THE RESEARCH OF A BRONZE AGE HILL SETTLEMENT IN VELIM NEAR KOLÍN

ABSTRACT — A recent research of the northern slope of the Skalka hill resulted in the discovery of a fortification system on the north-eastern side. The system includes two shallow ditches, a groove-palisade and a stockade. The fortification system did not enclose the entire hill-top. Roughly at the centre of the excavated area the fortification system turns to the interior of the settlement. The chronological relations between the settlement and the fortification are not yet clear. So far we have been able to determine only that the groove-palisade (object 3) is older than the ditch (object 5) as proved by superposition. The filling of both ditches contained pottery, bronze artifacts, a profusion of animal bones, and also dislocated human bones. On the western side we discovered a further system of three fortification elements (two ditches and a stone wall destroyed by fire (objects Nos. 44, 45, 45A). The double superposition yielded information concerning the chronological sequence (in the direction of numbering), the archaeological dating is proved by the ditch (object 44), proving at the same time that it belonged to the Tumulus culture, while structure No. 45A has been proved as belonging to the Late Tumulus or the Early Lušťan culture.

Inside the settlement, on the western side a number of irregular pits dug into the ground were discovered. It is believed that they are remains of cultic places (besides archaeological material they contained also large quantities of human bones). In connection with the cultic character of the settlement the authors have attached a list of finds of hoards (I—VII) discovered here, starting with the year 1885.

KEY WORDS: Bronze Age — Hill settlement — Fortification system — Late Tumulus culture — Early Lušťan culture — Cultic places — Cultic settlement.

The site is situated on the low hill called Skalka, on the eastern fringe of the village Velim in the Kolín District in Bohemia. The first discoveries were made in the 19th century during quarrying activities, disturbing the SK side of the locality. This and some other finds appeared in the specialized literature under the name of the Nová Ves site, a village to the cadastral of which Skalka belonged until recently.

The earliest finds are two troves of golden rolls of double wire, the first from the year 1885 contained about 36 rolls, the second deposit discovered in the year 1900 yielded six rolls alongside with bronze metal founder and chiseller's tools. The first excavation was realized here in the nineteen-twenties by Dr. F. Dvořák, whose interpretation of the find and his ideas concerning the character of the Velim settlement are known only from a brief treatise in his book (Dvořák 1930).

F. Dvořák presumed that the original Late Unčíte population pressed by the expansion of the Tumulus culture population, and feeling also the advance of the people of the Urnfield culture, retreated to places difficult of access. In such places we find graves with crouched skeletons, alongside with Late Unčíte and Lušťan pottery. He regarded Skalka near Velim as one of the refuges of the Late Unčíte people and he called the material assemblage found
there Velim-type material. He suspected that he had found traces of a densely populated and fortified "town" in Skalka. In the time of his excavation (1923–24) he found there burnt-dwelling, mutilated human skeletons, traces of looting, destruction of inventory (Dvořák 1926, 49). It was Dvořák's tragic lot that after WW II he could not return to his excavation and to publish his views with full documentation (the latter was destroyed). Nevertheless the brief references concerning the Velim finds (besides Dvořák e.g. Filip 1936–37, 8–9; Böhm 1937, 60, 91) signaled that it was a remarkable locality, situated — at the time of the settlement — in a geographically exposed place, that might answer a number of questions connected with the beginning of the Umfild culture period in Bohemia. For these reasons in the years 1948–49 a new research was launched in Skalka by V. Španěl. The results have not been fully published, the separate communications, however, present pottery similar to Dvořák's finds, but we can find among them also pottery reflecting traces of the influence of the Ústěcký group (Španěl 1972, 1978, 508, Fig. 157).

The impulse to new excavations was given by the project of a housing development on the northern slope of Skalka. The research has started in the year 1984, it has a character of rescue excavations and is still under way.

The present situation of the latest research: In the eastern part of the excavated area is situated the so-called external ditch. Its mean width is 5 m and the depth is 1.50 m (structure 1), along most of its length it has tub-shaped profile. 6 m behind it, to the centre of the settlement runs a groove, once forming the basement of the palisade. It is on the average 50 cm wide and 30 cm deep (structure 3). More inside the area runs a further line, the so-called internal ditch (structure 5); its distance from the palisade-groove is first 150 cm, but farther to the north-west the two structures converge, finally they fuse. The profile of their contact has proved that the palisade is of earlier dating. The second ditch is of smaller dimensions than the first one — its width varies between 3–4.5 m, and the depth is ±150 cm. The second ditch is followed — at the distance of 4.5–5.5 m — by a double, at places triple line of post holes of a further palisade, or rather stockade. At places where there are three lines of post holes the distance reaches 6 m. The distance between holes in the line is ±50 cm. It is quite possible that it was a combined timber-earth defence construction (Fig. 1).

