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TO THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS FROM THE LATE BRONZE AGE IN CÉZAVY NEAR BLUČINA

ABSTRACT — The Velatice settlement of the oldest stage of the Middle-Danubian Urnfields in the hill-locality Cézavy near Blučina (southern Moravia) is noted for several specific features: for the large quantity of human skeletons, their parts and isolated human bones (the minimum number of hitherto found individuals have been preliminarily put at 113), riches of bronze finds, often appearing in the form of hoards (so far at least 18 foci) and documents of foundry activities (moulds, metalworking tools); the horizontal concentrations of the finds recur, but fail the common settlement pits, neither is the presence of Velatice fortifications reliably proved. The human skeletal remains may be, according to the latest hypotheses the results of (1) an armed conflict culminating with massive killing, eventually connected with human sacrifices and executions, (2) a specific funeral rite accompanied by human sacrifices or (3) cultic rituals requiring among other things also human sacrifices, eventually in connection with anthropophagy. If we study the human skeletons in context with the rest of the above mentioned characteristics of the site, taking account also of the approximative demographic data, we have to refute the theory of a single event, such as a military confrontation. Against the alternative of funeral rite are the facts that we know about funeral rite in the Middle-Danubian Urnfield culture, and the most important thing is that such interpretation does not touch other specific features of the locality, namely it does not solve the problem of bronze deposits. So far everything seems to bear witness to the fact that Cézavy represented an elevated sacral site, a sanctuary, the venue of repeated socio-religious rituals and cultic acts of various forms.

KEY WORDS: *Urnfield period — Sacral sites — Hoards — Metalworking*

One of the most researched hill sites of the Bronze Age in Moravia is Cézavy near Blučina (Cézavy is the name of a hill in the cadastre of Blučina, a village in Brno Rural District). It is an oval knoll, strategically situated above the confluence of the Litava and Svatka rivers. From its total area of 17 ha (Fig. 1) 4 300 sq.m. had been gradually excavated in the years 1940—1987, representing roughly 2.5 % of the settled area, i.e. quite a representative sample. Three settlement horizons with qualitatively different functional parameters have been reliably proved as being from the Bronze Age. The first two horizons belong to the Early Bronze Age and are formed partly by a hill settlement of the Únětice Culture with

a skeletal burial ground at the foot of the western slope, partly by a hill fort of a people belonging to the Věteřov group. The third element of the locality belongs to the beginnings of the Late Bronze Age, to the earliest stage of the Velatice phase of the Middle-Danubian Urnfields (Říhovský 1982). This is, together with the character of find situations, and also with the character of the finds proper rather specific, differing thus both from most prehistoric hill forts, and also from simple open settlements — not only of those of the same period, but also from those of other prehistoric times. Hence the still problematic classification, and globally also the functional interpretation of the locality within the framework of the

archaeological nomenclature. Up to now Čezavy has usually been regarded as a Velatice-type hill settlement (Salaš 1987), or even as a hill fort (Paulík 1962, 67; Říhový 1982, 97—98; Furmánek—Vladár 1983, 5). K. Tihelka (1961, 1969) thought that it was a hill settlement whose area was used also for burials.

The specific features of the locality can be summed up roughly into five points:

1. extraordinarily large quantity of human skeletal remains,
2. extreme amount of bronze finds, mostly concentrated into hoards,
3. evidence of foundry production,
4. horizontal concentrations of finds and absence of settlement pits,

5. absence of classical fortifications.

The two latter features may be disproved by future field research, or by the reevaluation of earlier discovered find situations.

We might quote a number of analogies to the above features of the locality, however, in their complexity they represent quite an unusual archaeological constellation. In Bohemia and in Moravia we can mention only two other localities in which the above aspects — of course in various proportions — are perceptible: Skalka near Velim in central Bohemia (Hrala—Sedláček—Vávra 1987) and Přítluky in southern Moravia (Trnáčková 1954; 1959). No objects connected with metallurgy are mentioned in Přítluky, but all these localities, including also

