Research Article

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Neolithic Long Barrows and Enclosures as Landmarks of Ritual Landscape of Central and North Bohemia

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opar-2020-0207>

received December 31, 2020; accepted September 15, 2021

Abstract: Based on reconstruction of the spatial context of causewayed enclosures and long barrows of the Proto- and Early Eneolithic period, we attempt to model the phenomenon of the ritual landscape in Central and North Bohemia. Discussing the purpose and meaning of the long barrows and enclosures, they are being described as funerary and religious structures related to the cult of ancestors. An alternative explanation views them primarily, in economic terms, as territorial markers delineating the areas controlled by different communities. It seems likely that both of these interpretations are valid and well characterise the true nature of such structures. Both types of monuments should not be perceived as isolated structures, but just the opposite as they are part of a pattern of regional and super-regional identity of communities and individuals. In fact, they are crucial elements of the overall system of structuring of the prehistoric landscape.

Keywords: Neolithic long barrows, causewayed enclosures, Bohemia, ritual landscape

1 Introduction

In this article, the author reviews two main types of Late Neolithic (Eneolithic) monuments as important elements of prehistoric settlement areas, long barrows and enclosures.

Despite some formal changes during the late fifth and fourth millennium BC, long barrows and enclosures structured the cultural space of Late Neolithic farmers, offering a different way for the presentation of social and ceremonial ties within and between communities. Both types of monuments were maintaining ceremonial purposes mainly related to death and celebration of ancestral lineages. The long barrows were specifically created for funerary purposes of limited social groups; they have served as rather intimate family ancestral shrines for a considerable time after the initial funerary event (project by Turek & Křišťuf: recent observation from the TRB barrow at Dušníky, Litoměřice district). The Proto-Eneolithic and TRB (Funnel Beaker culture) collective burials are unknown in Bohemia, and long barrows most commonly contain limited number of single burials (Březno – Pleinerová, 1980; Dušníky, Račiněves, and Vražkov yet unpublished by Turek & Křišťuf). Enclosures, however, were created for the ceremonial activity of several

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Special issue: THE EARLY NEOLITHIC OF EUROPE, edited by F. Borrell, I. Clemente, M. Cubas, J. J. Ibáñez, N. Mazzucco, A. Nieto-Espinete, M. Portillo, S. Valenzuela-Lamas, & X. Terradas

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[#] The author dedicates this study to Marie Zápotocká, doyenne of Czech archaeology, on the occasion of her important life jubilee.

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communities, performing the ancestral cult in rather a public way, often burying the dead or their relics inside the ditches (Křišťuf et al., 2019).

The TRB long barrows in Bohemia carried on with the tradition of the trapezoidal ground plan archetype of the Stroked Pottery/Lengyel long houses, after almost 1,000 years of different, oblong dwelling structures. Such symbolic formal continuity may suggest certain expressions of traditionalism in relation to ancient times and ancestral legacy.

The following text will be focusing on the development of these ceremonial structures in Late Neolithic Bohemia and their role in the creation of ceremonial landscapes.

2 The Genesis of Long Barrows

Neolithic farmers created their own cultural space (cultural landscape) that they structured and adjusted to their economic and symbolic needs. Such cultural landscape became the property of whole community and individual families. A greater emphasis on the demonstration of genealogy was also in line with such divisions of ownership. The need occurred to demonstrate a link with preceding generations of their ancestors and to use their memory in order to re-confirm their right to use their land and to occupy their territory (Turek, 2005, 2010).

If we admit that the genesis of long barrows in Central Europe began already during the Early Neolithic period by the transformation of abandoned longhouses (Midgley, 2005; Turek, 2005, 2010), it is also necessary to clarify on when these structures definitely split and the burial mounds were established as purely funerary structures. The significant symbolic link between Neolithic houses and long barrows is known in European archaeology for a long time (Childe, 1949). So when it happened that the first specialised funerary long barrow constructions were built in Central Europe?

