ARCHAEOLOGIA POLONA TOM 63 (2025), PP. 205-227

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Author: Petr Kristuf, Jan Turek

PL ISSN 0066-5924

DOI: https://doi.org/10.23858/APa63.2025.4138

https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/publication/285419

Jak cytować:

Kristuf, P., & Turek, J. (2025). Returns to Ancestral Monuments. The Transition of Funerary Areas During the 4th and 3rd Millennia BC in Bohemia. Archaeologia Polona, 63, 205–227. https://doi.org/10.23858/APa63.2025.4138

Archaeologia Polona vol. 63: 2025, 205–227
PL ISSN 066-5924
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Returns to Ancestral Monuments. The Transition of Funerary Areas During the 4th and 3rd Millennia BC in Bohemia

Petr Krištuf[a] and Jan Turek[b]

The earliest manifestation of funerary monumentality in Central Europe is represented by long barrows from the 4th millennium BC. The latest discoveries suggest that it was the long barrows that initiated the tradition of shaping ritual landscapes. Besides their funerary function, these monuments also served as ancestral shrines. Current research indicates the existence of approximately a thousand-year hiatus in the use of these sacred places in Bohemia. Secondary burials associated with the Corded Ware and Únětice Cultures have been recorded in long barrows. Similar sequences can also be observed in other sites where evidence of long barrows is currently not secure. Beaker cultures of the 3rd millennium BC are represented primarily by funerary monuments in the form of round barrows. This form of funerary monuments did not evolve from the long barrows. On the contrary, it represents a new phenomenon originating from the North Pontic/Caspian region, associated with the Yamna Culture.

KEY-WORDS: long barrows, round barrows, secondary burials, Corded Ware Culture, ancestral monuments, Czech Republic, Central Europe

INTRODUCTION

Burial mounds are one of the fundamental expressions of monumentality in the funerary rites of prehistoric cultures in Europe. Their origins can be traced back to the so-called long barrows, which began to appear in Europe as early as the 5th millennium BC. Since then, burial mounds have been constructed at prehistoric cemeteries for millennia, and this phenomenon only truly disappeared with the advent of Christianity.

[a] Department of Archaeology, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Univerzitní 8, 301 00 Pilsen, Czech Republic; e-mail: pkristuf@ff.zcu.cz; ORCID: 0000-0001-6389-6316
[b] Center for Theoretical Study, Charles University, Husova 4, 110 00 Prague, Czech Republic; e-mail: turek@cts.cuni.cz; ORCID: 0000-0001-5370-7702

Received 14 May 2025; Received in revised form 10 October 2025; Accepted 12 October 2025
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Over this long period, burial mounds underwent many formal transformations, which may reflect changes in religious beliefs, ideology, or social norms (Bradley 2002; Bourgeois 2013; Jeunesse 2014; Ahola 2020). Perhaps the most significant transformation was the shift from long barrows to round barrows, which occurred in Central Europe during the 3rd millennium BC. From that point on, round barrows dominated prehistoric cemeteries in Central Europe, while the tradition of long barrows came to a definitive end. The use of long barrows for burials by subsequent communities has been observed at several sites in Bohemia. Secondary graves were inserted into the mounds more than 1000 years after their construction. Long barrows seem to have been an important part of the cultural landscape for a long time, structuring its perception. Mound builders and their immediate followers apparently perceived the site as sacred, associated with ancestor worship, but initially adding more burials was perhaps taboo. Over time, however, the perception of the mound changed. After a certain period, the direct link and memory of the ancestors who built the mound were lost, and only the mound itself, and in some cases the surrounding ditches, remained visible (Turek *et al.*, 2025). Such situations occurred mainly in the times of the Corded Ware, Bell Beaker, and Únětice cultures

This text aims to explore the background of this change. Are round barrows the result of a gradual shortening and fragmentation of long barrows? This perspective on the emergence of the round barrow phenomenon has been proposed in the past, based on research at certain barrow cemeteries in Central Europe (Neustupný 2001). During the 4th millennium BC, a gradual shortening of long barrows can indeed be observed (Turek and Krištuf 2025). At the same time, we see continuity in barrow burial practices from long to round barrows at some cemeteries. Evžen Neustupný suggested that the original concept of collective long barrows in Central Europe was eventually transformed into individual burials beneath round barrows (Neustupný 2001; 2013).

However, it is important to note that in Eastern Europe, for example, round barrows appear much earlier and without any preceding tradition of long barrows. This raises the question of whether the shift to round barrows in Central Europe may reflect the adoption of new cultural models from external influences rather than a continuous development of the local long barrow tradition.

Long barrows represent the earliest known funerary monuments in prehistoric Europe. In Central Europe, these structures appear at the beginning of the 4th millennium BC (Król 2021; Turek and Krištuf 2025). By this time, agricultural populations had already been developing in the region for 1500 years. Monumentality had been a part of their cultural expression from the start. This had primarily been manifested in the construction of so-called longhouses, which were the traditional

dwellings of both the Linear Pottery Culture and the subsequent Stroke Pottery Culture. Longhouses were an expression of a sedentary lifestyle, playing a significant role in asserting community identity and land ownership rights.

It is typical for the first farming communities in Bohemia not to have created designated cemeteries; instead, they buried their dead within the settlement area, sometimes directly beneath the floors of their homes. Several instances have been documented where burials were located within residential houses (Bradley 2001). It is possible that such a house lost its residential function and became a funerary monument. This probably marks the beginning of funerary monumentality in Central Europe. The ruins of longhouses, serving as houses of the dead, continued to attract burial activity. This can be observed, for example, at the Miskovice cemetery in Central Bohemia, where around 70 graves from the Stroke Pottery Culture were located in an area where three Linear Pottery Culture houses had once stood (Květina *et al.*, 2016). The ruins of these houses, possibly even partially modified into barrow-like forms, became the foundation of one of the largest Neolithic cemeteries in Bohemia.