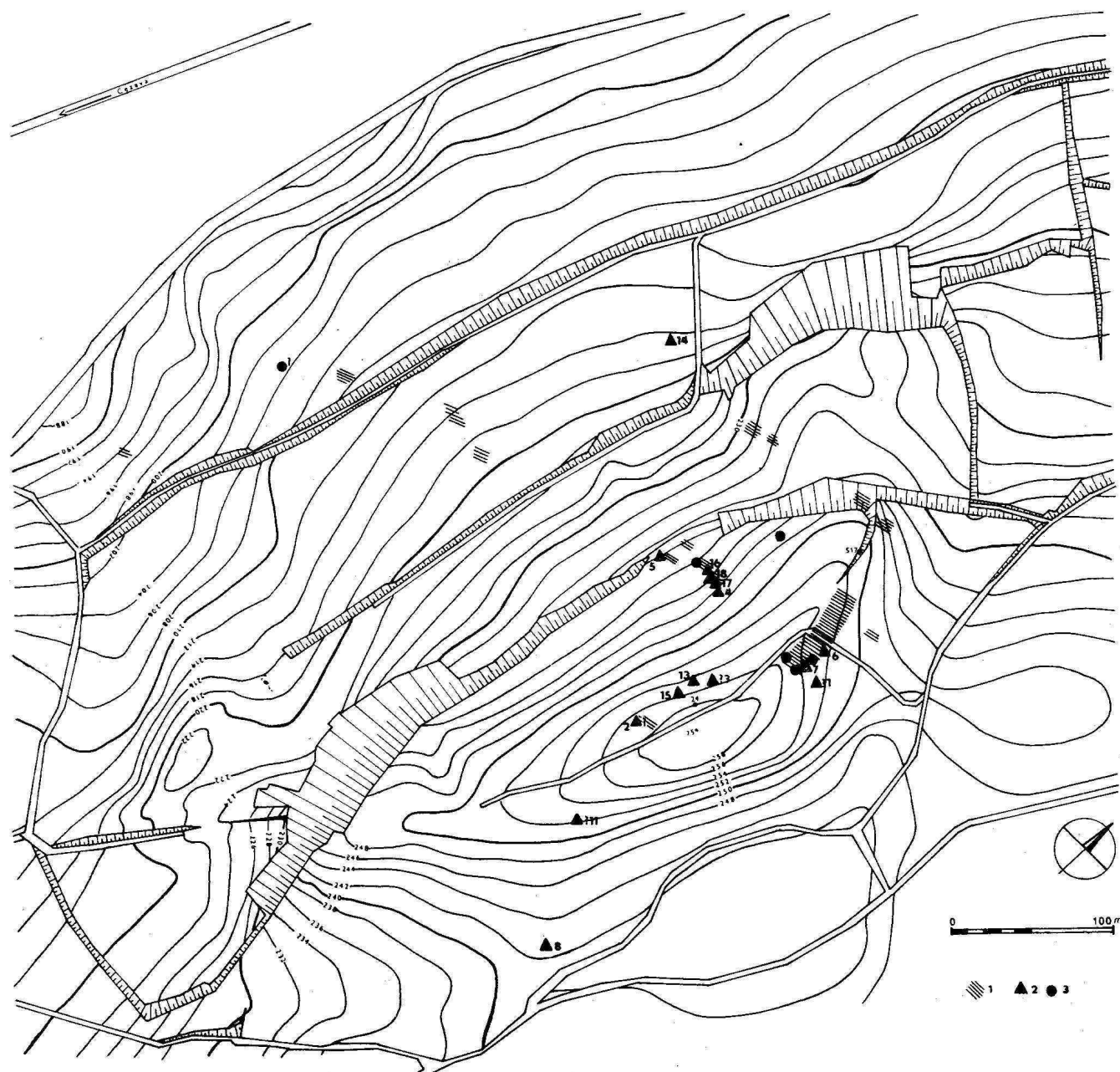


FIGURE 1. Blučina-Čezavy, Brno Rural District. The general plan of the hill site with finds of human skeletal remains (1), bronze hoards (2), numbering according to Říhový 1982, and of casting moulds (3).

Čezavy near Blučina (Tihelka 1957, 10) yielded rolls of golden wires.

Any attempts at explaining the still disputable functional classification of the Velatice settlement of Čezavy must take into account all the above features of the locality, and should interpret also their relations and causal dependences. In view of the topical orientation of this periodical, however, more attention is paid namely to the finds of human skeletons.

