

# Cultural discontinuity and the migration hypothesis. The 6<sup>th</sup>-century Slavic migration in the light of new archaeological finds from Bohemia

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## Abstract

The problem of discontinuity between the archaeological cultures of the Migration Period and the Prague-Type Pottery Culture (PTPC) applies to a large area of Central Europe, including Bohemia and Moravia. The PTPC developed in the 5th century in Ukraine and southern Belarus. About a century later, it had spread over a large area of southeastern Poland, Slovakia, Moravia and Bohemia. This paper discusses the similarities in archaeological remains from Ukraine and Bohemia from this period, using evidence from the sites of Rashkiv and Roztoky. Another important conclusion is that in Bohemia, continuity can be observed between the PTPC and later phases of the early medieval period (8th to 12th centuries).

## Keywords

migration hypothesis, Prague Type Pottery Culture, early medieval period, Slavs, Bohemia, cultural discontinuity, settlement

## 1 Introduction

During the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, Central Europe, including southern Poland, Slovakia, Bohemia and Moravia (Fig. 1), underwent cultural discontinuity and complex transformations

that have been attested archaeologically. Traditionally, these processes are described as ‘the arrival of Slavs’<sup>2</sup>; however, in the last decades serious reservations towards this explanation have appeared<sup>3</sup>. The discussion extends to the appropriateness of the term Prague-Type Pottery Culture (PTP Culture), the archaeological culture that is regarded as the material manifestation of these processes<sup>4</sup>.

The PTP culture emerged in the 5th century in the region of Ukraine and southern Belarus, developing out of the Kiev culture and partly out of the Cherniakhov culture<sup>5</sup>. In the course of the 6th century this culture replaced the later phase of the Migration Period (the Merovingian culture), known mainly from cemeteries<sup>6</sup>, in Bohemia and Moravia.

The cultural complex with Prague-type pottery was originally characterised only by its hand-made pottery of vase-like shapes with low necks (Fig. 5: 5). Gradually, further ceramic types typical of the PTPC have been determined, such plates (Fig. 5: 1<sup>7</sup>), and pot-like bowls. For the later phases, attested at least at Roztoky, non-transferable large rectangular pans (Czech: *pražnice*) are known. Specialised types are represented by the so-called small casting pans/melting ladles (Fig. 5: 2), which are abundant in Ukraine (Bernashivka, Rashkiv, Korčák VII and Semenki); however, their occurrence in Bohemia (Fig. 5:2, Roztoky, Kadaň<sup>8</sup>) and Moravia (Věrovany, Bořanovice and Pavlov<sup>9</sup>) remains rare. Small casting pans are also known from the settlement at Krakow-Nowa Huta<sup>10</sup> and probably from Żukowice in Silesia.

So far, among the most significant non-ceramic markers determining the independent PTPC are the following:

- Types and organisation of settlements such as along river banks (Figs. 2, 3) and with the dwellings arranged in a circle.

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<sup>2</sup> Zeman 1976.

<sup>3</sup> See Brather 2006; Curta 2001.

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<sup>5</sup> Baran 1988; Terpilovskij 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Svoboda 1965.

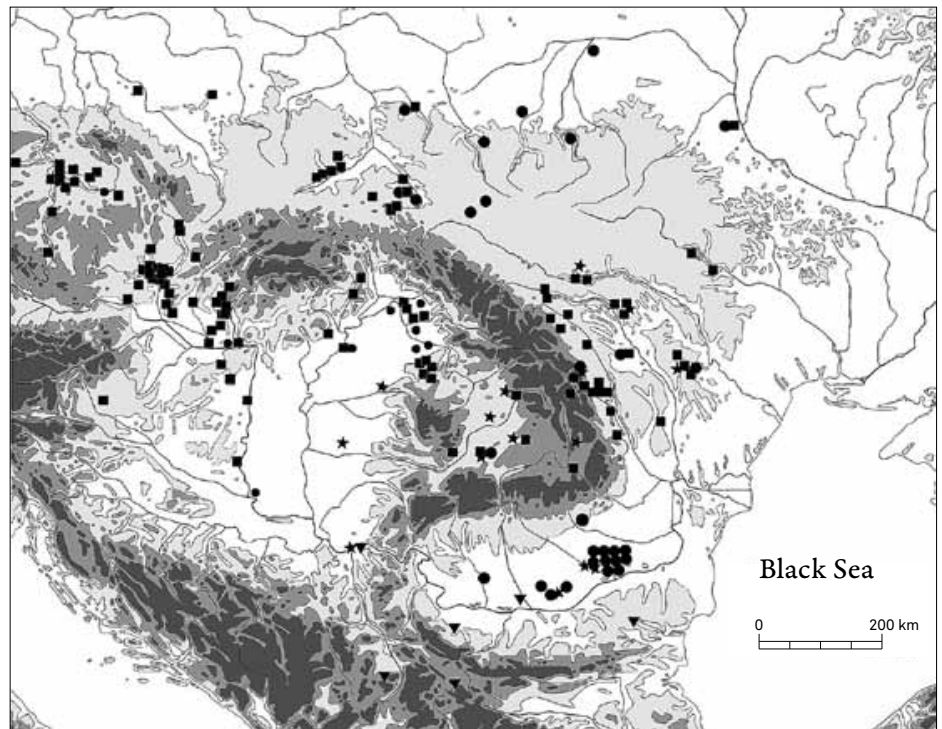
<sup>7</sup> Kuna & Profantová 2005, Fig. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Profantová 2009, Fig. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Jelínková, Šrein & Šťastný, v tisku (in press).

