



KLÁRA ŠABATOVÁ

## IT'S NOT CULTURE'S FAULT. PROBLEMS OF ONE PREMISE

*ABSTRACT: "Archaeological cultures" are models of human life in a particular time and space, which come out of the scientific and social mores at the time of their definition. These well-constructed typological-chronological schemes are very stable but imaginary entities. The traits, with which cultures were originally described and with which their quantity and ubiquity were studied (burial rituals, the character of settlements, artefacts, space) have often been influenced by signs from the present. The assigning of cultures was influenced by state borders and even ideologies. The pigeon-holing of assemblages/localities to one or another culture has often been done mechanically, without in-depth analysis. The attempt to define borders leads to the division of culturally joined spaces. Questions (Fragestellung) and methods of the culture-historic paradigm frequently remain inherent in the primary data, which is analysed through the new procedures and complemented with modern scientific topics. We do not consider the term "archaeological culture" problematic in and of itself. We do, however, have an issue with the use of this concept, where instead of an abstract model, which "archaeological culture" is, we create out of an "archaeological culture", genuinely existing entity.*

*KEY WORDS: Central European Archaeology – Archaeological culture – Ideology – Space – Imaginary entity – Empirical approach*

Central European Archaeology uses the term culture lightly. There are very few lectures, texts and formulae where the term culture does not appear. The term "culture" is perceived as ostensibly neutral (Sommer 2007: 62–63, 67). Just as the meaning of the term culture varies between the individual humanities, so it is variously understood and used in differing archaeological approaches. J.-C. Gardin, in 1989, demonstrated how "local knowledge" affects

archaeological interpretation. There are two basic possible approaches to the interpretation, not only in archaeology, but also in the humanities. The first is a hermeneutic approach, "the allegiance of a particular scientific community at a particular time to some specific theory and the inferences which constitute its key features e.g. Hodder" (Gardin 1989: 121). The second approach is empirical "down-to-earth mechanisms of validation of the type, which have been accepted for

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several centuries in the natural sciences" (Gardin 1989: 121).

In recent decades, often going outside the borders of the discipline, great attention was given by archaeologists to "culture in the sense of identity/social identity" (concludes Hofmann 2012: 13–15, Květina 2010: 651–653, basic Shennan 1989, Sommer 2007: 68–71). These studies concluded that "archaeological cultures" as models of human life in specific time and space, which stem from scientific and social values in the time of their definition, are gradually being abandoned. Their aims can be connected especially to the first hermeneutical approach. Among other reasons because in the empirical approach of Western European Archaeology from the end of the 60s, there is a regular criticism of the model of the "archaeological culture" pointing to the possibilities of new analytic tools (for example statistical methods) for the processing of the archaeological data (especially Clarke 1978: 247, Neustupný 2007: 124–144).

The process of the liberation of the culture scheme proceeds in Central European Archaeology with some delay. For example, I will recall, what outrage was provoked in the beginning of 80s, by the thesis of Boguslaw Gediga that the Lusatian Culture is not uniformly distributed throughout the entire territory (Gediga 1983: 159–174). The term "archaeological culture" is addressed in connection with historical influences on the research in the central European area (concludes Gramsch 2011: 49–57, Květina 2010: 633, currently Krekovič-Bača in this edition). Less often do we find in the central European space work, which addresses the issue of using systems of culture (Furholt, Stockhammer 2008, Neustupný 2010: 282–286, Sommer 2007: 59–67, and other literature here). Such considerations, however, had little impact on archaeological practise (Sommer 2007: 64).

The preference of new scientific themes (the hermeneutical approach) in the field then distracts from the original concept of the "archaeological culture". But questions (*Fragestellung*) and methods of the culture-historical paradigm frequently remain inherent in the primary data, which is analysed through the new procedures and complemented with modern scientific topics.

My intention is to point out some problematic methodological points in culture-historical archaeology, which are associated with the concept of "archaeological culture", which despite the criticism in the western world, still remain embedded in the central European world.

My argument is made of three points:

- Ideology, construction and deconstruction of "archaeological culture".
- Division into cultures – by space.
- Division into cultures – by archaeological material.

## IDEOLOGY, CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURE

In my first argument I would like to recall – from the example of the pre-Lusatian Culture (*Vorlausitzer Kultur*) – the situation when the original ideological intent overlapped with the chronological and typological construction so tightly that even though the original ideological arguments lost their validity, the allocated "archaeological culture" remained in force for a long time. The reason for bringing this culture to life was the hypothesis about the Slavic-ness of the Lusatian Culture enforced by J. Kostrzewski (Krukowski–Kostrzewski–Jakimowicz 1939, Kostrzewski 1949).

After World War II in response to the Nazi effort to prove the historical claims for the occupied territories there was the same effort in Poland and Czechoslovakia too. They are supported not only by the extensive research of the Slavic strongholds including the pursuit of the beginning of the Lusatian Culture, which is considered to be pre-Slavic. Continuously, the previous Pre-Lusatian Culture was as a result dated to the earliest period of the Middle Bronze Age (Dohnal 1974, Nekvasil 1987, Spurný 1972, 1978, 1982).