But the chronological sequence of the construction of the individual fortification system still escapes final dating. The only secure point is the sequence of the groove-palisade and the internal ditch. For this reason we followed also further sections of this system in the south-eastern direction. It seems that the groove of the palisade maintains the same distance from the first ditch, as the stockade represented by the post-holes from the second ditch, with the exception of the somewhat confused situation around the recently excavated continuation in the south-east. If we accept the finds from the bottom of the ditch as dating materials, as artifacts brought there at a time when the ditch was functional, then the first large ditch (structure 1) belongs to the Tumulus culture. Its relation to the groove-palisade (structure 3), the same as the relation of the second ditch (structure 5) to the stockade has not been clarified. We can be sure only about the following relations: the second ditch is later than the palisade with the groove because at the point of contact it is in clear superposition; it seems that the two ditches are not contemporaries — for horizontally-stratigraphic reasons (at places they get near to each other).

The archaeological content of the two ditches in their upper layers (roughly to the depth of 40 cm) is identical. There is a profusion of animal and dislocated human bones, a smaller number of bronze artifacts — mostly minor pieces, bands, fragments of pins, claws, rarely also tanged artifacts, chisel with eye in two pieces and a hatchet in the first ditch, a Dvořák-type pin and an ornamental pendant in the second ditch. Botanical finds of golden spirals from double wire in the first ditch; in the first case there are eight spirals clipped together, in the second there is a single spiral. In the large amount of pottery we can find items belonging to the Tumulus culture, but also pieces that might be regarded as pre-Lusatian or Early Lusatian. This situation suggests that when the function of the two ditches ceased, there remained isolated smaller open places along which the walls left holes were later filled up — roughly simultaneously.

Our trench was directed generally from east to west, forming a sector crossing the area between the two ditches turning to south-west. The first (the external) ditch (structure 1) preserves its half-tub section, but it loses depth and fades out towards the surface. The second (the internal) ditch (structure 5) gets narrower and also fades out towards the surface. The situation is rather complicated in the whole area; the area between the two ditches is covered with pits and hollows, some of them are connected to the internal ditch and interfering with the edges of the external ditch from both sides (one of them yielded a great deal of the bones of the pig and so the finds here). It seems that in this maze of depressions there is another ditch running from the opposite side, that is from the south-west. The whole situation suggests that we are at the entrance to the fortified system. Unfortunately we have to do with an area where it is impossible to distinguish the sequence. Completely on the western side of the studied northern segment of the hill a further fortification system was discovered: First appeared a shallow ditch of 200 by ± 60 cm dated by Tumulus pottery (structure 44). Its filling is covered with part of a rampart body belonging to the ditch (structure 45), 4 m aside. The dimensions of the ditch are 2 by 1 m. In the year 1987 we found in front of this ditch remains of a destroyed stone wall of a combined timber-earth construction, destroyed by fire (structure 43A). A narrow excavation ditch has been opened to study the section and the hitherto conclusion is that the timber structure and the stone wall were probably up to three metres high. The traces of mud form black carbonaceous silt, the gray filling has been converted into red hard substance, at places baked into lumps of wattle and daub with impurities. This fills the area above the stones and also between them. Part of this baked earth covers a half—filled older ditch (structure 45). (Fig. 2 and 3).

We have obtained thus a multiple superposition of fortification systems; the oldest shallow ditch covered by the rampart body of a later ditch in front of it and the latest fortification with a stone wall.

FIGURE 2. A section through the fortification on the western side; structures 43B, 45 and 44. — Lower at the bottom we can see a detailed rise of the destroyed stone walls (structure 43A) with charred poles.
poraries. Structure 11 is of the Tumulus-culture (ornamented foot of the vessel). We have no acceptable answer regarding the purpose of the enclosures in the given terrain situation. We have made only minimum excavations inside the enclosed area. In a probe (No. 11) we have discovered several post holes without any clear out ground plan and in structure in which a human skull and a charred mandible were found, and a complete egg-shaped vessel nearby. (The cultural affiliation of the vessel is disputable, it may belong both to the Tumulus or Latanian culture). Otherwise the relatively long trench was poor in finds.

Inside the area, near the described fortifications (structures 44, 46, 46A) a 550 cm large depression — so far of unknown length has been found. It cannot be excluded that it is a ditch. At its bottom appeared numerous animal bones, bones of at least 18 individuals of various age, including children. At the south-eastern edge the burial of a crowded man was found, oriented S—N. The pottery dates this depression No. 23 into the Tumulus culture (Fig. 4). Towards the north continue other similar depressions. No. 62 has e.g. oval ground plan and its dimensions are roughly 4 by 3 m (Fig. 5). Debris of big stones at their western side suggests that there was some construction on that side. Both depressions show some links with the known places of sacrifices in the Alpine region, namely near Reichenhall in Upper Bavaria, especially with the find at the Eisenbichl site (Krümer 1986), quoted by E. Plien as an example of south-eastern cultural influence (1974, 356—357). To this belongs to a certain extent also the somewhat older site Příhynky in Moravia (Truhlářová 1934).