<sup>10</sup> Kubica-Kabacińska & Szmoniewski 2002.

**FIG. 1** Map of Prague-Type Pottery Culture pit houses with stone ovens (square) and clay ovens (circle), or lacking an oven (star). After N. Profantová 2009, obr. 6. The territories of Slovakia, Romania, and Moldavia are after G. Fusek .



- Certain types of dwellings/houses: a sunken dwelling with a stone oven in the corner (mainly NW corner); the best examples come from the Roztoky settlement, Fig. 4C, cf. 4A, B).
- Certain funerary customs: the cremation burial rite (Prague-Loretánské n., Ždánice<sup>11</sup>, Zvinjach I at Ukraine<sup>12</sup>).
- Certain structures of settlement patterns, e.g. presence/absence of strongholds (in Central Europe these are mostly absent); the spatial relationships between settlements and burial grounds, etc.
- The main elements of the material culture such as undecorated hand-made pottery, costume ornaments (fibulae, necklaces, Fig. 5, 6), etc.

However, usually only two or three of the above-mentioned markers can be observed simultaneously at individual settlement units (i.e. sites), such as the settlement location, house types, pottery types, and funerary customs. Only the best-known sites also provide data for the other markers, e.g. settlement organisation (Roztoky, Březno, Mutěnice, Břeclav-Pohansko).

Roztoky is the largest known PTPC settlement in Central Europe, with the highest number of excavated dwellings (335) (Fig. 2<sup>13</sup>). It is estimated that originally, the entire Roztoky settlement on the Moldau River bank comprised 600 to 700 houses<sup>14</sup>. Březno, near Louny, represents a different type of settlement (attributed to the PTPC culture), with approximately eight houses<sup>15</sup> arranged in a circle.

The best examples of these two main types of settlement organisation (circular and longitudinal) known from Bohemia are

found in western Ukraine. The closest parallel for the longitudinal arrangement is seen in the large settlement at Rashkiv on the river Dneister (98 houses and 80 later houses; 8th century; cf. Fig. 3<sup>16</sup>); the circular arrangement was attested at the eponymous site of Korchak VII<sup>17</sup>. A substantial number of similar occurrences of carefully arranged dwellings can be found in Ukraine (Fig. 4A, B, C). Moreover, the Rashkiv settlement in Ukraine shows another common detail known from Roztoky, namely the occurrence of vessels placed next to stone ovens and sunken into the floor. The same detail is known also from the site of Luka Kavetschinskaja (House No. 2<sup>18</sup>). Likewise, the deep silo pits with tapering necks that have been attested not only at Roztoky<sup>19</sup> but also at Prague-Liboc and other sites, have parallels at the Rashkiv settlement<sup>20</sup>.

The archaeological evidence of the PTPC known from Ukraine and Belarus is dated to as early as the 5th century<sup>21</sup>; thus, it chronologically precedes the Central European finds. This is why it is traditionally accepted that the PTPC spread from the Ukraine and Belarus.

## 2 The PTPC concept

The PTPC concept was obviously created with the help of markers borrowed from everyday life. On the other hand, the costume ornaments are evidently of a general or trans-cultural nature, and their repertoire continuously shifted according to the broader political and cultural context in which the PTPC existed.

<sup>11</sup> Bubeník, Pleinerová & Profantová 1998, 114f.

<sup>12</sup> Baran 1972, 166.

<sup>13</sup> Kuna & Profantová 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Kuna & Profantová 2005; Kuna & Profantová

2007.

<sup>15</sup> Pleinerová 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Baran 1988.