In Moravia, the proof of this development used typological analyses showing strong similarities of the findings from the Middle and Late Bronze Age and especially hilltop site – Hradisko u Kroměříže where the sequence of Early Bronze, Middle Bronze Age, and then Early Lusatian Culture appeared (Spurný 1954, 1956). A similar if clearer picture is presented by the research into the Svitávka-Hradisko area (Štrof 1990, 1993: 312).

Only with new extensive research, from the 90s, of the flatland settlements of the Tumulus Culture it was unequivocally shown that the classical phase of Tumulus Culture of the Middle Bronze Age was not represented in the hilltop sites and settlements considered as pre-Lusatian Culture are actually mixed stratigraphies. So, despite there being no role for Slavic-ness in the Lusatian Culture, it was necessary to deconstruct culture typological scheme which lived its own life and show that in Moravia there is no appearance of the Urnfields

cemeteries in the Middle Bronze Age, but in the Late Bronze Age (Šabatová 2006: 113, 2007, Štrof 1993: 310).

In this example I want to show, that well-constructed typological-chronological schemes, supported by several prominent researchers, become very stable entities.

## DIVISION INTO CULTURES – BY SPACE

What in culture-historical archaeology still remains a hot topic, is the use of the archaeological term, "culture" as a real existing analytical entity with clearly given geographical limitation (cf. Sommer 2007: 63).

D. L Clarke at the end of the 1960s showed that the closest of the polythetic nature of the cultural assemblage is the polythetic theory: "...the individual distributions of the specific artefact-types from one culture extend in irregular lobes in various differing directions, many types also occurring as components in other cultural assemblages in neighbouring areas, and vice versa. ... The boundaries of this culture area only occasionally coincide with the boundaries of any specific artefact type or group of artefact types" (Clarke 1978: 265, Fig. 67). The determination of a culture's border in geographic space is problematic as is also the case in living societies; the anthropologists contest the idea of a geographic space as a mosaic of clearly differentiated cultures (Května 2010: 632, Sommer 2007: 60).

In the context of "archaeological culture", the solution is sometimes to use geographical features. But, in spaces where no geographical features exist, we often find nominal boundaries based on national borders. I present some examples where it is clear that this is for convenience in drawing maps, and in the ones there is still a problem of the merging of different "national" chronology and geographical terms too (Figure 1).

The fact that the borders between cultures are often irrelevant is well known to many archeologists in Central Europe and they are trying to remove them. A great work towards was this was done for example in the Urnfield Culture J. Říhovský, "The division into individual types is mainly due to modern political divisions of the Middle Danube Urnfield region... that is... undoubtedly one culture" (Říhovský 1958: 115). A good observation in this is the effort to unify the terminology of finds (e.g. A. Štrof unified the terminology for ceramics from the Lusatian Urnfield and Middle Danube Urnfield region, Štrof 1995: 86).

While certainly each of these situations can be argued, specific errors in the representation of the culture range, the state of the research in the region; or a difference in the terminology used, it is obvious, that there is an attempt to taxonomically define borders.

It is only significant that only rarely do we come across a broader expression of the culture transition (defining of the territory with mixed culture or culturally non-specific). It is usually marked by an independent culture type (Hurbanovo type, Zvolen group of Urnfield Culture).

A new dimension in the discussion is brought by the systematic work of D. Parma in central Moravia, which it was shown, that settlements and currently existing burial sites may point to, on the basis of materials, other "cultural" nationalities (Parma 2012: 223–230). This takes us back to the basic definition of culture, which should be defined on the basis of most of the material spheres of cultural activity (Clarke 1978: 246).

In this argument I specifically want to show that the attempt to define borders can lead to the division of culturally joined spaces.

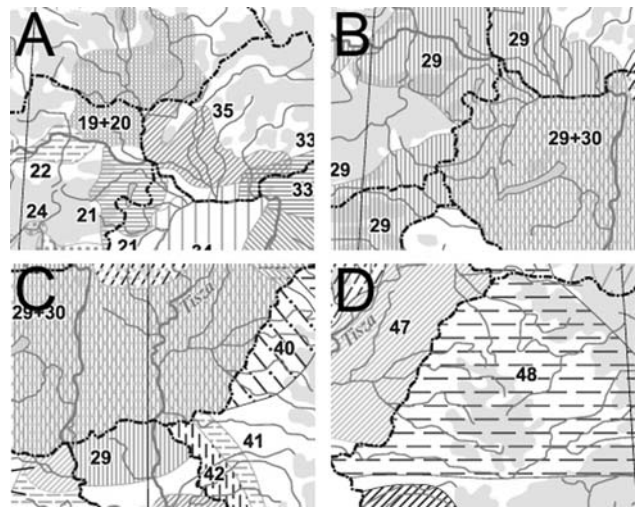


FIGURE 1. A, border between Moravia and Slovakia. Division into Věteřov group (19+20) and Maďarovce culture (35). B, border between Slovakia and Hungary. Division into Tumulus Culture (29) and Tumulus Culture with Kosider horizon (29+30). C, border between Hungary and Romania. Division into Tumulus Culture with Kosider horizon (29+30) and Igrîța Culture (40) and others. D, border between Hungary and Romania. Division into Gava (47) and Suci de Sus Culture (48) (Buchvaldek *et al.* 2007: Taf. 20a, 21a, 22a).

