

The Early Medieval Site of Roztoky: A Puzzle in the Vltava Valley, Bohemia

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Summary

The early medieval settlement in Roztoky in Bohemia is an exceptional case among the sites of the Prague-type culture (henceforth PTC). It does not differ from other sites of the same period in Czechia and Central Europe in terms of the features found, however, but rather in their extraordinary number, mainly consisting of hundreds of typical PTC sunken houses. A remarkable feature of the site is also its landscape setting confined to a narrow strip of land on the bottom of a relatively deep valley of the Vltava river. Part of the site, at the point where the valley widens, has been continuously inhabited throughout prehistory, but the highest concentration of PTC features oc-

curs in another part of the site, a relatively detached corner of the gorge, less accessible in terms of communication and (therefore) mostly uninhabited in other periods. The PTC settlement was first discovered by rescue excavation in 1980–1983 and subsequently investigated by further fieldworks up to 2010. So far, the processing of the finds has led to the publication of extensive reference sets of artefacts and ecofacts, but a clear answer to the question of what caused such a large concentration of population in the given place is still being sought.

Keywords: Early Middle Ages, Prague-Korchak culture, Bohemia, settlement agglomeration, pit house

1. Introduction

Roztoky,¹ a small satellite town on the northern outskirts of Prague, is a place connected with the beginnings of Czech archaeology. In the second half of the 19th century, several important archaeological sites were discovered in its territory or its immediate vicinity including, for example, the Řivnáč hilltop settlement (the eponymous site of the Middle Eneolithic period in Bohemia), the Únětice cemetery (eponymous for the Aunjetitzer culture of the Early Bronze Age), or the hillfort of Levý Hradec, one of the main centres of the early medieval Czech state. Since these early days of archaeology, the area of Roztoky has continued to be intensively monitored archaeologically and today it belongs to the best-known parts of Bohemia. However, one of the large and rich sites in this territory, the settlement of the Prague-type culture (PTC, currently dating to the last third of the 6th century and to the 7th century AD), coincidentally escaped attention for a long time, although a railway, a road, and residential structures were built over it as early as the 19th century.

The first finds from this PTC site were brought to light only by the rescue excavations during the construction of railway electrification facilities and a water pipeline in 1980–1983 (Martin KUNA, Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, henceforth IAP). Part of this area was already known as an archaeological site,² but only due to its prehistoric finds. During that four-year period, intensive rescue fieldwork was carried out in various parts of the site, and it soon became clear that (among other finds) an extremely large settlement agglomeration of the PTC had been discovered. The first rescue work was followed by several campaigns of research excavations (Martin GOJDA, IAP, 1984–1989) and later, by a smaller rescue campaign by Nad'a PROFANTOVÁ (IAP) in 2001.³ All excavation results from the 1980s, which recorded a total of 122 sunken houses and dozens of other PTC features, have already been published.⁴

The second large-scale fieldwork campaign was connected with the rescue excavation of the IAP in the course of road relocation in 2006–2010 (Martin KUNA). This new fieldwork drew on experience from previous campaigns, but the large number of new finds was still surprising. An

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² SANKOT 1991.

³ PROFANTOVÁ 2005.

⁴ KUNA et al. 2005.

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Figure credits

- Fig. 1: Martin GOJDA (Institute of Archaeology CAS, Prague)
Fig. 2: Táňa HRUBÁ (Czech Technical University in Prague) and Martin KUNA
Fig. 3–7, 9: Martin KUNA
Fig. 8: Photo Martin KUNA; Computer tomography St. Anne's University Hospital in Brno
Fig. 10–12: J. GLOC, 2019
Fig. 13: Lenka KOVAČIKOVÁ in KUNA et al. 2013

Die frühmittelalterliche Siedlung von Roztoky: Ein Puzzle im Moldautal, Böhmen

Die frühmittelalterliche Siedlung in Roztoky stellt einen Ausnahmefall unter den Fundstellen der Prager-Typus-Kultur (PTC, auch Prag-Kortschak-Kultur) dar. Sie unterscheidet sich jedoch nicht in der Charakteristik der Funde von anderen gleichdatierenden Fundstellen in Tschechien und Mitteleuropa, sondern in ihrer außergewöhnlichen Zahl, nämlich Hunderten, an typischen PTC-Grubenhäusern. Bemerkenswert ist auch die Lage der Siedlung, die sich auf einen schmalen Landstreifen auf der Sohle eines relativ tiefen Tals der Moldau beschränkt. Ein Teil des Geländes an der Stelle, wo sich das Tal erweitert, war seit prähistorischer Zeiten durchgehend bewohnt, aber die höchste Konzentration der PTC-Befunde findet sich in

einem anderen Teil der Fundstelle, in einer relativ abgelegenen Ecke der Schlucht, die in anderen Perioden meist unbewohnt war. Die PTC-Siedlung wurde 1980–1983 erstmals durch Rettungsgrabungen entdeckt und in Folge bis 2010 durch weitere Ausgrabungen untersucht. Bisher resultierte die Aufarbeitung der Funde in zahlreichen Publikationen, jedoch eine klare Antwort auf die Frage, was eine so hohe Bevölkerungsdichte an diesem Ort verursacht hat, wird noch gesucht.

Schlagnote: Frühmittelalter, Prag-Kortschak-Kultur, Böhmen, Siedlungsagglomeration, frühmittelalterliches Haus

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