The earliest securely recorded long barrows of European prehistory come from the site of Sarnowo in Kujawian region of Poland (Bogucki, 1988; Bradley, 1998; Whittle, 1996). The first barrow cemeteries in prehistoric Europe emerged at the beginning of the Eneolithic period. The occurrence of this kind of artefact belongs to the “package” of new phenomena that in Central Europe first appeared at the beginning of the Eneolithic period (Neustupný, 2001). The earliest examples of long barrows in Western Europe developed in Iberian Peninsula and western France during the mid-fifth millennium BC. The tradition then spread northwards, into the British Isles, Low Countries, and southern Scandinavia. Each area developed its own variations of the long barrow tradition, often exhibiting their own architectural innovations and further development.

The purpose and meaning of the long barrows remain an issue of debate. One argument is that they are funerary and religious sites, perhaps erected as part of a system of cult of ancestors. An alternative explanation views them primarily in economic terms, as territorial markers delineating the areas controlled by different communities as they transitioned towards farming. It seems likely that both these interpretations are valid and well characterise the true nature of long barrows. In the Danubian territory, if we accept the “longhouse of dead” pedigree, the abandoned houses with earth piled up upon its debris and subsequently also the long barrows were landmarks of the previous habitation and as such also a possible indicator of a farming friendly territory.

3 Long Barrows in Bohemia

The first burial mounds in Bohemia occurred just at the beginning of the Proto-Eneolithic period. They are elongated burial mounds originally mostly of rectangular or trapezoidal shape. Their main axis reaching lengths of up to several tens of metres, sometimes more than 100 m (e.g. Březno district Louny; Pleinerová, 1980, see Figure 1 in this volume). The outline of these mounds is often defined by furrows, which are

Figure 1: Březno (Louny district). A reconstruction of the Proto-Eneolithic burial mound (after Pleinerová, 1980).

probably remains of wooden palisades that formed the construction of these funerary monuments. No above-ground visible remains of these mounds were yet recorded in Bohemia. The original embankments of barrows were destroyed, probably by intensive arable farming in modern times. The earliest evidence of long barrow in Bohemia and probably in whole Central Europe is the building uncovered in Klučov (district Kolín; Kudrnáč, 1954; Pleinerová, 1980, p. 46), which is dated to the Střešovice phase of the beginning of the Jordanów culture (Neustupný, 2001, 2008). The fact that long barrows possibly emerged in Central Europe since the Proto-Eneolithic period supports, for example, the discovery of the tomb no. 28 at the eponymous site of Jordanów (Seeger, 1919, p. 48). The early evidence of Eneolithic long barrows could also be seen in grave 34/63 at Vikletice (grave description: Buchvaldek & Koutecký, 1970, p. 24; Neustupný, 2008, p. 48). Probably the most secure evidence of long barrows in Bohemia is a ground plan of two buildings discovered at Březno (district Louny; Pleinerová, 1980). Both structures produced radiocarbon dates of the Proto-Eneolithic period (Pleinerová, 1980). Further ground plan of the Proto-Eneolithic long barrow has been uncovered at Postoloprty (district Louny; Neustupný, 2008 – after Z. Smrž). Several other sites (such as Dušníky, Nížebohy, Figure 2, Vražkov, Figure 3, and Račíněves) were identified by the aerial prospection in the vicinity of the Mount Říp (e.g. Gojda, 2000, 2019) and will be investigated within the current project (GA21-25440S).

