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PRAGUE-TYPE CULTURE HOUSES. ASPECTS OF FORM, FUNCTION AND MEANING

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An exceptionally large Prague-type culture (6th-7th centuries AD) site in Roztoky, Czech Republic, provided a rich assemblage of dwellings from the given period. Over 300 sunken houses were (in part or entirely) excavated. Although the soil conditions at the site did not permit the preservation of wooden structures, the evidence on other aspects of house construction, e.g. stone ovens and patterns of post holes in the house interior, is abundant. Recent excavations (2006-2010) also produced an enormous amount of ecofacts and soil samples that are currently being processed. With the use of them, geoarchaeological research makes it possible to model the way the houses were used, abandoned and destroyed, information that impacts our understanding of settlement behaviour at the site.

Keywords: Early Middle Ages – Prague-type culture – Bohemia – Roztoky site – houses – stone oven – building tradition and symbolism – house abandonment and taphonomy

Introduction

In most of Central Europe, finds from the second half of the 6th century and the first two thirds of the 7th century AD are identified, on the basis of a characteristic vessel type, as the Prague-type culture (hereinafter PTC, also Prague-Korchak culture) and traditionally tied to the appearance of the first Slavs in Central Europe. While discussions on the ethnical meaning of the PTC is still ongoing (Curta 2008; Profantova 2009, 2011a), the significant homogeneity of the archaeological culture on the broad territory from Central Europe to the western part of Ukraine cannot be denied.

Houses are undoubtedly one of the most distinct elements of this culture: they are single-room semi-sunken huts with a characteristic square shape and a stone oven situated in one of the corners of the room (Baran 1988; Parczewski 1993; Fusek 1994; Cygan 2006). Although this type of house emerged and spread as an element of PTC, its connection with other elements of this specific culture is not absolute. For example, there are areas with culture related to PTC, though without the typical semi-sunken houses (e.g. the greater part of Poland: Zeman 1976, 1979; Parczewski 1993), or with

Fig. 1. Roztoky, (Prague-West district, Czech Republic). ABOVE: Aerial view of the rescue archaeological excavation during the road construction in 2006. A trench approximately 30 m wide and over 1.5 km long was dug along the course of the road in 2006-2010. Photo by M. Gojda (IA Prague). BELOW: 3D model of the site relief, view from nearly the same angle as the aerial shot. The site model shows the hypothetical distribution of houses in a time section during the Early Medieval occupation. Dissertation work by T. Hrubá (Czech Technical University in Prague, 2008).



these houses but without certain other characteristic features (e.g. clay ovens instead of the stone ones in the Danube River valley and in the southern part of western Ukraine: Rappoport 1975; Dolinescu – Constantiniu 1981; Dolinescu-Ferche 1984, 1986). Some of the characteristics of the PTC dwelling are often explained by the geographic nature of the forest-steppe zone of western Ukraine, where this specific semi-sunken hut is thought to have originated (Baran 1988; Parczewski 1993; Donat 1980); similar dwellings were maintained in the given regions until recently. However, the specific qualities of these structures cannot be explained only by adaptation, as more types of dwellings existed in this area during the first half of the first millennium AD (Przeworsk, Zarubintsy and Chernyakhov cultures) and the dwelling form of the emerging PTC did not appear until the 5th century AD.

PTC dwellings in the Czech Republic have received attention, for example, in the publication of the site of Březno (NW Bohemia) and of the house-building experiments carried out there (Pleinerová 1975, 1986, 2000). Larger sets of PTC dwellings come also from sites in western Ukraine (Rashkov, Korchak, Kodyn), the central Elbe River valley (Dessau-Mosigkau) and the Carpathian basin (Dunaújváros – though according to the traditional interpretation, an Avar context is involved in this case). The Rashkov site features two large PTC settlements on the banks of the Dniester

River, one of which has been partially studied (Rashkov II, 14 houses), and the other studied in full (Rashkov III, 91 houses: Baran 1988). The well-known Korchak site in the valley of the Teteriv River features 14 more or less contemporaneous sites with a total of several dozen (hundred?) houses; however, only some of these have been studied to date (Korchak I, VII, IX: Rusanova 1973). Kodyn in the Prut River valley is a pair of sites with a total of 76 houses (Rusanova – Timoščuk 1984); the Dessau-Mosigkau site features 44 houses (Krüger 1967), and the Dunaújváros site 37 houses (Bóna 1973). Important, albeit smaller, assemblages of houses are also located elsewhere, including Břeclav-Pohansko in Moravia (Dostál 1985) and several sites in Rumanian Wallachia (Dolinescu-Ferche 1984, 1986, 1992). Theoretical works with extensive listings by P. A. Rappoport (1975) and P. Donat (1980) are also important for the study of construction methods of the PTC houses.

The site of Roztoky

The site in Roztoky (Prague-West district, Czech Republic) is located at the northern edge of Prague, Central Bohemia. According to our knowledge and to published sources, this site is currently the largest of its kind in Bohemia and in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. The site covers a narrow 1.5 km strip of land at the base of the canyon-like valley of the Vltava River (Fig. 1). Early Medieval finds were discovered at the site during rescue archaeological excavations in 1980-89 (Kuna – Profantová 2005), 2001 (Profantová 2005) and 2006-2010 (Kuna – Lisá – Novák 2010; Kuna 2011; Profantová – Kuna in print); a total of 5.2 ha (ca. 25%) of the site has been excavated to date.

Although there was continual settlement at the site from prehistoric times up to the Early Modern period, with the exception of the 6th-7th centuries, only small settlements existed at the mouth of the Únětice Stream in the northernmost part of the site. Only during the PTC period was the nature of settlement completely different: the settlement occupied every available space on the floor of the valley – i.e. an area of over 22 ha; the epicentre of the settlement was in the southern part of the site (Fig 1). Excavations conducted thus far have uncovered 323 houses of the PTC in this area, and on the basis of extrapolation the total number at the site can be estimated at 750-1000 (according to different methods employed; Fig 2). This image is at odds with