Human skeletal remains are scattered all over the locality in an irregular pattern (Fig. 1), in various find situations and in a variety of positions (Tihelka 1969), often close to bronze deposits, or mixed with bronze artifacts. They are always accompanied by non-worked stones, and as a rule also by a considerable quantity of Velatice pottery and animal bones. Quite frequent are also other types of finds (e.g. charred palaeobotanic material, shells, etc.). It is a pity that the anthropological material has not yet been processed in a complex way, so that a more accurate demographic picture of the locality is still unknown. According to K. Tihelka (1969, 28), who worked out a survey of the osteological material found during research activities in the years 1948—1960, the skeletons of altogether 205 individuals were discovered there, 36 of them identified as males, 23 as females and 63 as children. The remaining non-identified skeletons, in view of the easier identification of child skeletons, are more probably adult than infantile. In view of the fact that there are also numerous incomplete skeletons alongside with separated individual human bones, it is almost impossible to determine exactly the number of hitherto found individuals, evidently we shall have to work with a certain approximative counting, related to the find of mandibles and of

frontal bones. Although the statistics include also finds before the year 1948, and following the year 1960, we have obtained 113 individuals, together with disputed cases 179 individuals; in this group we have identified 17 males, 18 females and 60 children, at the age of one to fourteen years, with infants up to six years prevailing. In spite of certain differences in absolute counts as compared with the counts by K. Tihelka, the percentually expressed rough demographic structure is very similar (Fig. 2: A). The proportion of adults and children would be 2 : 1, provided that the non-identified skeletons belong to adult individuals. From the assemblage as a whole we can detach a group of about eighty individuals (i.e. about 45—71 %), which according to their crouched or supine position may have been ritually buried. There prevail children (54 %), which, with a single exception, are all in crouched position. In the remaining group of non-ritually buried, but also incomplete and scattered skeletons we find distinctly fewer children — 17 % (Fig. 2: B). However, we have to bear in mind that in many cases the position of the skeleton cannot be accurately determined and classified, and it is also difficult to tell to what extent have been damaged some shallowly situated skeletons discovered during ploughing. Already K. Tihelka mentions such a group of recently disturbed skeletons (1969, 3—4), and it has been confirmed also by a situation discovered in the year 1983, when from an anatomically placed infantile skeleton found in the depth of 0.4—0.5 m only the pelvis and parts of the lower limbs were in place (Salaš 1985a, 28—29).

According to the latest interpretation hypotheses the human skeletal remains in Čezavy may be the result of (1) an armed conflict culminating with mass extermination (Paulík 1962, 67; Říhový 1982, 97—98), eventually in combination with human sacrifices and executions staged by the winners (Salaš 1985b, 48—50), (2) specific funeral rites accompanied with human offerings (Tihelka 1961, 207—208; 1969, 29—30), or (3) they are the result of cultic rituals, requiring among other things human sacrifices and executions, eventually in combination with anthropophagy (Jelínek 1957, 94—106; Bouzek—Koutecký 1980, 510—411, 418—420).

The possibility of an armed encounter is excluded by several circumstances. The hitherto researched sites have yielded the skeletons of 113—179 individuals, and from that we can deduce the number of skeletons in the locality in total. Since most skeletons (roughly 78—80 %) were discovered during research in the years 1950—1952 in what was once a moat belonging to a fort of the Věteřov Culture on the eastern slope, we have studied separately the total surface of the eastern moat (about 4 650 sq. metres), and also the rest of the locality. Thus the total number of human individuals in Čezavy might be between 1 429—2 466 (Tab. 1). In case of an elemental, one-time event, such as armed confrontation it would correspond to the momentary size of the living population, and if it included also the casualties of the assailants, the figures for the prehistoric conditions of central Europe would be too high. The size of the prehistoric