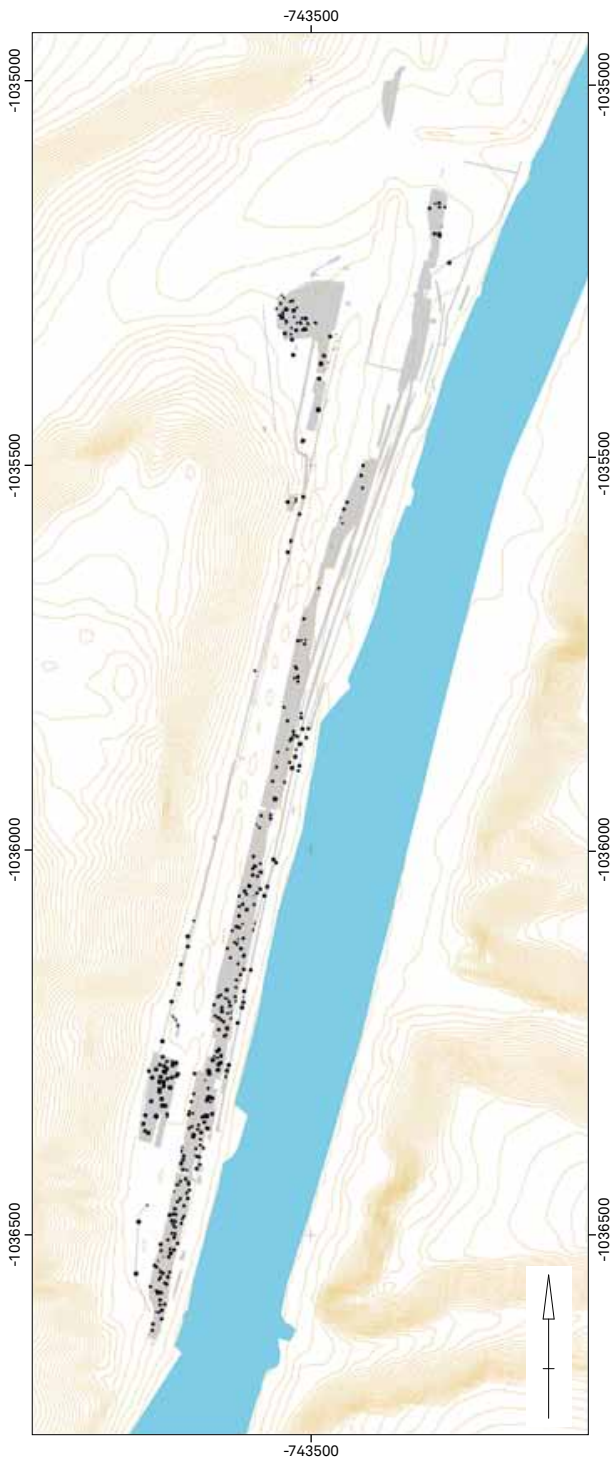
<sup>17</sup> Rusanova 1973.

<sup>18</sup> Vakulenko & Prichodnjuk 1985, Photo 10.

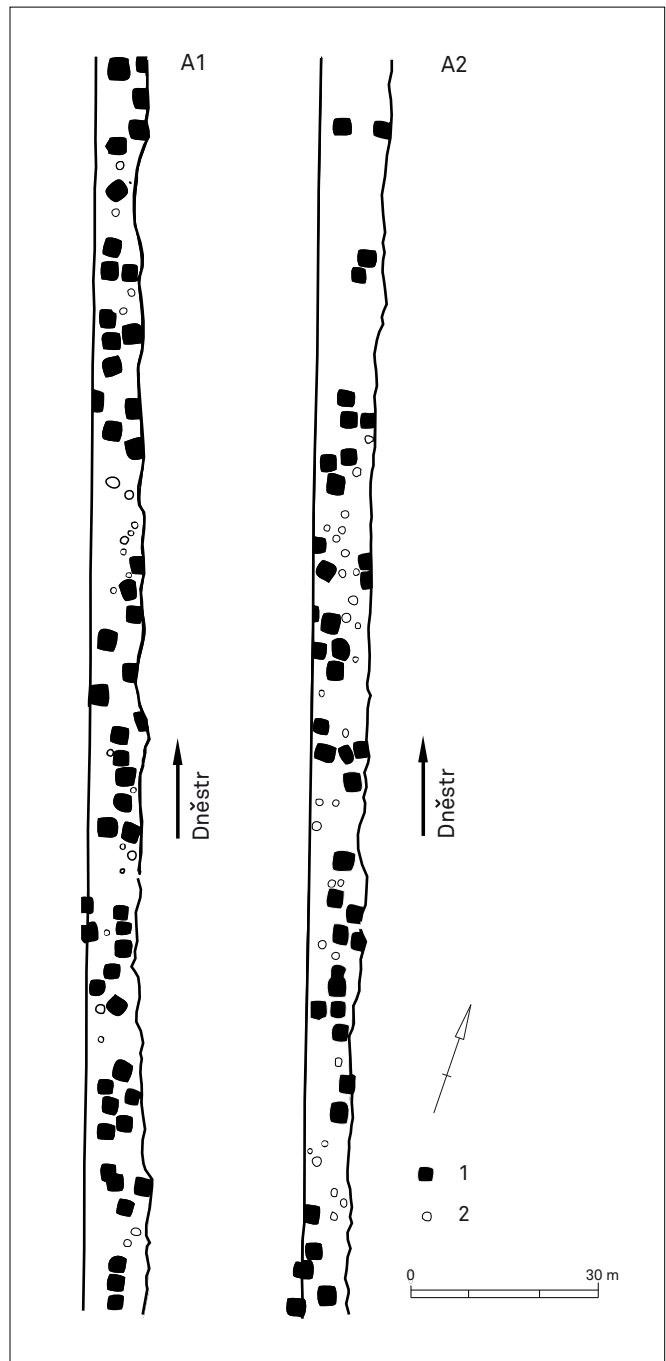
<sup>19</sup> Kuna & Profantová 2005, Fig. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Baran 1988, Tab. 24: Silo Nos. 9, 51, 52.