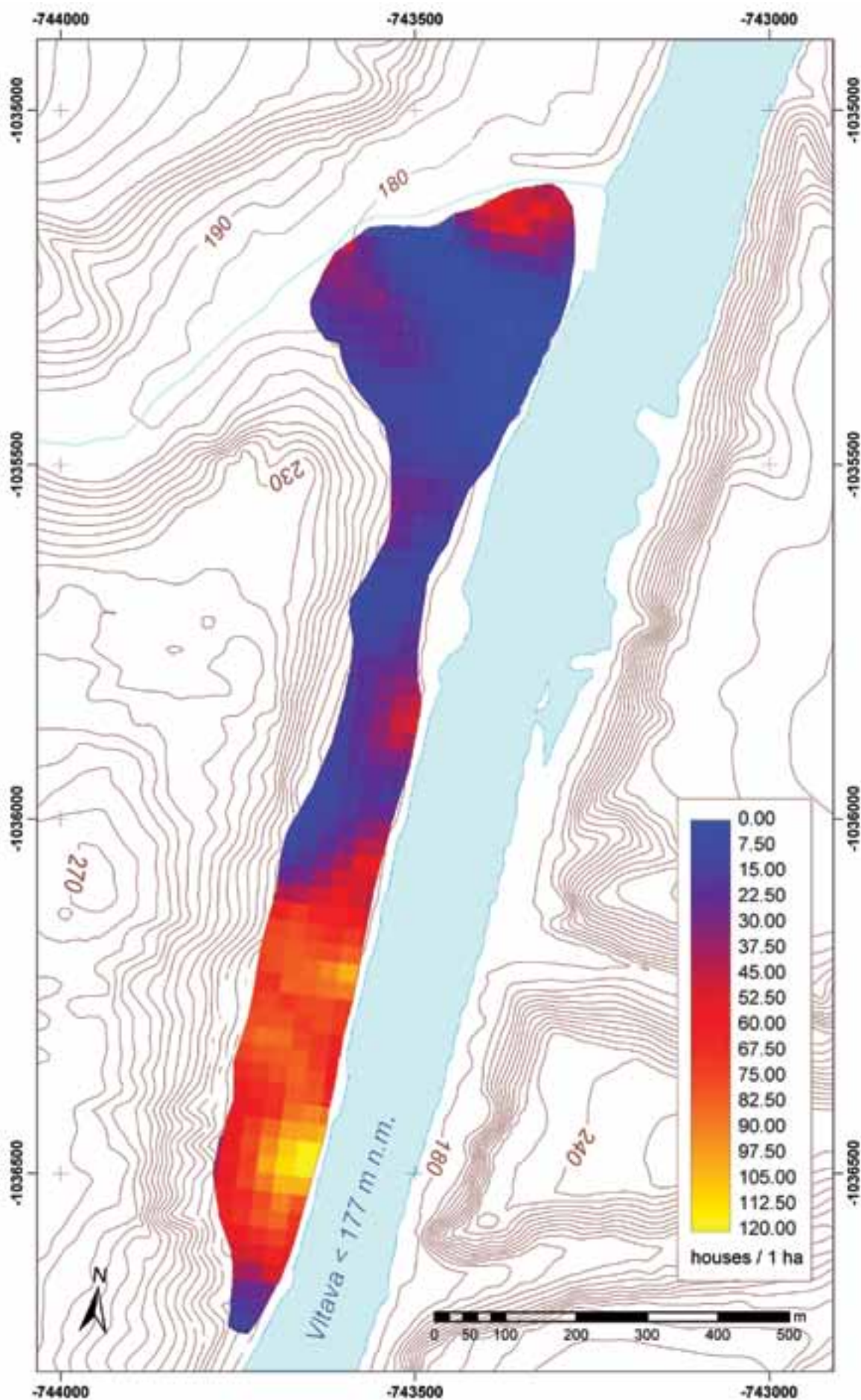


Fig. 2. Roztoky, the Early Medieval site with an estimate of PTC house density, calculated by extrapolation from the evidence in excavated areas. As a whole, the site covers 22.7 ha, the density of PTC houses in some parts reaches over 100 houses per 1 ha. New estimates (presented here for the first time) suggest a total number of 750-1000 houses at the site; estimates based on excavations in 1980-89 (Kuna 2001; Kuna - Profantová 2005) were somewhat lower (500-600 houses). Compiled by M. Kuna.

Fig. 3. Roztoky. House 1444 (excavations in 2006). 1 – Stone (mainly local wacke); 2 – the fired bottom of the firebox; 3 – post holes. The cross-section captures characteristic layers P, C and B (not G, see text).