There is only scarce evidence of Early Eneolithic (TRB) burial mounds within the territory of Bohemia. Only one barrow was yet discovered. It was uncovered at Nymburk – *U Kostelního náměstí* (Motyková, 1998). According to the spatial distribution pattern of graves at the Funnel Beaker culture (TRB) cemetery in Velké Žemoseky, it can be presumed that there was originally a long barrow (Křišťuf, 2004; Křišťuf & Švejcar, 2013), resembling the contemporary longhouses (Turek, 2014). Several barrow cemeteries of the Funnel Beaker culture were recorded in the forested areas of Central Moravia (cf. Houšťová, 1960; Šmíd, 2003). These mounds, even though they still have an elongated shape, are already of different characters than the above-described long barrows of the Proto-Eneolithic period. The construction of the mound embankment consists of a greater quantity of stone and their main axis is significantly shorter. The currently preserved ground plans are of an oval shape, but the original inner stone structures suggest that their ground plan was perhaps rectangular and their current appearance is the result of transformation processes. Some of these burial mounds are nearly circular (cf. Šmíd, 2003, 2017). In the following development, the evidence of funerary practices virtually disappears from the archaeological record and thus also the evidence of burial mounds. One study suggests that the idea of long barrows locally survived until the middle Eneolithic period (the Globular Amphorae culture barrow at Ctíněves; Trefný, Křišťuf, & Švejcar, 2011).

Figure 2: Nížebohy (Litoměřice district). Aerial photograph of cropmark of a long barrow, the narrower end oriented to West (after Gojda, 2019, Figure 5.125).

Figure 3: Vražkov (Litoměřice district). Aerial photograph of cropmark of a long barrow, the narrower end oriented to West (after Gojda, 2019, Figure 5.129).

The currently running project supported by Czech Science Foundation (grant No. GA21-25440S) is combining non-destructive archaeological survey, including the soil science research on both unexcavated long barrows and barrows partly excavated within the project.

The non-destructive approach involves remote sensing data (aerial photographs, orthophoto maps, and LIDAR) followed by geophysical and geochemical surveys of monuments located within the ploughed landscape.

The project aims to perceive the long barrows as an integral part of the prehistoric community areas and cultural landscape. Within the project, we explore the social and ritual significance of long barrows for farming communities at the beginning of the Eneolithic period (4300–3500 BC) in the terms of ritual landscape concept. We understand the long barrows as part of a pattern of regional and super-regional identity in the context of community areas and other monuments in the landscape under the mythical mount of Říp. Such an approach involves also the results of our previous project focusing on causewayed enclosures in the same territory (Křišťuf et al., 2019). The archaeological data will be accomplished by our extensive geophysical prospection of the area around and in between individual monuments. Another important source of the landscape reconstruction will be pollen samples extracted from wet locations near the monuments and if possible from remains of burial mounds and their construction features/graves.

In order to reconstruct the Eneolithic long barrows, we examine several questions with the following priorities: to functionally interpret the structure and its compartments; to obtain the relevant archaeological and radiocarbon dates in order to precisely date the structures; to search for remains of the earthen mound and construction traces; to study possible clues for reconstruction of dynamics and time span of the funerary use; and to reconstruct the original design of studied features.

The area around the Říp Mount (Litoměřice district) that we have selected for our research has a great archaeological potential with abundance of prehistoric sites and long tradition of archaeological interest (Gojda – Trefný et al., 2011). In recent years, the aerial survey in the western part of this region produced several sites with evidence of long barrows. The area of our research interest consist of parishes of Dušníky, Nížebohy, Račíněves, and Vražkov (area is covering 28 km²), with evidence of minimum five remains of long barrows and further funerary monuments of Proto- and- Early Eneolithic period.

The first barrow excavated (project by: Turek, Křišťuf, & Hejcman) in the region is situated near the present village of Dušníky (Litoměřice district). The barrow was discovered by aerial survey in 2016. In 2021 a geophysical survey, pedological coring, and finally an excavation was conducted.

The barrow is 86 m long orientated east–west. Its width is 26 m in the east and narrows to 17 m in the west. The mound was piled of dark earth exploited along the barrow. Its current height is still around 1 m. Such well-preserved mound is unique within Bohemia because most Late Neolithic barrows have been destroyed by ploughing in modern times. We have not detected any remains of stone or wooden structures used in the construction of burial mound.