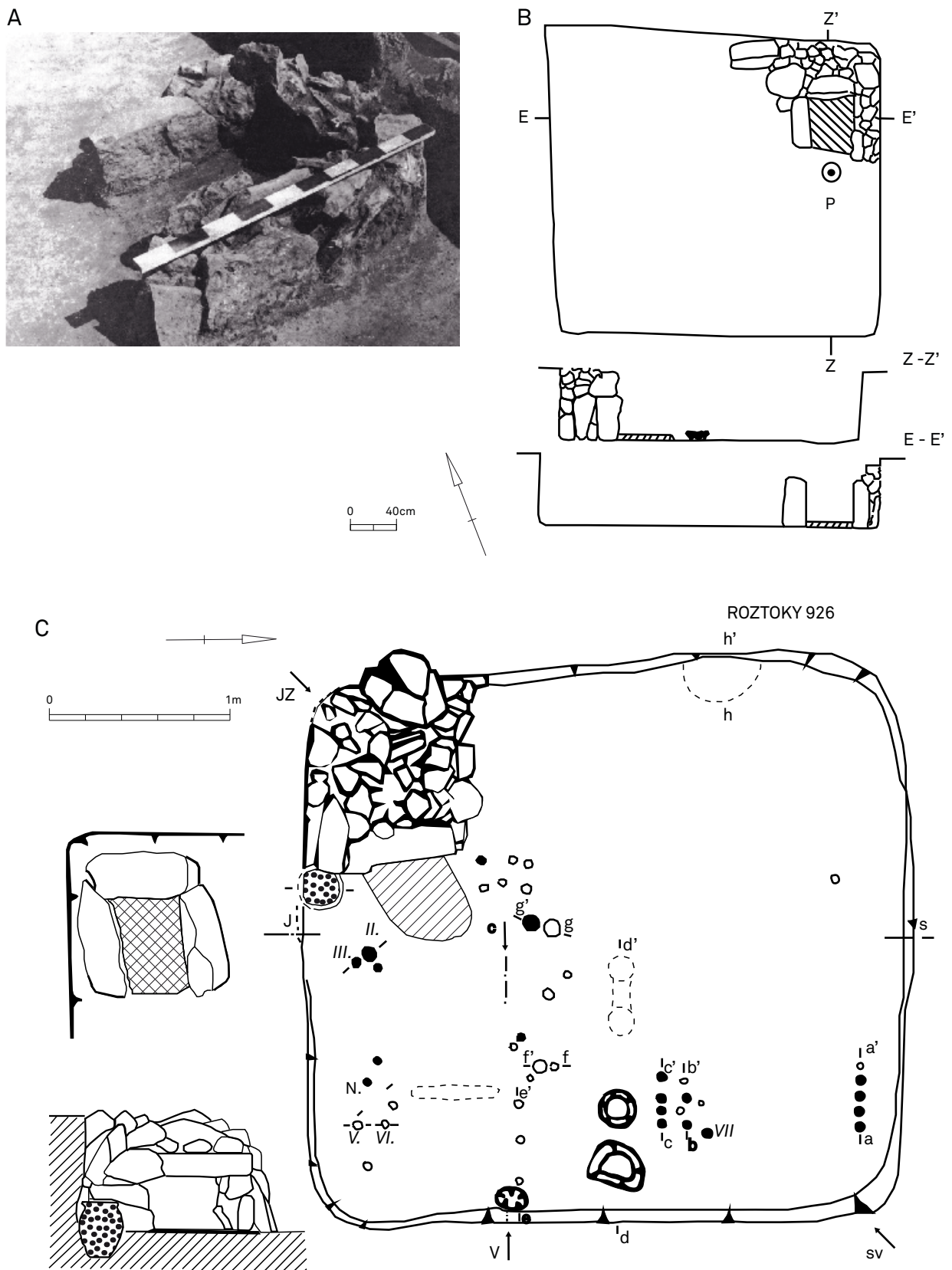
<sup>21</sup> Baran 1988.



**FIG. 2** Plan of the site of Roztoky, on the bank of the Vltava river (Bohemia), the largest PTPC site. Only houses (335) are indicated on the plan. After M. Kuna.