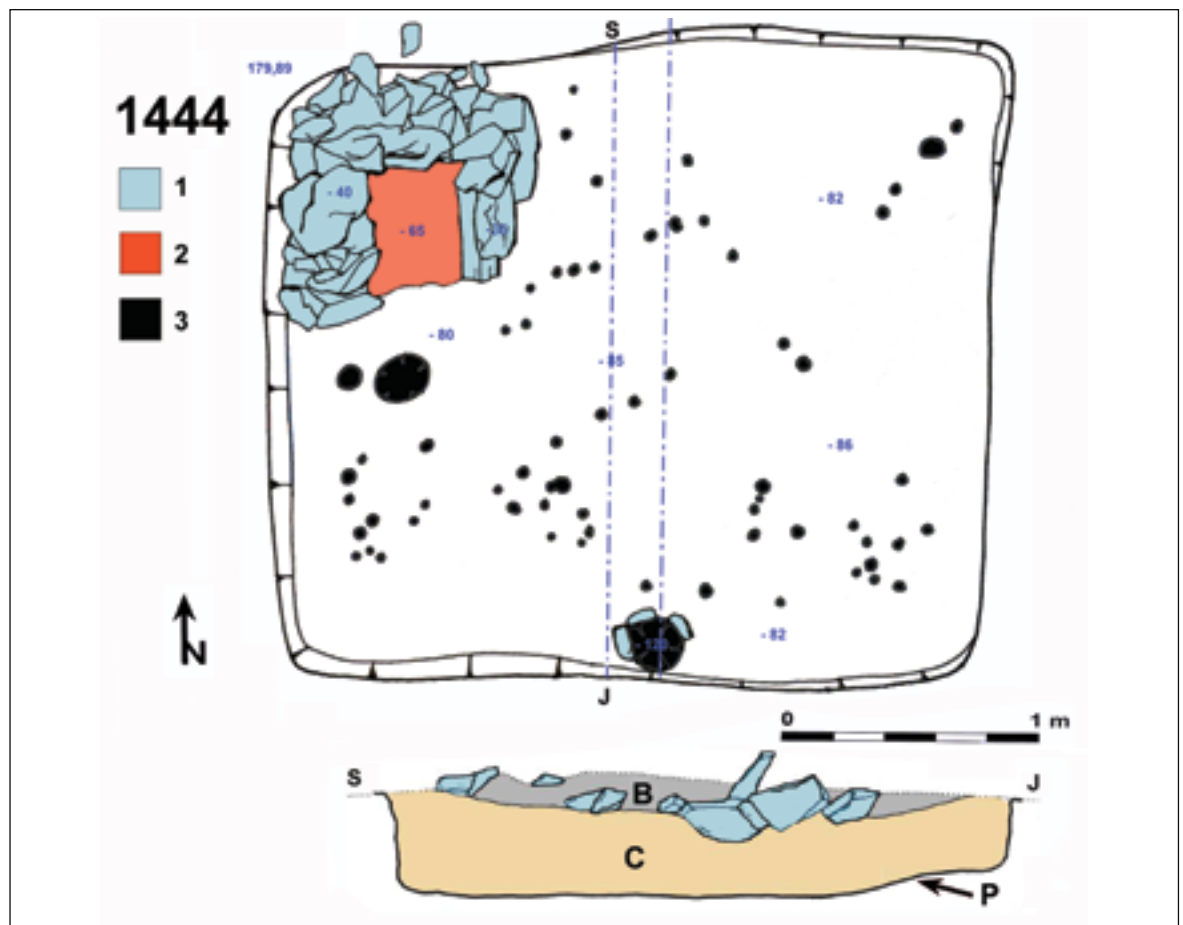


Fig. 4: Roztoky, house 926 (excavations in 1983). I – Ground plan of the house after excavation; II – the core of the oven; III – front view of the oven before dismantling; IV – side view of the oven from north. A – Hole for the main post supporting the roof; B – vessel sunk into the floor by the oven; C – post holes for drying equipment in front of the oven; D – post holes from the house furnishings; E – layer of charcoal swept from the oven and crushed into the floor.

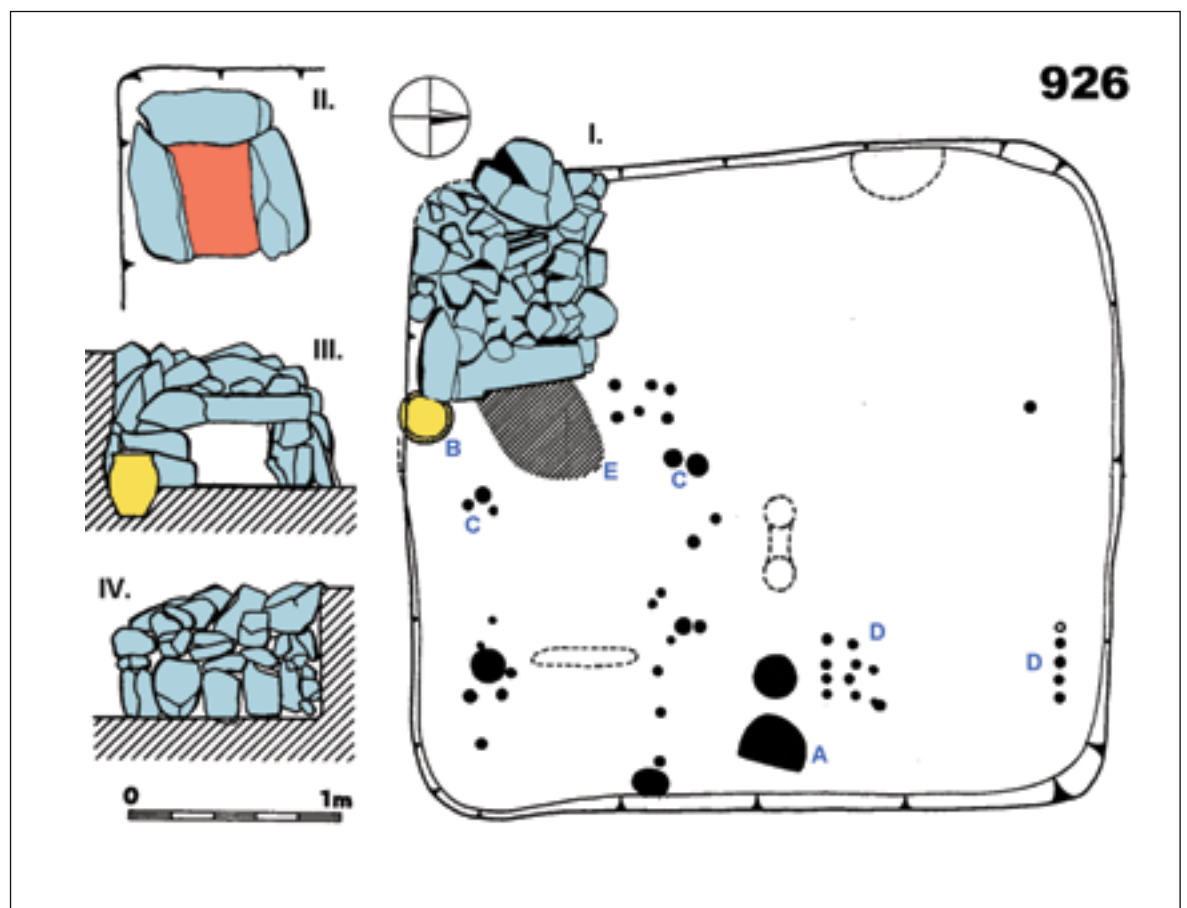




Fig. 5: Roztoky, House 1113 (excavations in 2006) after cleaning of the oven and preparation of the floor. Arrows indicate the mortise in the floor left hypothetically by vertical planks covering the wall. Photo by M. Kuna.

everything previously known about PTC: only ten of the 160 known sites in Bohemia feature more than three houses, none more than ten dwellings (cf. Kuna – Profantová 2005). Apart from the puzzle which the enormous concentration of dwellings represents, the site provides a lot of material to learn about the architecture in the given period.

Wooden structures

The Early Medieval houses in Roztoky are typically sunken 10-100 cm into the ground, seldom deeper (hence the preference for the expression “semi-sunken huts”). Since the original Early Medieval terrain surface has never been captured at the site, it is, however, not possible to determine the precise original depth of the dwellings. The houses are relatively small, with a floor space between 4 and 17 m²; the most common floor area is in the range of 9-12 m². The occurrence of large houses (15-16 m²) is rare, but any attempts to establish their connection with a special function or the social status of their inhabitants have been unsuccessful to date.

Though the ground plan of the sunken space was approximately square, the shape was typically not a pre-

cise square but rather a rectangle with a side ratio of 1.1. Small yet visible differences in the length of the sides were probably not accidental, since it always was at the longer side where the support post for the roof ridge (in our term “the main post”, “Firstsäule” according to Pleinerová 2000) was located. Therefore, the axis of the gabled roof must have been perpendicular to the longer wall of the sunken space (this rule was valid in Roztoky, not necessarily at other sites).