The barrow was built over the timber burial chamber containing remains of a 11 year-old child buried in a crouched position on its right side, with head orientated to the west. The tomb was made of wooden planks. The burial assemblage consisted of a small jug and a flint arrowhead. Based on the grave goods typology, we date the grave to the end of the Baalberge phase of the Funnel Beaker culture (TRB). After the deposition of the primary child burial and completion of the barrow construction, it probably served as an ancestral shrine. The evidence of a possible sacrificial activity is the accumulation of broken ceramic vessels in a communication surface near the eastern frontage. Such ceremonial activity could have lasted from several decades to perhaps 200 years. Subsequently, a massive ditch was dug around the barrow. It is more than 2 m wide and about 1.5 m deep. The sand extracted from the ditch was deposited at the base of the mound. It was the final phase of building the monument. The ditch was quickly backfilled and never recut again.

It is possible that the monument built over a child burial became a shrine that was used over a long time.

4 Causewayed Enclosures

The Neolithic predecessors of the Eneolithic enclosures in Bohemia were so-called rondels (see Řídký et al., 2019 and Turek, 2012 for further references). The ditch enclosures of the Proto-Eneolithic period, the so-

called causewayed enclosures, occurred in the vast territory of central and north-western Europe, starting in the late LBK period in Germany and France: Langweiler, Herxheim, and Menneville and are from the late sixth/early fifth millennium (Zeeb-Lanz et al., 2009, with further references).

Regardless of the regional variability of archaeological cultures, there is an apparent cultural phenomenon unifying culturally and geographically very distant regions. This fairly orthodoxly replicated form of monument is obviously related to a shared cosmological concept that has allowed the rapid spread of this phenomenon in the vast territory of continental Europe, southern Scandinavia, and the British Isles. Although the real nature of rituals and social interactions that were taking place within these enclosed areas is a disputable issue amongst archaeologists for a long time, it is clear that there was one common idea behind their spread. A significant factor influencing the spread of these monuments to the northern and western peripheries of the Neolithic Europe was the neolithisation process. Both in England and today's Denmark and southern Sweden, this is a concomitant phenomenon following the spread of agriculture. The builders of these enclosures were the first farmers to settle in the otherwise purely Mesolithic environment. The life of the original Mesolithic population had a subsistence and cosmology that was different from that of the settled farmers. Mesolithic hunter-gatherers belong to nature but farmers exploit existential bonding with nature prevailed (Tilley, 1989). While the Neolithic farmers exploited the nature and through their culture and subsistence strategy separated themselves from nature that they actively transformed. Enclosure monuments are, therefore, a part of the demonstration of cultural diversity and a part of establishment of the new order of the world. In continental Europe, ditch enclosures appear in the already established Neolithic communities, based on the 1,000 year evolution of landscape domestication and sedentary thinking. The first contact of Mesolithic (Limburg group, La-Hoguette) and Neolithic communities took place here much earlier in the mid-sixth millennium BC. This first stage of neolithisation is followed by the Eneolithic period after the middle of the fifth millennium BC, the time of progressive changes in agricultural production, social structure, and the application of the earliest copper metallurgy in Europe. At this time, some decisive changes in farming technology occurred (introduction of ploughing, see Neustupný, 1967, 2008), there occurred also certain changes in religious concepts, which continued to be based on the principles of agricultural cultures, but with increasing emphasis on the symbolism of bovine animals and masculine warfare symbols (battle-axes).

The research project focussing on Proto-Eneolithic enclosures was recently carried out in the Elbe River territory (Křišťuf et al., 2019; Figure 4). In Bohemia, these ditch enclosures appear in the context of the later

Figure 4: Location of the research area within the current boundaries of the Czech Republic.

