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

ABSTRACT — The Velčovice settlement of the oldest stage of the Middle-Danubian Urnfields in the hill-locality Cézavy near Blučina (western Moravia) is noted for several specific features: for the large quantity of human skeletons, their parts and isolated human bones (the minimum number of skeletons found individuals have been preliminarily put at 113), riches of bronze finds, often appearing in the form of hoards (so far at least 18 facts) and documents of foundry activities (moulds, metalworking tools); the horizontal concentrations of the finds cover, but fail the common settlement pits, neither is the presence of Velčovice fortifications reliably proved. The human skeletal remains may be, according to the latest hypothesis the results of (1) an armed conflict culminating with massive killing, eventually continued with human sacrifices and executions, (2) a specific funerary rite accompanied by human sacrifices or (3) cultic rituals requiring among other things also human sacrifices, eventually in connection with anthropopropy. If we study the human skeletons in contact 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 alternatives of funerary rite are the facts that we know about funerary 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 sacred site, a sanctuary, the venue of repeated socio-religious rituals and cultic acts of various forms.

KEY WORDS: Urnfield period — Sacred 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 cadastral of Blučina, a village in Brno Rural District). It is an oval knoll, strategically situated above the confluence of the Litaňa and Svatka rivers. From its total area of 17 ha (mp. 7 430 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 Únětická Culture with a skeletal burial ground at the foot of the western slope, partly by a hill fort of a people belonging to the Velčovice group. The third element of the locality belongs to the beginnings of the Late Bronze Age, to the earliest stage of the Velčovice phase of the Middle-Danubian Urnfields (Ríhovský 1982). This is, together with the character of final 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 Cėzavy has usually been regarded as a Velatice-type hill settlement (Salad 1987), or even as a hill fort (Pavlík 1982, 67; Říhovský 1982, 97–98; Parniček - Vlach 1992, 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 perceivable: Skalka near Velim in central Bohemia (Hrála - Sollášek - Vávra 1987) and Přítnoky in southern Moravia (Trčeková 1984, 1989). No objects connected with metalurgy are mentioned in Přítnoky, but all these localities, including also Cėzavy near Běčna (Tihelka 1967, 10) yielded rolls of golden wire.

Any attempts at explaining the still disputable functional classification of the Velatice settlement of Cėzavy must take into account all the above features of the locality, and should interpret also their relations and causal dependence. 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 1949–1960, the skeletons of altogether 205 individuals were discovered there, 89 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 probably children 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 lithic or found artifacts, evidently we shall have to work with a certain approximate 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 reached 117 individuals, together with 72 disputed cases 179 individuals; in this group we have identified 17 males, 18 females and 60 children, a total of 155 individuals, with an age range of up to six years prevailing. In spite of certain differences in absolute counts as compared with the counts by K. Tihelka, the generally expressed through 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 46–71 %), which according to their crowded or supine position may have been ritually buried. There prevail children (34 %), which, with a single exception, are all in crowded 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 skeletonized remains 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 skeleton 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 (Salad 1984, 28–29).

According to the latest interpretations hypotheses the human skeletal remains in Cėzavy may be the result of (1) an armed conflict culminating with mass extermination (Pavlík 1982, 67; Říhovský 1982, 97–98), eventually in combination with human sacrifices and executions staged by the winners (Salad 1985b, 48–50), (2) specific funeral rites accompanied with human offerings (Tihelka 1961, 207–208; 1969, 28–30), or (3) they are the result of cultic rituals, requiring among other things human sacrifices and executions, eventually in combination with anthropophagy (Jelínek 1967, 94–106; Borko - Koutek 1980, 510–411, 418–420).

The possibility of an armed encounter is excluded by several circumstances. The lithic 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 1960–1962 in what was once a mast belonging to a fort of the Všetkov Culture on the eastern slope, we have studied separately the total surface of the eastern most (about 4 650 sq. metres), and also the rest of the locality. Thus the total number of human individuals in Cėzavy 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 1.** Běčna-Cėzavy, Brno Rural District. The general plan of the hill site with finds of human skeletal remains (1), bronze hoards (2), numbering according to Říhovský 1982, and of casting mounds (5).

**FIGURE 2.** The demographic structure of the anthropological material at the locality Cėzavy near Běčna. 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.
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 funerary rites there would remain anomalous and unexplained facts: (1) Biritural burials appear still in the late-barrow stage Strachůň Velská Hostěradíky (Ríhovský 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 Břešice, 2.5 km from Čeřavý (Ríhovský 1980, 648; 1986).

For this reason we 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 (Pšol 1988; Kylicková 1988). The real burials appearing in Čeřavý 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 (Ríhovský 1983, 1978, 49; Paalik 1974, 76; 1976, 572; 1981, 88–90). If we expected something similar in Čeřavý, 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 (Drahokoupil 1973; Paalik 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 two and a half year old (Tříkola 1991). Nor can it be regarded as a specific burial rite of a group of metalurgists, according to the proved metallur-
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; Jochenhövel 1982a; Horst 1984, 177). In view of these facts the theory of burial rite accompanied with human sacrifice seems to be little plausible in case of the Češavy finds. Furthermore such an interpretation is not explaining other specific features of the site, namely the woman without the problem of bronze crosses and of metalurgical production.

The last alternative explanations 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. Schulze 1966; Bouzek–Koutecˇky 1990 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 prevalingly 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, charcoal, 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 aeretum) and petrified animal excrement. 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 anatomical 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–J: 2), in such a way that the mutual position of the individual bones respected the anatomical 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 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-Alpine Urnfields, most probably from Bavaria (Salz 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 (Kuhaˇnika 1980, 262–263).

With regard to the hypothesis of the existence of a sacred precinct in Češavy 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 postmortem 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, 25–26).

The theory of repeated rituals and cultic offices might explain satisfactorily also other specific features of the Velatice settlement in Češavy. 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 hoards (Jochenhövel 1982b, 264–265; Diemer 1985, 63–64). The correctness of the above assertion 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 (Bell 1939, 55; 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 Češavy. It was situated practically on the level of the original surface (Salz 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](https://example.com/image.jpg)