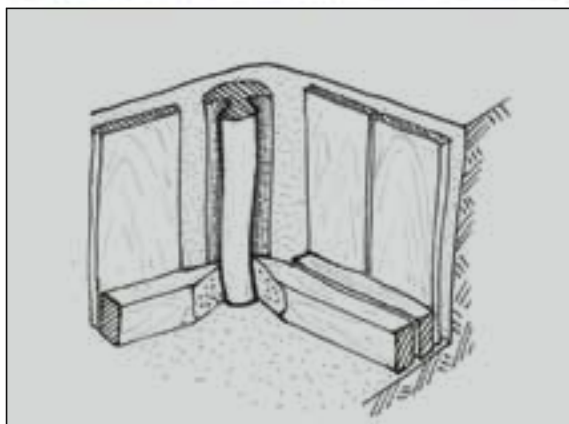
The main post was a key element in the house structure (Kuna – Profantová 2005). The second support post (assumed to have been located on the opposite wall) was typically missing in Roztoky (Fig. 3, 4:A). It is therefore likely that Early Medieval dwellings in Roztoky were not originally composed of just a sunken part; instead, the support post was located outside it, on the level of the original terrain, creating thus probably a kind of elevated bench used for sleeping or storage.

It would be highly beneficial to identify the entrances to the houses in order to learn about their inner structure and the structure of the entire settlement. Unfortunately, very little information was gathered to help elucidate this matter.

Fig. 6: Čáslav, Czech Republic. Photograph and a reconstruction drawing of wooden wall construction in a Medieval sunken house (cellar), 13th cent.



Fig. 7: Roztoky. Stone ovens in PTC houses. A – House 1434, oven after cleaning; the oven's orientation toward the centre of the house is rare. B – House 1351, oven after the removal of destroyed parts; the vault in the rear part of the oven is highly visible. Photo by M. Kuna.



It is unlikely that the walls of the sunken part of the PTC houses were not reinforced somehow, since the subsoil in Roztoky is composed of relatively loose silty sand. A wattle construction is not likely, since lines of smaller posts along the walls were not discovered inside the sunken space. The most likely explanation is therefore some type of log construction; the greatest support in the data is found for walls composed of vertical planks held to the walls by a plank set in a mortise in vertical posts in the corners (sunk into the floor or resting on the floor in a frame). Corner posts were seldom found in the houses in Roztoky, lending greater credence to the second variation. And yet, clear evidence of this structure is however missing. Only a few cases of mortises or impressions in the house floor along the walls are known; their sometimes irregular shape might suggest the insertion of vertical planks (feature 1113, Fig. 5). Though dating to a later period, a precise analogy of this type of structure is known from Bohemia (Čáslav, 13th century: Tomášek – Šanderová 2011). Log structures from the PTC period are documented in the territory north of the Carpathian Mts, where the wood has partially survived in some of the locations (for example Kraków – Nowa Huta 1, Žukovice 1: Cygan 2006, Tab. V, VIII). Similar finds also come from Ukraine, where only the mortises for timbers embed-

ded in the corner posts have been more often preserved (Bernašivka; Kodyn I, house 13; Goreča, house 21), as are crossed timbers in the corner (Rashkov III, house 45: Baran 1988).

Knowledge of splitting tree trunks is documented in PTC in the form of the repeated occurrence of halved trunks (“semi-columns”) used as roof supports (e.g. Figure 4:A). If the main post was set close to the wall of the house, it was probably incorporated into the wall itself; if the post was located away from the wall, the distance is approximately the width of a horizontal beam. Although flotation produced over 100,000 charcoal fragments, there is yet little direct evidence of the species used to build the houses (these finds are only being analyzed). Preliminarily, it seems that the building material was mainly fir, which is rather surprising given that this species was certainly not frequent in the given type of environment; hence, the transport of wood from a greater distance must be assumed.

Stone ovens

The most distinct element of the house interior in PTC houses is the hearth – a stone oven. The stone oven is always situated in the corner of the room, in most cases taking up the entire corner of the dwelling.

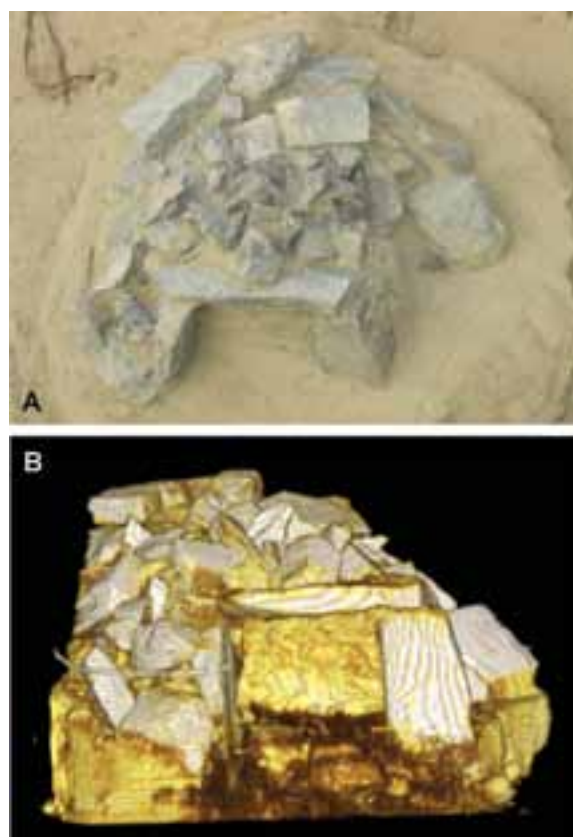


Fig. 8: Roztoky. Miniature ritual oven in house 1206 (excavations in 2006). A – View of the oven during excavations (photo by M. Kuna); B – Computer tomography image (produced in St Anne Hospital in Brno) after the removal of the oven from the site.



Fig. 9: Roztoky. Section view of a post hole in the floor of house 1991 following the removal of loose fill. The image shows the thin, compacted layers on the bottom and sides of the hole resulting from repeated insertion and movement of the post in the hole. Photo by M. Kuna.

Only in rare cases were the ovens built away from the wall, perhaps to leave some room behind the oven for the log wall. The oven remains in Roztoky were approximately square with sides of 100-150 cm; the shape of the actual firebox was rectangular and featured internal dimensions of 60×40 cm. The oven was almost always made from large blocks of stone, perhaps the result of having an adequate supply of raw materials directly on a site surrounded by a canyon-like slope with outcrops of local metamorphic rock (wacke).