phase of the Jordanów culture. The ceramics found in some causewayed enclosures also feature elements of the Schussenried culture, as well as the oldest phase of the Michelsberg culture. This development is indicative of the continuity of this type of enclosures regardless of the formal changes in the style of ceramic production. The latest of the Proto-Eneolithic causewayed enclosures in Bohemia is the one in Kly, Mělník district (Figure 5). This site has been connected purely with the ceramics of the II phase of Michelsberg culture. If we evaluate the geographic position of the Proto-Eneolithic causewayed enclosures in Bohemia, most of them are located on the level of river terraces. The similar situation was observed in Germany, where most of them are located in the locations with broad access and enclosed by ditches of oval shape, sometimes several 100 m long. In most cases, the geomorphological setting is enclosing the site either only partially or not at all. An important phenomenon in the Czech Republic is the preference of these flat positions near the main watercourses, even in cases where there are significant geomorphological formations nearby (such as hill-top sites used in later periods to build fortifications and fortified settlements). This is the case of the trio of enclosures Vliněves – Kly – Vrbno at the confluence of the Vltava and the Elbe river, which is close to the dominant ridge stretching between Všetaty and Mělník with an important fortified early medieval site on its northern edge. Despite these landscape dispositions, the locations at the level of the first terrace of the Vltava and Elbe rivers were preferred for all the three Proto-Eneolithic causewayed enclosures. All the three of them are located just a few metres above the floodplain. Although these locations provided a long-term protection against the flooding, they are undoubtedly not the most strategically advantageous sites with fortification potential within the surrounding landscape (see map in Figure 6).

The location of the trio of Proto-Eneolithic enclosures at the confluence of largest Czech rivers is situated on the divide of the open flat agricultural landscape of Podřipsko (Říp Mount area) with the natural dominating feature of Říp in the west and the vastly rugged landscape of the Kokořín region in the northeast forming a wild hilly counterpart of the Říp surrounding plain. Říp Mountain was in direct sight of all the three enclosures, and it is likely that this circumstance played a significant role in their spiritual exploitation.

The significant concentration of the three Proto-Eneolithic sites in the relatively small confluence area of the Labe and Vltava rivers leads us to re-consider their contemporaneity present and thus the density of these sites in the landscape. Given the size of the individual causewayed enclosures, it can be assumed that

Figure 5: Kly (Mělník district). A Michelsberg culture causewayed enclosure. Cropmarks showing two lines of parallel ditches and the inner palisade (photograph by M. Gojda).

Figure 6: Terrain relief model of the Mělník area with highlighted causewayed enclosures in the area of the Elbe and Vltava river confluence, in direct visibility of the Říp Mount (after Křišťuf et al., 2019, Figure 6.1).

the enclosures exceeded needs of one community area, and they probably served the activities of several communities within a wider region. The enclosures might have even maintained the inter-regional social interaction. The fact that this enclosure concentration is located at the confluence of large rivers is certainly indispensable. The Labe (Elbe) and Vltava rivers represented important landscape boundaries, but they also served as important communication corridors. At this point, we have to discuss why the three Proto-Eneolithic enclosures were created in such limited space? The answer can be perhaps found in the chronological consecutive sequence of sites. The relatively short usage time, which is documented in Vrbno and Kly can be assumed even in the case of Vliněves, suggests that these constructions might have been built with the purpose of serving a particular ritual or series of rituals, not with the intention of a stable, long-term use. Such interpretation suggesting successive development of these sites seems to be logical. Especially, the enclosure at Kly seems to be chronologically later, and this is reflected also in different style of material culture.

Transferred into the terms of living culture, one can suppose that after some time of up keeping by one community came a time when the similar enclosure was built within another settlement area within this distinctive communication region, and thus a chronological sequence of inter-communal gathering monuments was established.

Especially if we consider the funerary significance of the enclosure, it is also necessary to consider the spiritual significance of the place where the waters run from different parts of the country and where the people, perhaps, from distant regions gathered for funerary ceremonies. Local communities from the mythical confluence landscape (ritual landscape) would thus be a sort of steward of a far-reaching, sacred district. In this respect, it would be interesting to observe the location of the aforementioned areas with the context of the current settlement.

In general, there seems to be two main forms of burial at the beginning of Eneolithic period in Central Europe: a burial inside the house of the dead, that is, a long barrow, which is a symbolic reflection of a small, closed social group (household/family) particularly emphasising the local ties and intimate relationships, and a second public way of burial within the super-communal ritual space emphasising a broader shared cultural identity (Křišťuf et al., 2019).