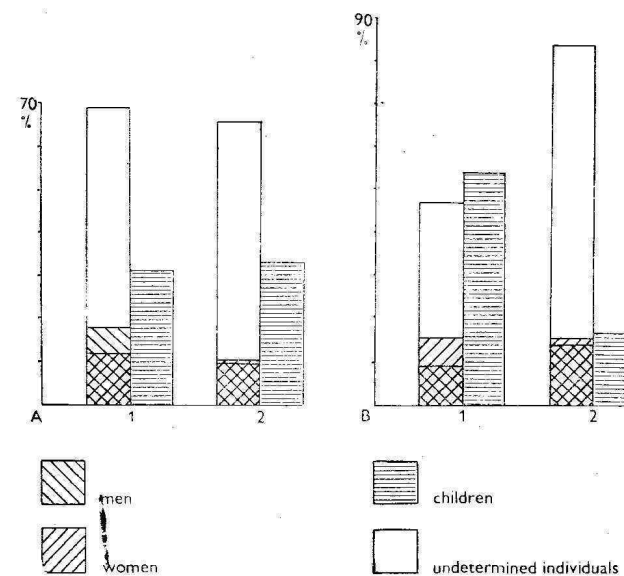


FIGURE 2. The demographic structure of the anthropological material at the locality Čezavy near Blučina. A 1 — according to K. Tihelka (1969), A 2 — worked out recently on the basis of finds of mandibles and of the frontal bones, B 1 — number of ritually buried skeletons, B 2 — number of other skeletons.

communities is estimated to be at least fifteen times lower; e.g. the number of inhabitants of the Vikletice burial ground, belonging to the Corded culture, was determined at 25 (Neustupný 1983, 181), the burial ground of the Únětice culture near Těšetice was used by a community of about 60—70 people (Lorencová—Beneš—Podborský 1987, 100). The estimates for the open settlements of the Urnfield period are rather variable. According to a micro-region along the “Lužický potok” (creek) the local community consisted of 15—30 people (Srnč 1987, 615); as a maximum we can count with 100—120 persons per settlement (Bukowski 1978, 275; Horst 1985, 161; Furmánek—Stloukal 1985, 145—147). In case of fortified settlements we may perhaps treble the number of inhabitants (in the Billendorf hill fort Seftenberg with 30 houses the number of inhabitants has been put at 200 Buck 1982, 106); nevertheless even the lowest population estimates in Cézavy are at least three times higher. The hypothesis of armed conflict is refuted also by known fact that in case of warlike situation weapons are usually not hidden in caches (Hundt 1955, 97—98). In case of Cézavy it is quite a justified objection, since in the eighteen hitherto known mass finds there are 23 complete, undamaged weapons: 13 axes (tool-weapon type of artifact), 6 spears, 3 daggers and one arrow head. The most compelling argument against the theory of armed confrontation are the find situations proper, showing that in their complexity they cannot be the result of a single, one time event. They are evidently the result of repeated activities, corresponding to the two other interpretations.