Around 300-500 kg of stone was needed for a single oven, and the largest stone blocks could have weighed up to 100 kg. The way the ovens were built has been learned only recently. The core was mostly composed of flat blocks standing on their thinner side – these lined the right-angled firebox (Fig. 4:II). A horizontal lintel lay across the front of the firebox; behind the lintel the oven was vaulted (Fig. 4:III; 7). This type of oven was mainly suitable for heating, less so for cooking purposes. A miniature ritual oven analyzed by means of computer tomography had an identical form (Fig. 8). The absence of larger amounts of stone in some of the houses does not mean that a particular house did not have an oven; instead, it likely indicates that the stones were removed once the house was abandoned, and used elsewhere. In these cases the shape of the fired bottom of the firebox and imprints of the stones on the house

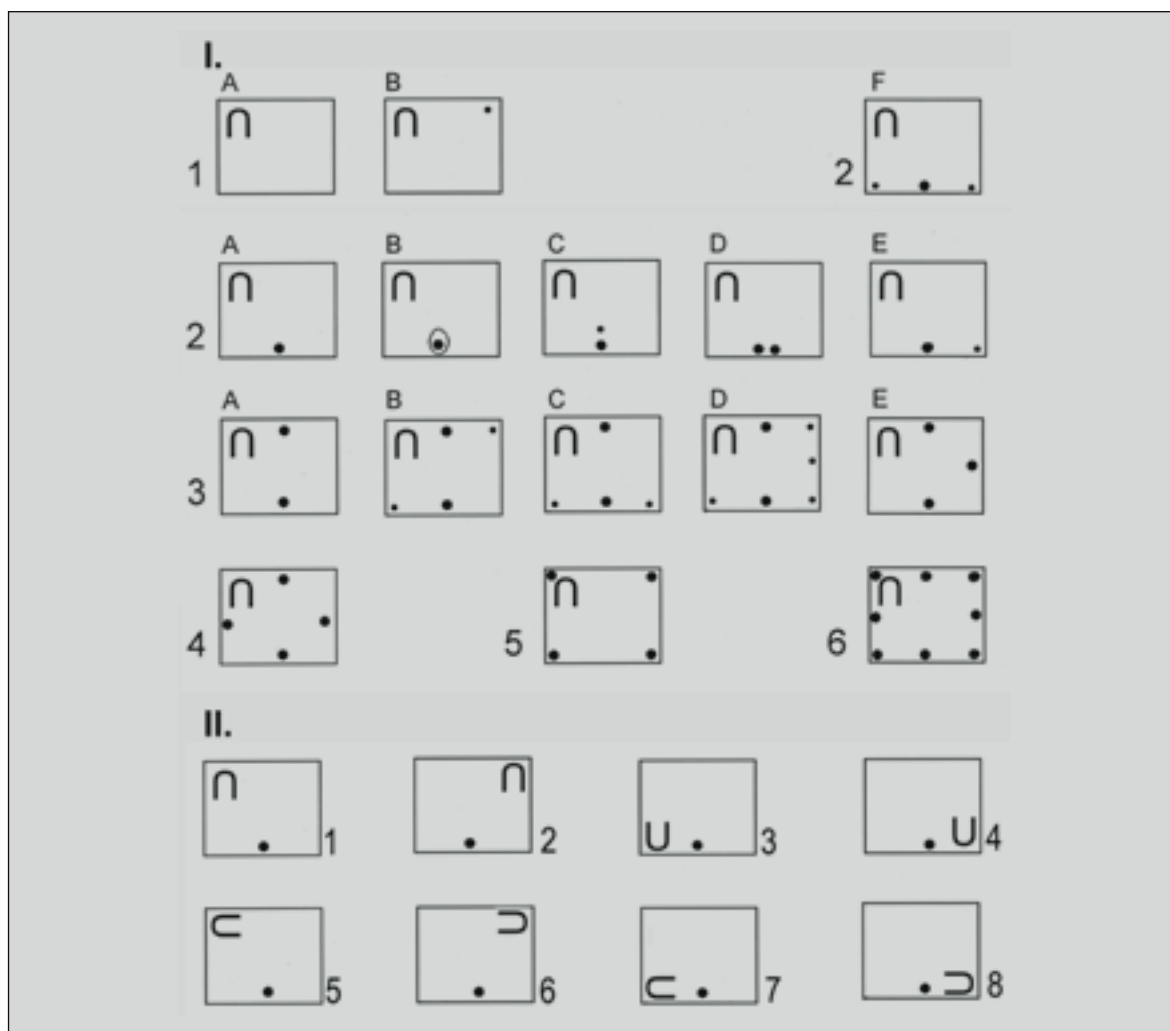
floor provide evidence of the original position and shape of the oven.

In several cases domed clay ovens were found in houses as a secondary heating device; these were typically embedded in the wall next to the stone oven. There were around five such discoveries in Roztoky, and their most likely use was to bake bread or other food. Similar ovens are known from other sites in Bohemia and elsewhere.

Hearthside features and small posts

Another relatively common feature of the house interior in Roztoky was a hearthside vessel sunk into the floor near the oven, either in the wall next to the firebox (Fig. 4:B; 4:III) or behind the oven. In several other cases there was just an empty hole instead of a vessel, or vessels were found on the floor, not sunken into it. The occurrence of hearthside vessels as a standard part of house interiors has not yet been recorded at PTC settlements. This element has been discovered only sporadically, for example at Rashkov II-III, Luka Kavetschinskaja (house 2: Vakulenko – Prichodnjuk 1985, photo 10), Goreča (houses 21 and 25), Kodyn II (house 12: Rusanova – Timoščuk 1984, 30) and elsewhere.

Fig. 10. I: Diagram of types and variations of post construction in PTC houses. II – The structure of the internal space of the PTC houses; theoretical combinations of the position of the main post and the oven. Compiled by M. Kuna.



A larger number of post holes of various diameters and depths commonly occur in the floor of the houses; most often these holes are quite small. The arrangement of these post holes is usually difficult to interpret. Their numbers can vary significantly from house to house, though it is not known if this is the result of differences in the use of the houses or the time duration of their occupation, the nature of the floor cover (e.g., wooden planks would not permit any small posts in the floor: Pleinerová 2000), the type of ground soil or even the method of excavation. Generally, there are few suggestions of any regularity in the arrangement of the small post holes.

The above statement has possibly one exception, namely a frequent pair of post holes in front of the oven. This arrangement usually consists of either a pair of medium-large holes or, more commonly, two clusters of post holes suggesting the repeated building of certain furnishings (Fig. 4:C). A significant feature of these groupings is the distance between the holes or clusters; with minor variations, this figure is always

around one metre. Naturally, the simplest explanation for the repeating distance is the standard dimensions of the actual oven, with which the given furnishings are likely connected both functionally and spatially. I. Pleinerová presents a similar pair of holes from Březno (2000, 195-196) and interprets them as the remains of drying equipment in front of the oven. This appears more likely than an interpretation as a chimney cowl. Two to three parallel rows of four to five small holes in the northeast sector of house 926 represent another grouping of small holes, which is in general quite rare (Fig. 4:D).