5 Conclusion

Based on the reconstruction of the spatial context of causewayed enclosures and long barrows of the Proto- and Early Eneolithic Period in Bohemia, we attempt to model the spatial and chronological relations within the hypothetical framework of ritual landscape. Long barrows and causewayed enclosures should not be perceived as isolated monuments, just the opposite as they are part of a pattern of regional and super-regional identity of communities and individuals. In fact, they are crucial elements of the overall system of structuring of the prehistoric landscape. Specifically, we are talking of the ritual landscape that has been repeatedly described mainly by the British scholars (for the concept, see Edmonds, 1999; Parker Pearson, Pollard, Richards, Thomas, Tilley, & Welham, 2020; Pelisiak, 2014; Pryor, 2016; Robb, 1998; Tilley, 1997).

Did such ritual landscapes exist even in prehistoric Central Europe? Within the prehistoric cultural landscape, in some areas the profane and the sacred activities naturally intermingled, and a number of utilitarian activities could take on a ritual significance in a certain context. So where to look for such a ritual landscape? It could have been in the vicinity of important communication crossroads, at the confluence of large rivers, in the vicinity of sacred mountains such as Říp or at the divide between the domesticated and wild worlds, for example, in Prachovské skály of the Bohemian Paradise. The Michelsberg culture enclosure at Urmitz in southern Germany lies on the site of a significant ford across the Rhine in superposition with later Roman camps, whereas the enclosure in Mayen is located at the crossroads of Roman trade routes. So there seems to be a far-reaching tradition of people using and enclosing these important parts of landscape.

Most of the Bohemian Proto-Eneolithic ditch enclosures are located in the plain, on river terraces and only partially use the natural properties of the geomorphology of the terrain to close the inner area. This is the case, for example, with the three Vliněves – Kly – Vrbno, Proto-Eneolithic enclosures at the confluence of the two biggest rivers of Bohemia.

Considering the enormous size of the enclosed areas, it can be assumed that the ditch structures went beyond the framework of the community area and probably served the activities of people from the wider region and maintained their mutual social interaction. In this context, the fact that the concentration of enclosures is located at the confluence of the largest Czech rivers, which not only form important borders in the landscape but are also important communication corridors, is certainly not negligible. So why were those three Proto-Eneolithic enclosures located in this important, but relatively limited space? The answer can be found in the chronological sequence of the sites. Their relatively short period of use suggests that the features were built for a specific ritual assembly or series of social events (Křišťuf et al., 2019).

As mentioned above, the three confluence enclosures were located just between the open flat and mostly waterless landscape of Říp Mount plateau with the natural dominance of the mythical mountain in the west and the highly rugged landscape of Kokořín region forming a wild ragged counterpart to the plain around Říp. Mount of Říp was in direct view of all the three enclosures located near the Labe/Vltava confluence, and it is probable that in the spiritual level of their use, this circumstance played a significant role. If Říp was only 30–50 km northwards, it would be one of the many formations of the Bohemian Central

Figure 7: The Říp Mount, a mythical landmark of prehistoric ritual landscape in Bohemia (view from the Elbe and Vltava confluence in Mělník, photograph by Jiří Jiroušek).

Highlands, but its solitary location in the Elbe plain gives Říp a very special role as a sacred mountain of Bohemia (see Figure 7). As we know from the botanical reconstruction of the vegetation cover, the mountain has not been deforested until recent time. The shape of Říp resembles a manmade mound, and it is possible that it also played such a role in the mythology of our prehistoric ancestors. Říp was perhaps perceived as a place where the spirits of ancestors gather and the deities reside?

Funding information: This study is part of the research project: “Eneolithic long barrows in Bohemia and reconstruction of the ritual landscape around the hill of Říp” financed by the GAČR – Czech Science Foundation, grant No. GA21-25440S. Tato studie je výstupem projektu “Eneolitické dlouhé mohyly v Čechách a rekonstrukce rituální krajiny pod Řípem” (GA21-25440S), který je financován GAČR – Grantovou agenturou České republiky.

Conflict of interest: The author states no conflict of interest.

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