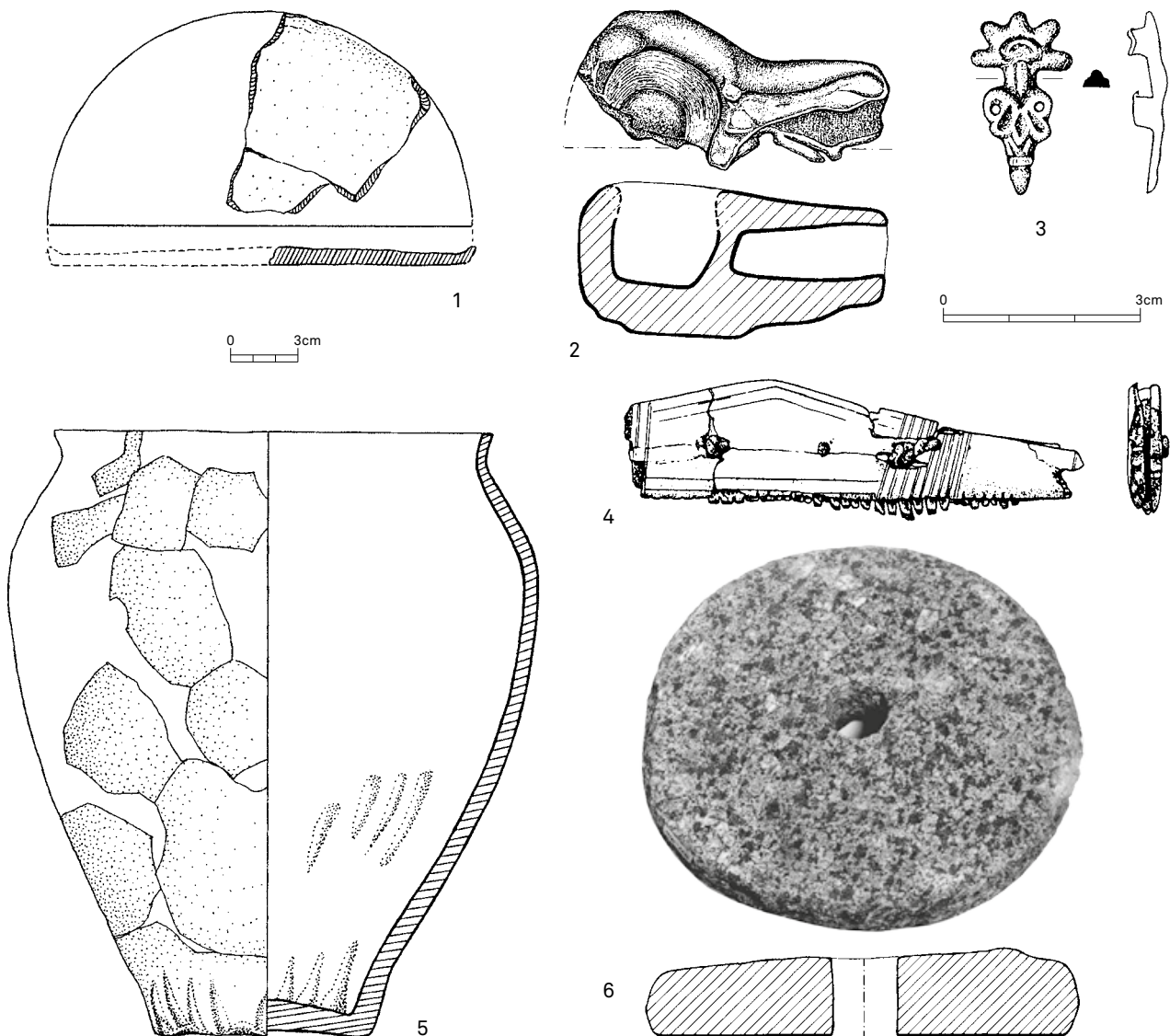
**FIG. 3** The very similar to Roztoky is the situation in the earlier part of the PTPC site Rashkiv III in western Ukraine. Section A2 is adjacent to the north of section A1. After V.D. Baran.



**FIG. 4** A: Detail of the stone oven in Luka Kavetchinskaja, H. 23. After L.V. Vakulenko & O.M. Prichodnjuk 1985, photo 10; B: Typical house of *ПТРС*, a pit house with stone oven in the corner, house 14 in Raškov III, Ukraine. In front of the oven, the lower part of a vessel lies on the floor. After V.D. Baran; C: Plan of House 926 in Roztoky near Prague, a similar example with an oven with inset vessel (detail on the left), atypical oven in SW corner, After M. Kuna & N. Profantová 2005.

Several significant types such as spiral-shaped necklace elements with decorated plates and the so-called radiate-headed bow fibulae (found at Dřevíč, and Liteň in Bohemia; Fig. 5: 3), which can be linked with both the western Ukraine region and the Early Avar culture, occurred in the costume ornaments assemblage from the beginning, while others appeared only after the arrival of the PTPC into Central Europe, and are absent on the Ukraine sites. This group of finds consist of single-sided combs (Fig. 5:4), iron strap ends (the influence of Lombards and Baiuvars<sup>22</sup>), and Early Avar beads with eyelets, etc.