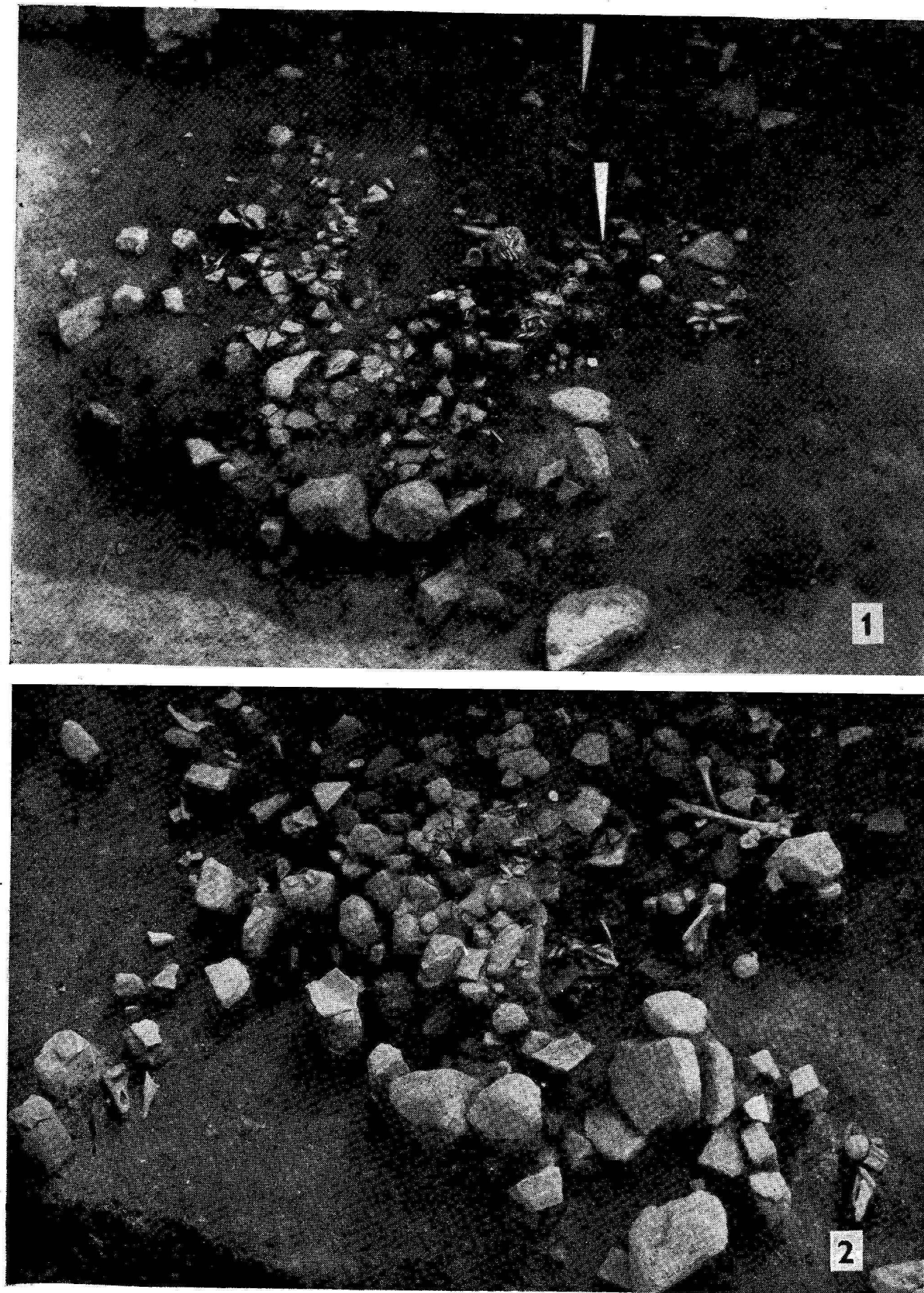
Let us consider first the hypothesis that we have to do with a specific funeral rite. Here we must exclude the possibility that all human skeletons found on the site represented the naturally deceased part of the population, as held by G. Lange (1983) in case of the La Tène oppidum Manching. In Manching, to wit, we are confronted with a similar situation as to the quantity of anthropological material (2 % of the researched surface yielded some 400 individuals), and partly also with the state of its preservation; however, the human skeletons appear there in somewhat different find context (they often appear in settlement pits) and there is no evidence of the ritually buried skeletons, sometimes provided with funeral offerings on the one side, and with skeletons in non-ritual positions or incomplete skeletons, on the other side. One of the most palpable arguments against the hypothesis that the population buried in Cézavy deceased with natural death are the demographic estimates of the population living on the site (cf. Neustupný 1983, 37—38), with the lowest calculations nearing five hundred (*Tab. I*), a number hardly achieved even by the largest Bronze Age hill forts. If we agreed with K. Tihelka's hypothesis (1961, 207—208, 29—30) that part of the skeletons belonged to individuals sacrificed in a funeral rite, then the share of the naturally deceased population would be smaller, and so would also be the size of the living population. But here end the possibilities of demographic calculations, as we are unable to identify the skeletons belonging to the offered individuals,

TABLE 1. The number of hitherto discovered human individuals in Cézavy near Blučina (cf. Fig. 2: A2) and the derived parameters

Number of individuals from the excavated area (4 300 sq. m.)	Derived total amount of individuals on the site	Number of inhabitants with naturally dying population during the functional period of the locality	
		50 years	75 years
min. 113	1 429	714	476
max. 179	2 466	1 233	822

