred imperfectly cremated fragments of the skull and of the long bones. It seems that the block of the heavily fired clay with numerous pine-tree (*Pinussilvestris*) charcoals served as cremation place. The remains of the cremation or at least of its part were left on the spot. According to the anthropological expertise by Dr. Chochol these charred remains were parts of a braincase and there were also several fragments or the agglomerations of the long bones. The fragments were small-to-medium-sized, they were parts of an almost perfectly cremated skeleton that once belonged to a single individual, to a young adult. There exist few indices that the skeleton belonged more likely to a male, than to a female. In the bronze bracelets of the consumed skeletal burial there were found also fragments of the distal part of non-cremated radii and ulnae of the left and right arms, imbued with copper oxide. They belonged to a person with not too robust stature, more likely to a male than to a female, to a young adult. It is theoretically possible that all cremated and non-cremated remains belonged to the same person, but it has not been proved. The find of a single pin at the uncremated remains of the body is an archaeological proof that we have to do more likely with the skeletal remains of a male, not of a female, quite in line with the anthropological conclusions. Although the results of phosphate analysis document the presence of an uncremated body inside the stone lining, we are unable to say whether the skeleton was complete or whether its parts were missing. We can only say that the find situation escapes any interpretation, namely as we

do not know whether the skeleton was buried with or without head.

We have to emphasize that similar finds of skull fragments and of fragments of long bones were found also in barrow 47 in Nová Hospoda in non-cremated form, and in barrows 24 and 32 in Podražnice-Kocourovský les, in cremated form. So far I do not see any plausible explanation to these burials. We can only conclude that the common feature of the incomplete remains from the barrows in Plzeň Nová Hospoda and in Podražnice-Kocourovský les is that in all cases we have to do with young adults, in four cases with males, and in barrow 24, where the find is especially difficult to define, the skeleton belonged more likely to a female, and last but not least all these barrows belonged to the younger period of the Barrow culture.

To less common cases belong also barrows 31 and 49 from Podražnice-Kocourovský les (Archives of the Archaeological Institute of the ČSAV Prague No. 2238/87 b, g). In barrow 31 a heap of charred bones was found at quite an unusual place, close to the external perimeter at the SE part of the stone circle. But all these bones have been of animal origin. Cattle bones prevailed, but there were also sheep and goat bones. The inside of the barrow did not contain any other finds. From the heaps of sherds a big amphora-like vessel has been glued together. At another place of the barrow a small bronze dagger was found. Both have the oldest forms of their kind in the West Bohemian Barrow culture.

In barrow 49 there were five places yielding sherds of pottery, mostly from the Tumulus-Milaveč transition period and from the Older Milaveč period. Among the sherds there were charred bone fragments, in two of them there were bronze bracelets (one in each) and fragments of a pin, always arranged so that it absolutely did not differ from other cremation burials. Only an anthropological analysis has shown that all five places contained unidentifiable small fragments and bits of human and animal bones, with a prevalence of animal bones.

It is probable that the charred animal bones in barrow 31 are remains of a sacrifice. The places containing charred bones in barrow 49 are evidently documents of funeral rituals that cannot be derived or explained from the objective facts. Although no similar cases have been recorded at the west Bohemian burial grounds, they are evidently not isolated. At the Lower-Bavarian burial ground at Deggendorf-Fischerdorf, excavated by K. Schmotz in the years 1982–85 similarly situated animal bones were found in barrow 5 (Schmotz 1986, 42). Aurochs (cattle?) bones and pig bones among charred human bones were found at the same burial ground in four cases. The burial of whole animals (e.g. of a boar) is also known from the Bavarian barrows (Koschik 1981, 51, Tf. 163: 7, 8).

The burial rite is one of the most conservative components of the Middle Bronze Age cultures and the special features I have been talking about illustrate the complicated character of the whole structure of the clan society I. of that time. To learn more about this we shall have to realize new, well up to-date

excavations, only thus can we verify or refuse the presently accepted interpretation of facts discovered earlier.

REFERENCES

- ČUJANOVÁ—JÍLKOVÁ E., 1970: Mittelbronzezeitliche Hügelgräberfelder in Westböhmen. ASM, 8. Praha.
 ČUJANOVÁ—JÍLKOVÁ E., 1975: Zlaté předměty v hrobech českofalecké mohylové kultury, *Památky archeologické* LXVI, 74–122.
 ČUJANOVÁ—JÍLKOVÁ E., 1981: Kulturní vztahy západních Čech k sousedním oblastem na počátku střední doby bronzové, *Památky archeologické* LXXII, 300–337.
 ČUJANOVÁ—JÍLKOVÁ E., CHOCHOL J., 1982: Vzájemný vztah dvou současných milavečských pohřebišť, *Památky archeologické* LXXII, 293–311.
 FRANC F. X., 1906: Přehled nalezišť v okolí Úslavy, Mže, Radbuzy, Úhlavy a potoka Klabavky. Nepublikovaný rukopis v AU ČSAV.
 HÖRMANN K., 1926: Bronzezeitgräber in Mittelfranken,

- Abhandlungen der Naturhistorischen Gesellschaft zu Nürnberg* XXI, 6, 251–292.
 JÍLKOVÁ E., 1957: Výzkum mohylového pohřebiště v Plzni-Nové Hospodě v r. 1955, *Archeologické rozhledy* 9, 31–32, 43–45, 49–57.
 JÍLKOVÁ E., 1958: Nejstarší a nejmladší horizont západočeské mohylové keramiky na pohřebišti v Plzni-Nové Hospodě, *Památky archeologické* XLII, 312–347.
 JÍLKOVÁ E., 1961: Kostrové pohřby ze střední doby bronzové v mohylách na Plzeňsku, *Památky archeologické* LII, 195–200.
 KOSCHIK H., 1981: Die Bronzezeit im südwestlichen Oberbayern. Kallmünz Opt. Teil I Text, Teil II Tafeln.
 LUDWIG—LUKANOW S., 1983: Hügelgräberbronzezeit und Urnenfelderkultur im Nördlinger Ries. Kallmünz Opt. (Herausgeber Rolf Dehn).
 NAUE J., 1906: Funde aus oberbayerischen Grabhügeln. *Prähistorische Blätter* 18, 1–5.
 PIRLING R., WELS—WEYRAUCH U., ZÜRN H., 1980: Die mittlere Bronzezeit auf der Schwäbischen Alb. *PBF* XX 3 München.
 SCHMOTZ K., 1986: Das bronzezeitliche Gräberfeld von Deggendorf-Fischerdorf. Die Grabungskampagne des Jahres 1983, *Bayerische Vorgeschichtsblätter* 51, 39–90.
 TORBRÜGGE W., 1959: Die Bronzezeit in der Oberpfalz. Kallmünz Opt.

PhDr. Eva Čujanová—Jílková, CSc.
 Archeologický ústav ČSAV
 Letenská 4
 118 01 Praha 1