It is worth noting that so far neither the most archaic shapes of pottery, dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> – early 6<sup>th</sup> century AD (Gavrituchin's phase o<sup>23</sup>), nor assemblages featuring 5<sup>th</sup>-century fibulae have been attested in Bohemia or Moravia. Moreover, finds assemblages that can be securely dated to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD were found only in southern Poland<sup>24</sup> and in southwestern Slovakia<sup>25</sup>. Even though the earliest Bohemian assemblage, including metal finds (a necklace with decorated plates, probably of Byzantine origin) remains so far unpublished (Fig. 6:2, Houses 1717 and 1708 from Roztoky<sup>26</sup>), several sets dating to



**FIG. 5** PTPC: A typical simple, undecorated hand-made pottery vessel (with cylindrical mouth), plates and some other artefact types (melting ladle, small bow fibula, a quernstone and a single-side comb – attested for Central Europe). 1 Prague-Bohnice, house, 2 Roztoky (Prague-west), house 1034, 3 Dřevíč, Rakovník distr., 4 Roztoky (Prague-west), house 911, 5- Roztoky (Prague-west), house 1086, 6 Roztoky (Prague-west), f. 291. After J. Zeman 1976 (1) and M. Kuna & N. Profantová (2,4-6), and Profantová 2008 (3).

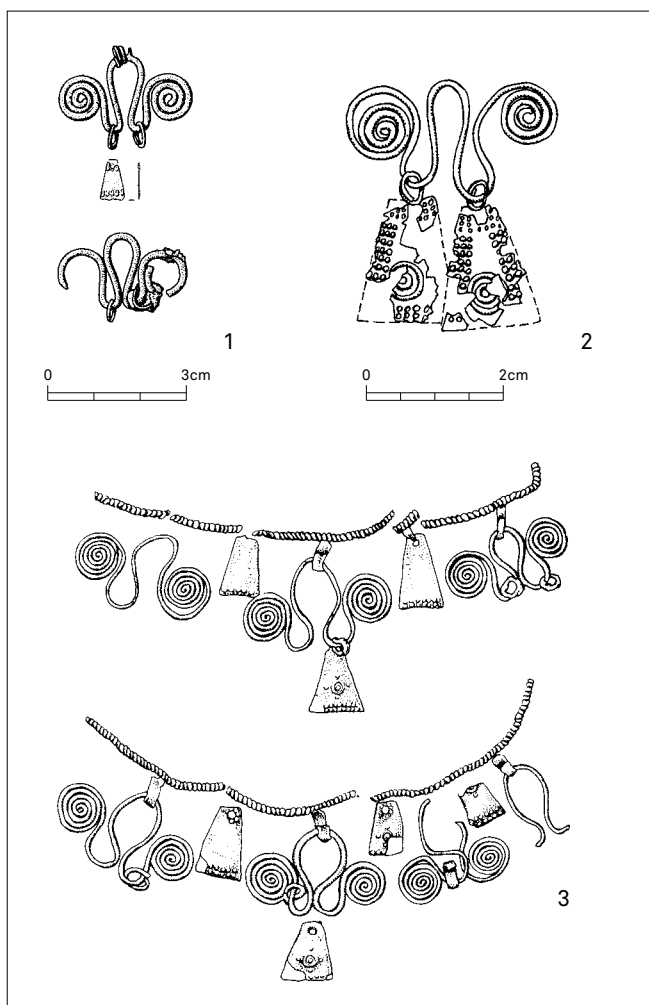
<sup>22</sup> Profantová 2008, Abb. 5, 10:5, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Gavrituchin 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Parczewski 1988, 102-104, Fig. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Fusek & Zábajník 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Profantová 2009, Fig. 8; Profantová in press.



**FIG. 6** Bronze necklaces: 1- Grossprüfening (Ge), cremation grave 2. 2 Roztoky (Cz), House 1717. (Dat. 566 – 620 AD). Part of bronze necklace. Drawing L. Rasslová. 3: Complete bronze necklace from Early Avar grave No. 40, Oroszlany II (Hu). 1- After W. Eichinger & H. Losert 2004, 3 After E. Garam 2001, Taf. 23.

the final decades of the 6th century are known from Bohemia (for example Fig. 6:2<sup>27</sup>). The occurrence of single-sided combs (Fig. 5:4), their local manufacture (Mutěnice<sup>28</sup>), and the adoption of a particular type of pottery decoration, the filled stamps (Prague-Běchovice<sup>29</sup>), seem to confirm a certain amount of contact between the Slavs and the Lombards that could only have taken place between 540 and 560/567 AD. The radiocarbon dates for the PTPC remain mostly unpublished; as far as the Roztoky settlement is concerned, only a general date of the late 6th/ early 7th century is available (calibrated 570 – 680 AD at 1 sigma confidence level, House 1264). The radiocarbon dates from the Prague-Liboc are very similar<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Garam 2001, Taf. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Klanica 2008, Photos 19 and 17, Fig. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Profantová 2008, Abb. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Bureš in press. Three dates could be determined on the basis of animal bones. One of the dates from the house shows 'before 665 AD' at 95%

confidence level, while the other was 'before 686 AD' at 75% confidence level.

<sup>31</sup> Strontium isotopes analysis was carried out on selected animal bones from the Roztoky site. However, results from the analyses had not been received at the time of the deadline for this paper.