and we do not know whether the normal burials span the entire social spectrum of the population. Nevertheless in case of accepting the theory of funeral rite there would remain anomalous and unexplained facts: (1) Biritual burials appear still in the Late-barrow stage Strachotín-Velké Hostěrádky (Říhovský 1982), but the burial rite of the Middle-Danubian Urnfields, including their earliest level, is nearly exclusively of cremation type, and this might be documented e.g. also by the early Velatice necropolis right in the cadastre of Blučina, 2.5 km from Cézavy (Říhovský 1959, 648; 1965). For this reason we cannot have to do with the survival of skeletal burial rite from the Late-barrow period, as could have been the case in the western cultural groups of the Upper Danube Urnfields, where skeletal burials form part of normal cemeteries (Plesl 1988; Kytlicová 1988). The real burials appearing in Cézavy are always skeletal burials, without analogies in the Middle—Danubian Urnfields; traces of fire on some non-ritually buried or incomplete skeletons have nothing to do with ritual cremation. (2) The social stratification in the burial rite of the Middle—Danubian Urnfields is usually reflected by the more pretentious outfit of the cremation burials in the burial grounds and in the construction of the isolated princely barrows (Říhovský 1958, 1978, 49; Paulík 1962; 1974; 1976; 1981). Besides a central cremation burial they comprise as a rule also lateral burials, quite exceptionally skeletal ones, some of them interpreted as human sacrifices (Paulík 1974, 76; 1976, 372; 1981; 1983, 58—59). If we expected something similar in Cézavy, there should have been buried through a longer period also members of the higher social strata, and in view of the developed patriarchal society with elements of military democracy (Dušek 1973; Paulík 1974, 76—77; Bouzek 1986) — mainly chieftains, outstanding warriors, eventually priests. So far not a single burial interpretable in this way has been discovered; the only somewhat ostentatious exception is the burial of a 30—40 years old woman with two children, the one is a new-born child, the other is an infant of roughly one-to one-and-a-half year old (Tihelka 1961). Nor can it be regarded as a specific burial rite of a group of metallurgists, according to the proved metallur-

FIGURE 3. Blučina-Cézavy, Brno Rural District. Concentration of finds with human skeletal remains (1985 research season). 1 — absolute depth of 50 to 60 cm, 2 — absolute depth of 60—70 cm.



gical production. They perhaps enjoyed higher social status (e.g. Simon 1982, 256—257), but in spite of differences in burial outfit and adjustment they were buried in normal cemeteries (Winkler—Baumann 1975; Jockenhövel 1982a; Horst 1984, 177). In view of these facts the theory of burial rite accompanied with human sacrifices seems to be little plausible in case of the Cézavy finds. Furthermore such an interpretation is not explaining other specific features of the site, namely it is not concerned with the problem of bronze caches and of metallurgical production.

The last alternative explications are other ritual, namely cultic practices. Due to the character of this paper we cannot deal here with various forms of these rituals and with their purpose, in fact the character of archaeological sources makes it impossible to seek such an answer. In many cases they were without doubt bloody rituals, connected with human and animal sacrifices, and we could mention here great many analogies (e.g. Schwenn 1966; Bouzek—Koutecký 1980 with lit.). A situation discovered in a settlement layer in the years 1985—1986 could be concretely regarded as ritualized and very probably religiously oriented. In an area of 6 sq. m., among prevailingly small stones we have discovered an extraordinary accumulation of rather heterogeneous material (Fig. 3—4). Most finds are Velatice pottery sherds, with numerous animal bones, shells, charcoals, charred cereals (including millet), and did not fail metal artifacts (a bronze knife thrust in the earth at a torso of the skeleton of an infant, a bronze razor, fragment of a pin, fragment of a copper accretion) and petrified animal excrements. At the centre of this seemingly chaotic find in its top horizon was situated the skeleton of an infant of about five years of age, but only his backbone and the pelvis appeared in anatomic order, from the rest of the skeleton only several scattered and isolated fragments have been found. In the following artificial horizon, i.e. some 15—20 cm deeper, the skeleton of a young man was found on the same spot. His trunk and pelvis have been pressed between stones, and above the pelvis the left femur was transversely put. The remaining long bones of the upper and lower limbs, together with parts of the skull were situated at the distance of half a metre (Fig. 3: 2, 4: 1), in such a way that the mutual position of the individual bones respected the anatomic links and orientation. Besides these two skeletons of a child and of a man, there were scattered also other human bones (e.g. part of a mandible, maxilla, humerus), indicating the presence of at least one more person. A preliminary anthropological examination of the man's skeleton by J. Jelínek has proved numerous traces of intentional interference (burning, cutting, splitting, chopping).