The hitherto available finds from the Shalka site, gathered over more than one hundred years, reveal the extraordinary character of the site. We have in mind seven mass finds of golden and bronze objects: deposit I with about 36 golden coins made of double wire (1895); deposit II — six similar coins with three two-part bronze moulds for casting axes, a bronze axe with an anvil (1908); deposit III — eight golden coins, find from the year 1927 (Hálek 1981 with earlier literature); deposit IV — eight golden coins of the same type as in the three previous deposits; find from the year 1984 (Hrála—Vávra—Sedlěšek 1985, 1967); deposit V — an ornamental bronze pendant; small looped disk; four spiral tubules made of wound spiral wire (Sala Leona); two crescent-shaped and a lyre-shaped pendants with orifices at the top, pins, find from the year 1984 (Hrála—Vávra—Sedlěšek 1986; Fig. 6); deposit VI — three axes (Abausitiell), a sickle, a bronze accretion from the year 1985 (Hrála—Sedlěšek—Vávra 1987b, Fig. 8), deposit

![Figure 3. A child burial at the bottom of the ditch (structure 43A) on the NW side of the area.](image)

wall, whose debris partially fill the previous older ditch. An identical situation was found also in other excavations in the north-western part of the studied segment of the fortified settlement. The last two fortifications are directed towards the northern foot of the hill. Evidently they spanned the settlement along the same contour line also on the eastern side, where the situation cannot be checked any more (there is an abandoned quarry, a house and a local road).

It follows from the above information concerning the fortification systems in Velim, that the continuing field research has considerably changed some of our former views (Hrála—Vávra—Sedlěšek 1986, Hrála—Sedlěšek—Vávra 1986a, 1987b). Firstly, we must say that the two ditches and the two palisades on the eastern side and their continuation in the central part of the area, do not represent the main fortification, they limit only part of the internal area of the fortified settlement. The fact remains that in no of the above ditches (structures 1 and 5) can we find any proof of the existence of a rampart or defensive wall; perhaps the double or triple stockade might be a trace of a timber-earth wall, but this is not supported by the situation in the terrain (full absence of the vestige of an earthwork bank).

As far as the time sequence of these constructions is concerned, we can be sure only that the second (internal) ditch (structure 5) is superimposed over the groove palisade (structure 3). After some considerations we have arrived at several possible variants, and two of them are quite plausible: 1. The groove palisade — structure 3 — is the oldest simple fortification of the area, and it served till the moment when a more sophisticated system — i.e. the first external ditch (structure 1) was completed. The first ditch (structure 1) with its groove palisade (structure 3) forms a single system preceding the construction of the younger system, i.e. the second ditch (structure 5) with stockade (wall 1) — this variant is more plausible, as indicated by the following facts: a) it seems that both palisades follow unvaryingly at the same distance "their" ditches (the grooved palisade is following the first — external ditch, the stockade runs along the second — internal ditch); b) horizontally-stratigraphic reasons: the pit (structure 11) is situated on the external side of the stockade, thus the two structures cannot be contem-

![Figure 4. Find situation in a structure of military character (structure 25).](image)
a foot. Among the ornaments prevail horse-shoe elements, sometimes hatched triangles, and numerous vertical notches. The dilemma of this cultural milieu is represented by two basic shapes — by amphorae and by biconical vessels. From this viewpoint the Velim pottery seems to be closer to the proto-Lusatian horizon in Moravia, that knows both shapes, than to the pro-Lusatian culture, with the biconical vessel missing (Gedd 1976). Nevertheless the proto-Lusatian horizon with its shapes reveals its Middle- Danubian Tumulus culture origin, only a part of the ceramic inventory may be derived from Větěžov basis. In Velim the elements attributable to Větěžov legacy are few, evident cases are known only from the research by V. Sperny (1972, Fig. 3: 6). The biconical vessel is known already in the purely Tumulus culture. In Velim we can find also sporadically elements of the Bohemian-Palatine Tumulus culture. There is nothing new about it, this integration phenomenon was known already earlier (Ploš 1954, 237).

From a global look at the Velim pottery, prior to its analysis we can say that the principal settlement is in stage B, with its beginning perhaps at the end of the previous stage, and that the development reached also the beginning of stage D. Such dating is supported also by the bronze inventory, further development of the settlement by the situation of the terrain.

It seems that culturally Velim appears as a solitary phenomenon on the border — like that was arising in Bohemia in the Middle Bronze Age, and is very well perceptible in the Early Urnfield period, as a watershed between the Kouvitz and Lusatian cultures, or to use superior terms, by the south-western and eastern regions of the Urdelide.

REFERENCES