The latest information regarding the function of the houses is tied to the small post holes. It has become clear that the holes were not always filled with homogenous material but contain thin layers of compacted material that alternates with layers of ash and charcoal (apparently swept from the floor). This fact indicates that the post holes were not used only for attaching fixed furniture, but could have been used for anchoring mobile, removable equipment, the movement of which caused

the compaction of the walls of the holes (spinning, weaving). As such, the number of holes in the floors of the houses could have been connected with one of the significant functions of the sunken houses – textile production (in the winter).

Houses as meaningful artefacts

Some kind of symbolic behaviour of the PTC populations may be detected both in the way the houses were setup in the landscape and structured inside. Both aspects have been studied on the Roztoky materials – the results so far are mainly based on the earlier data (Kuna – Profantová 2005). The type of symbolism employed in the PTC architecture has yet to be specified (shared tradition vs. intentional communication?) but there is no doubt that much its formal variability is neither functional, nor random.

The majority of houses were built along the cardinal directions; cases in which they were turned clockwise or counter clockwise against the points of the compass were essentially rare. In Roztoky this orientation could have been the result of the particular landscape setting: the river at the site runs from south to north, and the orientation of the houses could have been adjusted accordingly. Evidence against this explanation may be found in Březno, where the river runs approximately SW-NE, and yet the houses are still mainly built along the cardinal points. In this respect PTC does not differ from Central European prehistoric cultures, whose generally strong relationship to the cardinal directions in the construction of dwellings and burial structures is well known. A general explanation is undoubtedly found on the symbolic level – the house is incorporated into a certain cosmological structure (Bajburin 1983).

Additional house features such as the placement of heating equipment are also tied to the significance of the cardinal directions. In Roztoky, 80% of the ovens are in the NW corner, 15% in the SW corner and around 5% in the NE corner. While the chronological significance of this variability has not yet been demonstrated, this feature will be further studied, with a potential to be explained as a marker for various groups of inhabitants or parts of the community.

The specific meaning of houses can also be well documented by their structural variations which obviously must have played role in maintaining the regional or local identity of their inhabitants. We know several variations of the post hole structure of the PTC houses (Fig.

10:I) – they obviously do not have functional but rather stylistic implications. It is significant that only one of the types usually predominates at each of the known sites where a larger assemblage of houses has been evidenced. For example, the leading type at Rashkov is that without any larger internal posts (type 1), type 2 with a single post is typical for Roztoky and Březno, type 3 with two opposing posts for Donaujváros, type 4 with four posts in the middle of the sides occurs at Dessau-Mosigkau, type 5 with posts in the corners is apparently the most common at Korchak and Kodyn (impossible to determine with complete certainty from available publications) and type 6 with eight posts in the corners and in the middle of walls is typical for Dessau-Mosigkau and occurs relatively often at Kodyn as well (Kuna – Profantová 2005, tab. 15, Fig. 26-27).

The spatial relationship between the oven and the main post also shows considerable regularity. In the dozens of houses at Roztoky where it was possible to determine both of these features, the main post *always* stood in the middle of the wall opposite the firebox opening. We can interpret this relationship to mean that access to the oven was always oriented along the axis of the roof ridge and that the interior space of the houses was not structured randomly: the oven was always open either to the south (if located in the NW or NE corner) or to the east (if located in the SW corner).

There are eight theoretical variations for the position and orientation of the oven and the location of the main post (Fig 10:II). However, only two of these variations were found at Roztoky: (1) the variation in which the oven from the perspective of the main post is situated “to the left and behind,” with the firebox open to the viewer, and (2) the opposite variation, with the oven “to the right and behind” but again with the oven open the viewer. All of the house plans at Roztoky belong to one of these two alternatives. So, for example, the house plans with the oven in the southwest corner are completely identical to the floor plans with the oven in the west and northwest corner: this involves the same “left-sided” arrangement turned 45 or 90 degrees. Much less common, the “right-sided” arrangement variation can only be connected with the occurrence of the oven in the northeast corner. Similar regularities can also be found at other locations. For example, unlike in Roztoky, ovens in Rashkov are found in all four corners of the houses in almost equal numbers. It is interesting, however, that in more than 90% of the cases the arrangement is “right-sided” – a rare layout

in Roztoky tied exclusively to an oven location in the northeast corner. In Rashkov, ovens in the NW corner were turned toward the east (to the south in Roztoky), ovens in the NE corner turned to the south (the same as in Roztoky), ovens in the SW corner face the north (the east in Roztoky) and ovens in the SE corner face the west (ovens are never found in this corner in Roztoky). It therefore appears that the main standard in Rashkov was to maintain the interior layout of the living space; a relationship to a certain cardinal direction was less pronounced. If, for example, the location of the main post (entrance) was changed for some reason, the position of the oven also changed; the structure of the interior, however, remained unchanged.

We still do not know the precise meaning of these variations in the interior structure of the houses, and due to the lack of high quality published finds, it is not yet possible to determine this. Nevertheless, there is a high probability that future analyses could uncover interesting aspects of the symbolic systems of the PTC, important for the creation of a group identity and manifested through artefacts.

Domestic ritual

The most curious find from the new excavations at Roztoky was a small oven set beneath the floor of a house in some type of small cellar that took the form of a reduced house with dimensions of 140 x 130 cm. The small oven was a precise copy of a large oven and was also preserved in perfect shape. On the basis of the overall context (the oven must have been beneath the floor of the house), we believe that it was neither a children's toy nor a practical device. The lone remaining alternative is that it was used for cult purposes. Unlike the large ovens, the miniature version was the only oven facing west, i.e. the direction designated in Slavic cosmology as the underworld, the world of the dead and ancestors (see Profantová – Profant 2004; Profantová 2011b). It is therefore possible that offerings placed in this oven on special occasions were meant to establish communication with the afterlife. This may have been used in some of rites of passage to secure the magical protection of the individual, family or the entire settlement through the agency of ancestors. In another context, communication with the dead has been documented during burial ceremonies with the use of masks representing the souls of the deceased (Profantová – Profant 2004, 172-173). The miniature oven was lifted

in a block of soil and is still awaiting laboratory analysis; the inner structure of it was, however, already rendered in a very interesting way by computer tomography (Fig. 8:B).