The whole situation is evidently the result of a one-time act, best documented by separately situated pottery fragments belonging to each other. There was among them also a jug ornamented with notches (Fig. 4: 2), imported from the region of the north-Alpian Urnfields, most probably from Bavaria (Salaš 1990). The vessel was without the least doubt

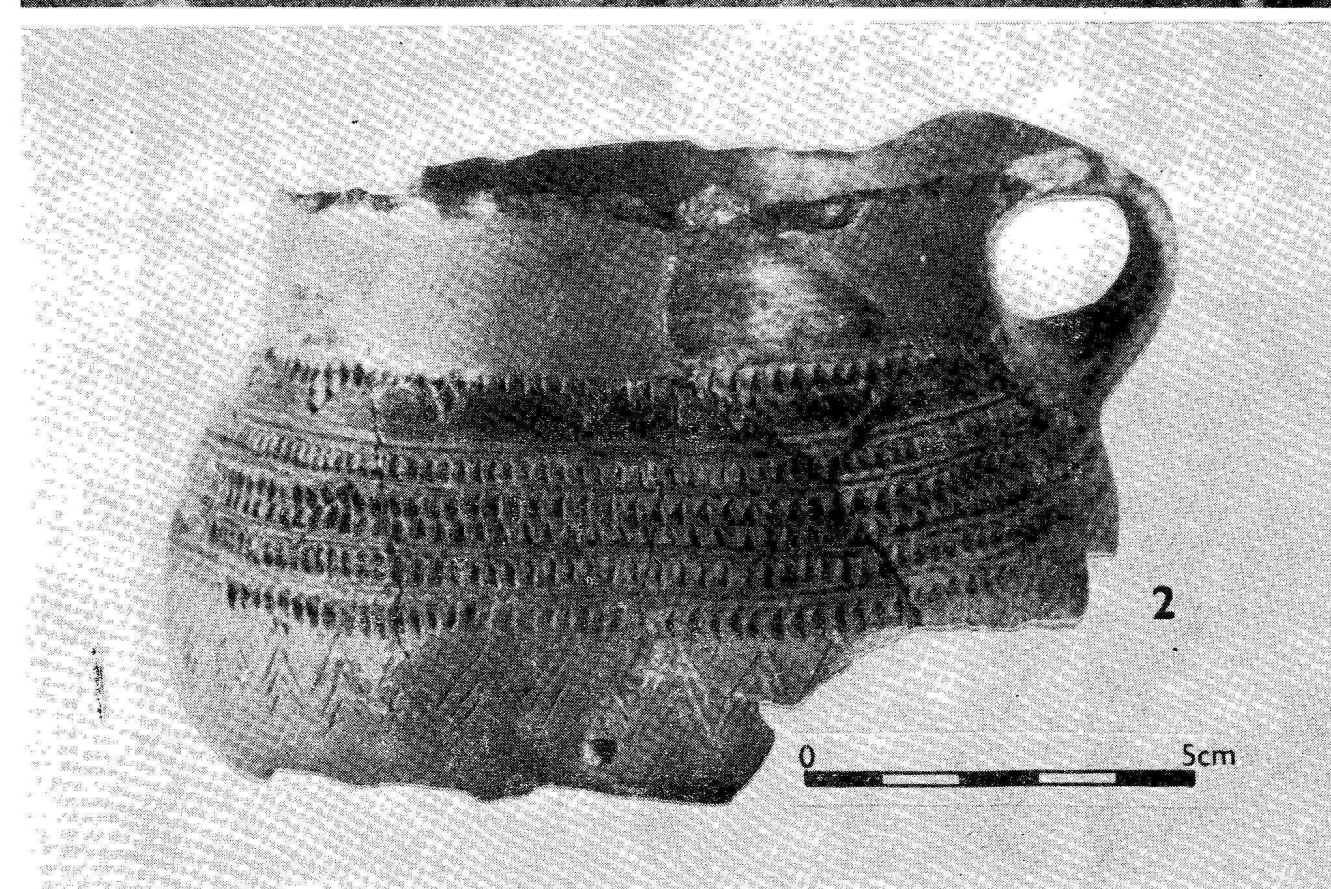
broken on purpose and its individual fragments were scattered over the whole surface of the find. The presence of the imported jug is also one of the important indices supporting the interpretation of the suggested find situation as part of a cult, since artifacts of foreign provenance with their unusual character and special significance, were often used for ritual purposes and cultic practices (Kubach 1980, 262—265).