<sup>32</sup> Hajnalová & Profantová 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Profantová 2009, Fig. 8; Profantová & Bureš 2010, Figs. 1, 5, 6, 8, 11; Profantová & Bureš in press.

<sup>34</sup> Klanica 2008.

However, justified doubts can be raised. Individual markers such as hand-made pottery, sunken dwellings or cremation graves have been also attested for other cultures dating to the Migration Period; therefore, only the simultaneous occurrence of those markers can be characterised as typical of the PTPC. The key question, then is: would be culture lacking its specific articles with symbolic and statutory values determined at all if the 'early Slavic culture' had not been looked for?

The likely answer is: no, such a culture would not be determined. Discoverer of PTPC, Ivan Borkovský, had been looking for the earliest Slavic material culture. And he found it. Thus, from a methodological point of view, the origin of the PTPC clearly lies on 'the wrong side of the blanket' as is the case with any other Migration Period cultures.

The migration hypothesis cannot be tested with the help of the natural sciences. It is worth noting that cremation burial rites and the small number of graves hamper any serious research based on isotope analysis<sup>31</sup> or other modern methods.

On the other hand, a supposed connection between the weakly determined archaeological culture and historical assumptions regarding Slavic tribal migration to Central Europe enables meaningful interpretation of transformations occurring during the so-called 'dark' centuries. This mainly comprises the following phenomena:

- The PTPC represents a combination of regression (e.g. in variability and quality of pottery) and economic and technological innovations, such as the widespread use of rotary querns (Fig. 5:6, Roztoky), the introduction of common wheat instead of the previously cultivated emmer wheat<sup>32</sup>, and stone ovens. Short-term innovations which vanished after a while, like the occurrence of metal casting pans which, for a certain period of time, replaced melting pots (crucibles) carry a high measure of significance in this aspect. This trend, which appears irrational or illogical to us, may perhaps be better explained by the presence of bearers of a certain culture than by cultural diffusion and/or cultural interaction.
- Transformation of settlement dynamics: according to the current state of knowledge, the PTPC's emergence in southern Poland and Saxony (up to the Elbe and Havel rivers) had been preceded by significant depopulation (this settlement hiatus may extend to several decades). The PTPC's arrival could be associated with the emergence of intensive settlement. However, in the case of Bohemia, estimations of population decrease preceding the PTPC's emergence are much lower.
- Continuous development of the PTPC: settlement and cultural continuity between the PTPC and the later phases of the early medieval period, i.e. the Early and Middle 'Hillfort' periods (8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century; with well-attested Slavinity based on written sources), well documented from Bohemia and Moravia, represent another important aspect in the subsequent development. The best attested examples of settlement continuity can be found on the sites of Prague-Liboc<sup>33</sup> and Prague-Hloubětín in Bohemia, and Pavlov and Mutěnice<sup>34</sup>

in Moravia. As far as cemeteries are concerned, continuity is best attested at Přítluky and Břeclav-Pohansko<sup>35</sup> in Moravia, and Čakajovce in south-western Slovakia<sup>36</sup>.

A commonality in the worship of particular gods (Perun, Svarožič<sup>37</sup>) can be observed on the study area, as well as concurrence of certain rituals, and last but not least the existence of a particular group of identical toponyms in this vast territory, such as river names: Donau/Dunaj, which also occurs in Belarus, Morava (Moravia/Serbia), and Bystrica (Slovakia/Romania), as well as names of castles or towns: Krakow (Silesia/northern Hungary), Děvín (Slovakia/Bohemia), Melnik/Mělník (Bohemia/Bulgaria), to name but a few.

### 3 Conclusions

The 6<sup>th</sup>- and 7<sup>th</sup>-century Central European cultural transition, often called the ‘Slavic expansion’, cannot be interpreted as the arrival of a population group held together by a well-defined and functional political and cultural identity, with characteristics that remained unchanged for several centuries, as some of its critics<sup>38</sup> have attempted to. After all, such an idea falls well below the standards set by research at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, carried out for example by L. Niederle (1923)<sup>39</sup>. Even then, the contrast between the diversity in Slavic tribes, all with their own etnonyms (mentioned by Prokopios and Jordanes), and the relative uniformity in language and customs was taken into consideration. As far as the PTPC is concerned, the work by the chronicler Fredegar (ca 655 AD) is of great importance as he applied the term ‘Slavic’ as a kind of catch-all denomination when referring to the two tribes/gentes, Wends and Serbians.

The Fredegar Chronicle<sup>40</sup> provides more interesting insights than the simple process of a unified people becoming

more sedentary. The creation of new collective, tribal identities, or rather the redefinition of the old ones, occurred in a context of intensive power struggles and cultural interaction between the Slavs and the Avar Khaganate. The archaeological evidence confirms and builds on the chronicler’s testimony, and stresses the Byzantine influence on Avar-Slavic co-existence. From the outset, cultural interaction between the Slavs and the Germanic cultures is equally intensive. Even though they are not mentioned in the written sources, such interactions are attested not only by the presence of common toponyms and hydronyms (including the name of the sacred Czech hill ‘Říp’, deriving from Germanic ‘Rip’<sup>41</sup>) but also by the occurrence of production innovations (such as single-sided combs, etc.). The intensity of this linguistic process is illustrated by the cemetery at Grossprüffening near Regensburg (late 6<sup>th</sup>, early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>42</sup>) an exceptional example of syncretism.