The use, abandonment and decay of houses

Phosphate analysis of floor samples from the houses showed that people lived in them (this seemingly banal observation is not entirely pointless in light of the possibility of explaining the enormous number of houses by entirely ritual activities). High concentrations of phosphates typically appear in front of or next to the oven (Fig. 11) where food was probably handled, and it is also possible that they witness for the presence of a food-drying device in front of the oven (see above). Further concentrations of phosphates on the floor the studied houses (six cases) did not reveal any more regular arrangement.

Evidence of the use of the houses also came from the ovens. A carbonized layer in front of the ovens indicates that inhabitants swept out the firebox (Fig. 4:E). The layer of charcoal in the firebox is probably from its final use. Anthracological analysis reveals that oak was mostly used; beech and fir were the final woods burned in some fireboxes, too. The occurrence of fir in this context is especially interesting, as this was a wood that was relatively rare around the site and was likely preferred for building purposes. The frequent occurrence of fir in fireboxes is probably connected to the burning of wood from older houses. Fir only rarely occurs in other parts of the house infill, but it was used, for example, to build burial chambers and coffins at the cemetery from the 9th-10th centuries in Klecany on the opposite bank of the river.

The settlement features do not reveal any evidence of catastrophic events that might have accelerated the destruction/renewal cycle of houses (three houses destroyed by fire are the only exceptions). In general, relatively few moveable finds were recovered from the site as a whole, suggesting, along with the nature of the fill in the structures, an uneventful demise.

The sunken parts of the houses show a relatively distinct infill pattern. Samples were taken for geoarchaeological (micromorphological) soil analysis, and a total of 43,000 litres of earth underwent flotation. The fill of the majority of houses showed the repeated occurrence

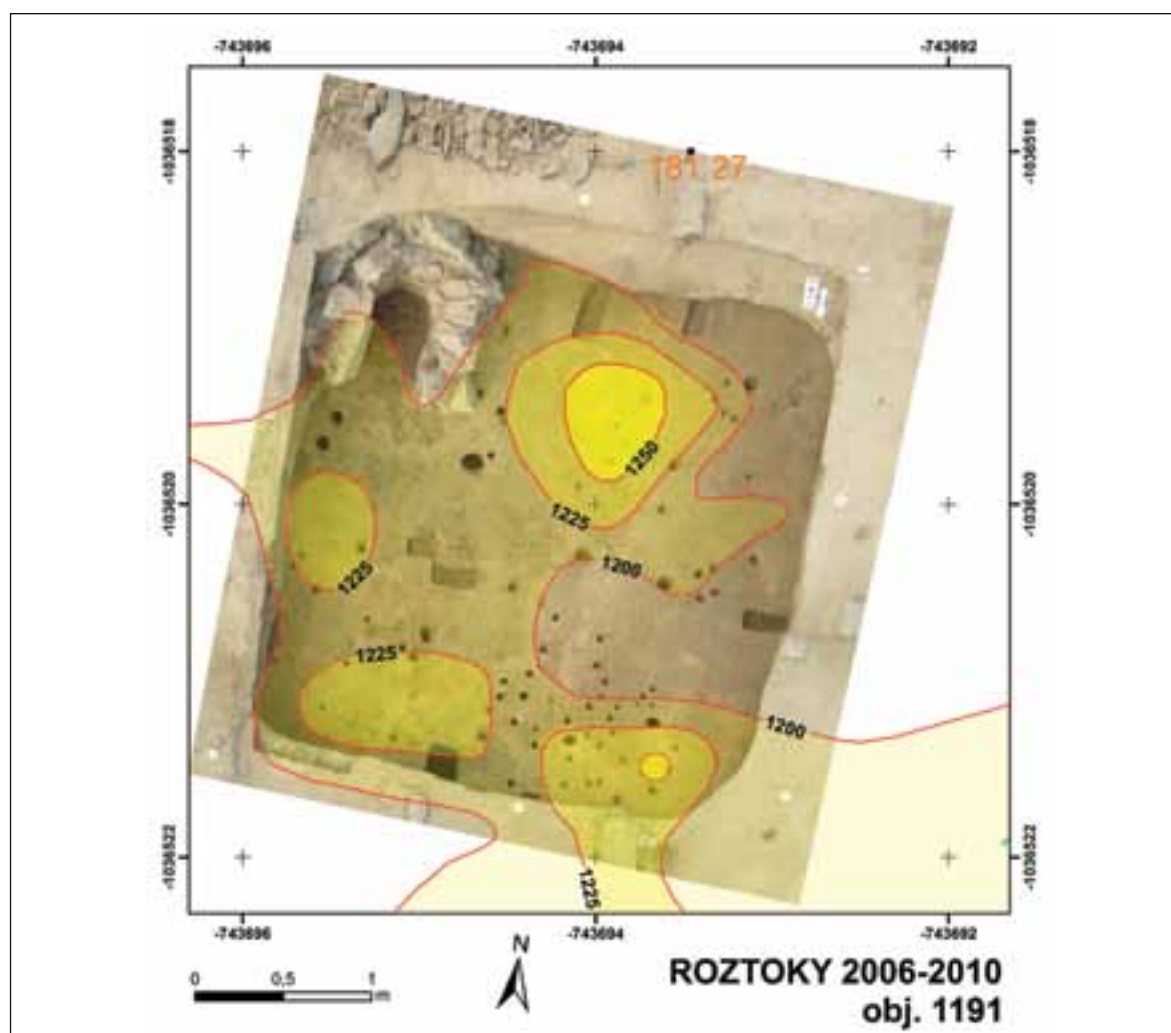


Fig. 11: Roztoky. Photogrammetric plan of house 1991 with an indication of the phosphate content in the floor surface. Values given in RF units: 1200 equals 0.1%.

of several types of layers, although not all of them were present in all cases. The typical sequence of layers was labelled P-G-C-B (from the bottom up; Fig. 3).

Layer P was the compacted edge of the subsoil and the fill – a thin, compact layer several millimetres thick on the bottom of the structure, i.e. the actual floor of the house. Geoarchaeological analysis showed that these floors were probably not covered with mats or planks, but were regularly cleaned (swept).

Layer G on the floor was typically dark and up to 5 cm thick; it was found in approximately 30% of the houses. This layer was originally thought to be primary discard that accumulated on the floor of the house, a hypothesis that was not supported by geoarchaeology. Instead, this analysis confirmed that it was a layer that accumulated on the floor after the house was abandoned but before the sunken space was filled.

Layer C was typically 10-50 cm thick and was deposited over the entire surface of the structure; it was also always lighter than the upper part of the fill. Macroscopically it appeared to be inhomogeneous in

detail, with lighter and darker grains of soil. The layer contained relatively few archaeological finds, though in some cases small fragments of daub and charcoal were found. Archaeological and geoarchaeological analyses are in agreement in the case of this layer: layer C was probably a levelling layer of the sunken feature completed at a single time with material dug from a new house situated nearby.