With regard to the hypothesis of the existence of a sacral precinct in Cézavy the skeletons in ritual positions may be somewhat disputable, especially if they are accompanied with funeral gifts, so that they are real burials. Perhaps they were individuals at the centre of such rituals, personalities whose position required reverent postmortal treatment. Or for some reasons unknown to us it was impossible (or forbidden) to cremate these individuals, and they were normally buried (cf. Bouzek—Koutecký 1980, 414, 419). This second possibility explains also the relatively large number of children in skeletal burials (Fig. 2: B1), which are usually absent in cemeteries up to the age of three years (Neustupný 1983, 23—24).

The theory of repeated rituals and cultic offices might explain satisfactorily also other specific features of the Velatice settlement in Cézavy. This holds namely for the bronze hoards. At least eighteen such hoards had been discovered up to the year 1988, which is a rather extraordinary local concentration. The only relatively comparable parallel of the Late Bronze Age is the hill fort at Bullenheimer Berg near Würzburg in northern Bavaria, where twelve hoards were discovered (Diemer 1985). Localities of this kind, with such a concentrated appearance of bronze hoards, are usually regarded as hill-fort holies (Jockenhövel 1982b, 264—266; Diemer 1985, 63—64). The correctness of the above assertions might be proved also by a number of indices found at the analysis of the content of these depots. There appear often artifacts without traces of wear or use, but evidently distorted and broken on purpose. Such a way of destruction lacks any rational, economic motivation. We could again find an explanation in some ritual practices, when the artifacts intended for offering or representing the property of the deceased (Totengut) were intentionally destroyed before being included in the burial (Hell 1950, 65; Hundt 1955; Brunn 1980). The well fixed find situations in certain places do not reveal the intention to cache these supplies; this holds e.g. for cache No. 16 in Cézavy. It was situated practically on the level of the original surface (Salaš 1989), usually one of the criteria for cultic interpretation of the hoards (Diemer 1985, 63—64).

Foundry products are also important material documents contributing to the overall classification of the locality. The mould together with a fragment

FIGURE 4. *Blučina-Cézavy, Brno Rural District. Skeletal remains of a man on the basis of a find concentration (1985 research season), absolute depth of 80 cm; 2 — one of the ceramic vessels in the find concentration.*



of a clay coat of a lost mould (Salaš 1985b; Salaš—Stránský—Winkler 1989) have probably not only symbolic significance (e.g. as offering), they illustrate the real local production. On the other hand metallurgical evidence is not necessarily colliding with cultic functions of the locality. In the Aegean world, in the time ranging from the Late Bronze Age to the classical Hellenistic period we know numerous cases when metallurgical workshops were working in the area of cultic precincts (Buchholz 1974, 361ff.; Muhly 1976, 91—93; Karageorghis 1976, 72—74), and copper was throughout the Antiquity connected with Venus, her planet and also with her deity (Bouzek 1979, 261). There is no doubt that metal-working had to have its ideological impact upon the contemporary rituals and cultic practices, and was accompanied with interpretative context. Given the fact that metallurgists treated their production procedures as a closely guarded secret, the process of metal melting necessary appeared to those not in the know as something wrapped up in mystery.

Excavations still continue, and we are sure that in the future a complex processing of the entire material will bring a number of novel informations, in many aspects changing the hitherto conclusions. At the present state of research, with a number of open problems and disputable questions we are able perhaps to eliminate only the hypothesis that Cézavy near Blučina was a hill-fort or hill-settlement captured in a military confrontation. On the other hand it can be accepted as evident that Cézavy was the venue of various forms of religious and social rituals, justifying the hypothesis that the locality was a sacred precinct of central character, repeatedly used by several communities. The existence of such cultic places and sanctuaries, including those situated in elevated and fortified places is an accepted fact; from the later period of Antiquity we know a series of localities of this kind (e.g. Lubský 1949, 205—217; Krámer 1966; Bouzek—Koutecký 1980, 417—418; Schauer 1981; Rutkowski 1985). In connection with material evidence of foundry production in Cézavy we shall have to subject to a more detailed analysis the superstructural aspects of metallurgical production, and to take into account the effects of other, secular functional factors.

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