## **DIVISION INTO CULTURES – BY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL (Archaeological culture is like a medical diagnosis)**

If the material is determined as an "archaeological culture", it is treated as a rule from the position of the knowledge of this culture. In a slightly different way, D. L. Clarke states that "archaeological culture" concept is high-level predictive category (Clarke 1978: 247), specifically it can be seen that:

- Inclusion in the "archaeological culture" leads to the limitation of the questions on topics connected with this culture.
- Designated occurrence of the "archaeological cultures" in the site leads to the fact that we process features in accordance with the allocated cultures, not addressing their intersection and mutual coupling.

The issue remains preliminary a culture designation which precedes the processing of the material. The situation in this respect is worse in settlement archaeology. In the processing of burial sites this is easier. Graves are usually closed finds, classification into "archaeological cultures" is usually more accurate and during the processing of cemeteries, we are usually able to overlook the primary culture inclusion.

First example: In the area of the settlement, there were identified two successive cultures with possible time overlap. If the intent is to process their relationship, it should be independently designated together (typologically and in terms of fragmentation), analytically determine their relationships or culture differences. And not the first determination on the basis of the typochronology and then subsequently compare with the help of statistical methods.

Second example: In the settlement objects there is the material of two contemporary cultures one of them has different geographic distribution, the contents of the object should be processed together not independently. It may sound obvious but it is quite normal that the processing is focused on specialised ceramic class (especially luxurious or "imported"), but finally we do not have an overview on overall fragmentation and therefore on the creation of the contents and origin of the layers.

The selection of the part of the material for processing can be always problematic. Even in the processing of the selection artefacts the author should be familiar with the complex. This is certainly true in the case of a known well from Gánovce where the originally accepted, unequivocally oldest finding of the iron – sickle from the time of the Ottoman culture was

undermined due to the possible presence of finds from the Iron Age in the object (Benkovský-Pivovarová 2002).

If we can only date individual items, it is never possible to exclude their presence especially in a younger context. This is true for grave units as well, in which metal or ceramic items can appear from a generation before or even older (Nekvasil 1982: Tab. 182:1–2, Šabatová 2007: 209).

Ideally, there should be an object even though there is material present from more cultures, processed together. Only in case of fully procession of the material, can we try to find out in which connection of the part the object was created and which part is intrusive or residual.

Third example: This example reflects on some of the other arguments above. One possible confusion, where a culture is defined by the way in which "the products of segments or classes of societies have been elevated to full cultural status" (Clarke 1978: 248). It is problematic in this way, i.e. the Čaka Culture is characterised mostly by rich finds from burial mounds of the elite, but after their extinction they are consequently considered as part of the cultural of the Middle Danube Urnfield Culture.

With these examples, I wanted to show that the culture determination as such divides also in the situation when it is necessary to evaluate comprehensively. It is possible to say that these are banal examples, but they are banal because these situations have already been addressed and those that are not banal we have not yet been able to distinguish.

## **IT'S NOT CULTURE'S FAULT**

Central European archaeologists are trained to look at the work of the predecessors with great respect (cf. Gramsch 2011: 49). Doubts about something as stable in nomenclature as "archaeological cultures" is often rejected because there is no reason to destroy the concept of Culture, there are useful information contained within them. But it is necessary to think about where the data ends and where interpretation begins.

At the time when there was no possibility to work with large data files, the culture designation and division of the file into minor units was an effective analytical tool which allowed us to handle a huge amount of material by using an empirical culturally typological method.

Today it is not necessary to use auxiliary culture divisions as the analytical tool. The processing of the traits should precede methodical cultural destination. The reverse process is what discredits the material-oriented approach, which is in the eyes of the part of professional public unscientific.

The handling of the material has sense for archaeology. It is necessary to avoid primary mistakes, primary assumptions of the existence of real units to the material. Even the archaeologist of the culture-historical paradigm refute this assumption, the key is hidden in the method. The empirical method does not mean thoughtless criticism. On the contrary, we are charged with having the clearest approach to data. We must carefully think over which data and which approach our predecessors and their predecessors used to create the concept of culture.

"Archaeological culture" itself is an abstracted model. And determination of the "archaeological culture" should not be the first word of our study, but when, then its last word.

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Klára Šabatová  
Department of Archaeology and Museology  
Faculty of Arts  
Masaryk University  
Arna Nováka 1  
602 00 Brno  
Czech Republic  
E-mail: [sabatova@phil.muni.cz](mailto:sabatova@phil.muni.cz)