Layer B, the upper part of the house fill, was usually a darker layer 10-50 cm thick that covered the remaining part of the fill of the sunken structures. Typically dark grey, the layer contained stones, a greater number of animal bones, charcoal, potsherds, etc. Often it did not extend all the way to the walls of the sunken house, but filled a bowl-shaped space in its centre, resulting from the settling of layer C. The creation of the layer was apparently connected to a refuse area (dump, latrine) in a subsequent phase of settlement. Layer B often included a connected layer of larger stones, sometimes on its surface, other times closer to its bottom. At first glance this stone layer appears to be the remnants of the oven,

but in fact it was never stratigraphically connected to it. This layer of stones is explained as paving that caps a layer of waste or one that makes it easier to move in the refuse area; the stones likely reached the lower parts of the fill only later as the result the sinking of the heavier fractions. This layer model also has general consequences on the evaluation of the find assemblages: finds from the floor of the house probably belong to a different settlement phase than those from the upper part of the fill, despite the fact that the time interval need not have been great.

Conclusion

The extraordinarily large number of Early Medieval houses in Roztoky provided many new views of the nature of PTC dwellings. As the series of recent excavations was only completed in 2010, the new collected

material has not yet been subjected to a thorough analysis. Although the potential of this material is, from the point of view of the study of ancient architecture, limited by the very fact that wooden structures rarely survive in common soil conditions of Central Europe, the great amount of material makes it possible to explore other questions, e.g. those of the social function and symbolic significance of the Early Medieval houses, the depositional and post-depositional processes in these features, etc. The main challenge of this site is, however, the very number of dwelling features which is still to be explained. A research project has been started recently to cope with the environmental evidence brought by the recent excavations; an analysis of artefacts, including the architectural remains, will follow.

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SAŽETAK

NASTAMBE PRAŠKE KULTURE – ASPEKTI IZGLEDA, SVRHE I ZNAČENJA

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Praška kultura u Češkoj datira se u drugu polovicu šestog stoljeća i u prve dvije trećine sedmog stoljeća te je tradicionalno povezana uz pojavu prvih Slavena u Srednjoj Europi. Nastambe su jedan od najvažnijih razlikovnih elemenata ove kulture. Radi se o jednosobnoj, poluukopanoj kolibi karakterističnog pravokutnog oblika s kamenom peći koja se nalazi u jednom kutu sobe (Baran 1988, Parczewski 1993, Fusek 1994, Cygan 2006). Tumačenje je da su ove značajke nastale kao prilagodba na okolinu u zapadnoj Ukrajini (Baran 1988, Parczewski 1993, Donat 1980). Danas prvenstveno razumijemo ovu vrstu nastambe kao kulturološki element sa značajnom društvenom i simboličkom svrhom.

Nalazište u mjestu Roztoky (Zapadni okrug Praga, Češka Republika) smješteno je na sjevernom rubu Praga u središnjoj Češkoj te predstavlja najveće poznato (objavljeno) nalazište takve vrste ne samo u Češkoj već i u cijeloj Srednjoj i Istočnoj Europi. Nalazište pokriva uzak (1,5 km) pojas zemlje na dnu doline rijeke Vltave, nalik na klanac (sl. 1 – 2). Ranosrednjovjekovni nalazi pronađeni su na nalazištu tijekom zaštitnih arheoloških iskopavanja 1980-89. (Kuna – Profantová 2005), 2001. (Profantová 2005) i 2006-10. (Kuna – Lisá – Novák 2010, Kuna 2011, Profantová – Kuna u tisku). Do sada je istraženo više od 5 hektara (od ukupno 22,7 ha) nalazišta. Uočene su 323 nastambe praške kulture. Na temelju ekstrapolacije procijenjeno je da se ukupan broj nastamba kreće između 750 i 1.000 (sl. 2). Takva slika u suprotnosti je sa svime do sada poznatim vezano uz prašku kulturu. Naime, samo deset od 160 poznatih nalazišta u Češkoj ima više od tri nastambe, a niti jedno nema više od deset nastamba (vidi Kuna-Profantová 2005).

Iznimno velik broj ranosrednjovjekovnih nastamba iz naselja Roztoky pruža pregršt novih pogleda na prirodu nastamba praške kulture. Međutim, kako najnovija iskopavanja (2006-2010) nisu još detaljno vrednovana, neki od naših zaključaka za sada se temelje uglavnom na ranijim iskopavanjima. Ovaj se rad bavi pitanjem veličine ukopanog dijela nastamba (obično 9 – 12 m², premda postoji mogućnost da su se nastambe širile i izvan ukopanog dijela): sl. 3 – 4; zidnih konstrukcija (vjerojatno okomite daske, element kojeg je teško dokumentirati: sl. 5 – 6); konstrukcija kamenih peći (od masivnih blokova sa zasvođenom unutrašnjosti: sl. 7; vidi minijaturu obrednu peć: sl. 8) i svrhom rupa za stupove (koje su, u nekim slučajevima, tragovi pokretne proizvodne opreme: sl. 9).

Rad se također bavi prostornom orijentacijom nastamba u odnosu na glavne strane svijeta, tipologijom građevnih elemenata i unutarnje strukture nastambe – simbolička vrijednost nastambe najuočljivija je kod ovih njezinih značajki. Pokazalo se da su nastambe namjerno građene na osima glavnih strana svijeta te je uočeno da na različitim područjima (ili nalazištima) postoji određena sklonost prema različitim tipovima gradnje i unutarnje strukture nastambe. Na primjer, tip 2 karakteristična je tipologija na nalazištu u mjestu Roztoky s jednim glavnim stupom u sredini zida nasuprot peći te s unutarnjom strukturom gdje se peć nalazi „lijevo i iza“ položaj peći „desno i iza“ javlja se vrlo rijetko (vidi sl. 10).

Sustavna se pažnja poklanja tafonomskim pitanjima, posebno onima koji se odnose na napuštanje i propadanje nastamba iz ranog Srednjeg vijeka. Razlikujemo nekoliko karakterističnih slojeva ispunja nastambe. Slojevi su proučavani i dokumentirani uz pomoć kako standardnih arheoloških metoda, tako i mikromorfologije tla: P – pod, G – otpad iz netom napuštene nastambe, C – materijal za poravnavanje za novoizgrađenu nastambu, te B – područje za otpad koje pripada novijoj nastambi (sl. 3). Između ostalog, ova istraživanja ukazuju na to da barem sloj B pripada nekoj drugoj fazi stanovanja od same nastambe.

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