The connection between the PTPC and the “Slavic expansion” is less significant for the identification of the place of origin of the cultural change and the diffusion of Slavinity across Central Europe than for the interpretation of archaeological finds dating to the period of which the final phase was characterised by the biographer of Charlemagne in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with the following words: “*Wild and barbarous tribes dwelling in Germany ... all of which speak very much the same language, but differ widely from one another in customs and dress. The chief among them are the Welatabians, the Sorabians, the Abodriti, and the Bohemians...*” (Einhard 1880, cap. 15)<sup>43</sup>. And it was exactly during this particular period that a new political and ethnic map of Central Europe emerged, which subsequently determined the entire early medieval development of the region.

TABLE I

Distinguishing features of the PTPC, as documented in various regions with respect to cultural continuity in Bohemia and Moravia. Only the presence of relevant phenomena is documented. In fact, none of the registered phenomena turns up in the later phase of the Migration Period, with the sole exception of bow fibulae, which nonetheless vary in shape and size. A newly identified feature is represented by pits with narrowed necks, similar to the so-called pits of pear-shaped sections, the only example being pit 1553 at Březno. These small pits had an economic function and were archaeologically sterile so that their chronology is uncertain. A Circle indicates the occurrence of the phenomenon both breaks. After N. Profantová 2009.

Region	Houses with stone oven / Nos. of sites	Storage/ pits with narrowed neck	Cremation graves	PTPC vessels, plates	Smelting pan	Bow fibulae	Little bread/ chlebec	Mills-rotary querns
Bohemia	•/43	•	•	•/•	•	•	-	•
Moravia	•/25	•	•	•/•	•	•(1)	•(1)	•
Slovakia	•/17	•	•	•/•	-	•(1)	-	•
Ukraine	•	•	•	•/•	•	•	•	•
Bohemia 8th cent.	•	•	•	-/•?	-	-	-	•
Moravia 8th cent.	•	•	•	-/-	-	-	-	•

35 Dostál 1985.

36 Rejholecová 1990.

37 Profantová & Profant 2004, 160-164.

38 Curta 2008.

39 Niederle 1923.

40 Fredegar, cf. Havlik (ed.) et al. 1966; Krusch (ed.) 1888.

41 Labuda & Stieber (ed.) 1970, 637.

42 Eichinger & Lösert 2004.

43 In his list of significant Slavic tribes, Einhard completely omitted the Moravians, of whom the first mention in the written sources is not until 822 AD.

## Resumé

### **Kulturelle Diskontinuität und Migrationstheorie. Die slawische Migration (6. Jh.) im Lichte neuerer Funde aus Böhmen**

Die Diskontinuität zwischen der merowingischen Phase der Völkerwanderungszeit und dem Erscheinen der sog. Keramik des Prager Typs wird im breiteren Raum Mitteleuropas üblicherweise nicht nur als Kulturwandel erklärt sondern auch als ethnischer Wandel. Die Kultur der Keramik des Prager Typs war in der Ukraine im 5. Jh. entstanden und breitete sich von dort während des 6. Jh. nach Mitteleuropa aus. Archäologisch ist erwiesen, dass hier für die Siedlungsgründung vergleichbare Landschaften ausgesucht wurden, gleiche Grundrissanordnungen vorliegen (Raškov/Raschkiv in der Ukraine, Roztoky in Böhmen), die gleichen Grubenhaustypen mit Steinofen in der Ecke, dieselben gewulsteten Keramikformen einschließlich spezifischer Teller, evtl. nicht übertragbare Röstplatten aus Lehm.

Entsprechungen finden wir auch bei den Fibelfunden und einigen Ziergegenständen (Abb. 5, 6). Der gleichfalls in der Ukraine belegte Brandbestattungsritus wurde von Körperbestattungen abgelöst. Aufgrund der Kontinuität der Kultur mit Keramik des Prager Typs zu jüngeren Entwicklungsetappen, vor allem der Kultur der Burgwallzeit (8.-10. Jh.) auf einigen Siedlungen (Prag-Liboc, Prag-Hloubětín, Böhmen) und Gräberfeldern (Břeclav-Pohansko), können wir den ethnischen Wandel mit den überwiegend später schriftlich belegten Slawen in Verbindung bringen, und zwar konkret mit den Wenden (Fredegar, 7. Jh.), erst zu Anfang des 9. Jh. sind zum ersten Mal die Cihu-Widinen/Winiden und Beu-Winiden (J. 805) – entstellte Formen des Ethnonyms der Tschechen/Böhmen schriftlich belegt.



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