For Neolithic communities in Central Europe, the residential quarter held significance as a place for depositing the dead. Their houses, after being abandoned, served as homes for deceased ancestors. When we look at this context of destroyed longhouses with the dead preserved inside, we can begin to see where the idea of building long funerary barrows as designated burial structures originated. It took approximately 1000 years for this concept to evolve in Central Europe into the construction of independent funerary barrows (Turek and Krištuf 2025). However, the earliest examples of long barrows do not originate from this region; they first developed in northwestern France during the first half of the 5th millennium BC (cf., Chambon 2020). The tradition then spread northward to the British Isles, the Low Countries, southern Scandinavia, and also to Central Europe – though a case can be made for convergent development in this region as well (Turek and Krištuf 2025). If we seek for the origin of long barrows in Europe we should follow the occurrence of longhouses of a distinctly trapezoidal layout that appeared in the Stroke Pottery Culture and the Lengyel Culture around 4800 BC and later in the Brześć Kujawski Culture in about 4300–4200 BC, but they did not yet have a funerary counterpart of a similar plan. This process of diversification and the emergence of the first trapezoidal barrows in Kujawy sites, such as Sarnowo or Wietrzychowice (Chmielewski 1952), did not occur until around 3900–3800 BC (Król 2021), that is 600–700 years later than in the Paris Basin and almost 1000 years after the first trapezoidal houses in Western Europe. It should be borne in mind that trapezoidal houses were no longer being built by the time of the construction of long trapezoidal mounds in Greater Poland (Król 2021), Silesia, and Bohemia (Zápotocký 2023; Turek and Krištuf 2025), which is

3700–3500 BC. Typical houses in the Funnel Beaker Culture period were of rectangular ground plan. The trapezoidal shapes of the long barrows were not therefore clearly based on the contemporary Funnel Beaker houses, but were derived from ground plans of houses 1000 years older.

Neolithic long barrows remain a visible part of the cultural landscape of northern and northwestern Europe to this day, so it is no surprise that they have attracted scholarly interest at least since the emergence of archaeology as a scientific discipline in the 19th century. Intensive research on these barrows is especially linked to the first half of the 20th century, when both megalithic (e.g., Piggott 1962) and non-megalithic (e.g., Ashbee 1966) structures were excavated in the British Isles and northern Europe, along with the first long barrows in Central Europe (e.g., Chmielewski 1952), where they are primarily associated with the Funnel Beaker Culture. However, in Bohemia, no above-ground remains of such barrows had been recorded, and so they remained long outside archaeological evidence. The first indications of their existence were brought to light by Ivana Pleinerová (1980) following the discovery of two long structures in Březno near Louny. Subsequent activities by Czech archaeologists, culminating in a systematic research project on long barrows from 2021 to 2023, identified more than 60 potential long barrows in Bohemia (Krištuf *et al.*, 2024).

These investigations show that various types of long barrows in Bohemia are connected to the Funnel Beaker Culture, and in some cases also to the earlier Michelsberg tradition (Krištuf *et al.*, 2024). They do not form cemeteries but are built individually, usually outside the residential area proper (Krištuf *et al.*, 2023). Burial under long barrows thus becomes spatially separated from settlement activity and houses, which had once served as their prototype. In some regions of Bohemia, long barrows are even the first structures with which people entered previously uninhabited parts of the landscape (Krištuf and Fišer 2025), and their construction marks the beginning of a change in the use of these places and a transformation of the environment (Strouhalová *et al.*, 2025).

Crucially, in the context of this article, recent research on long barrows in Bohemia has shown that these structures were not built as collective or family tombs. Most of the excavated barrows contained only a single burial that could be dated to the time of construction. Other potential graves in the barrow were secondary burials made hundreds or even thousands of years later (Turek and Krištuf 2025). Thus, the significance of these structures for Neolithic communities appears to have been more religious and social than purely funerary. The barrows served as community sanctuaries dedicated to the worship of gods and ancestors, often in use for decades or even centuries. The burial of a selected community member was probably connected more to the founding or initiation of the structure.

Equally important was the very existence of the barrow, which remained in the landscape for thousands of years, even long after its primary function as a sanctuary had ended. The barrow continued to influence the perception and use of the surrounding landscape (Krištuf *et al.*, 2023). The monumentality of the first barrows was thus a key factor in the development of the Neolithic landscape, and it probably continued to shape human behaviour during the subsequent Bronze and Iron Ages. The significance of monumental funerary structures may have survived in the form of legends well into the modern era (Turek and Krištuf 2025).

EVIDENCE OF SECONDARY CORDED WARE BURIALS IN BOHEMIAN LONG BARROWS

A characteristic feature of Neolithic long barrows in Bohemia is that they were constructed for the burial of a single individual. Interestingly, we currently have almost no evidence of additional burials being inserted into these barrows during the Funnel Beaker Culture period or even in subsequent ones. This situation changes during the 3rd millennium BC, when, in several cases, secondary burials of the Corded Ware Culture and later the Únětice Culture of the Early Bronze Age were inserted into Neolithic long barrows. These are cases in which burials were added to partially eroded long barrows more than 1000 years after their original construction. The best examples of this practice have so far been documented at the site of Březno in northwestern Bohemia (Pleinerová 1980) and at the sites of Vražkov and Račiněves in the vicinity of the sacred Mount Říp (Krištuf *et al.*, 2024; Turek and Krištuf 2025).

Březno long barrows

During systematic excavations in the 1960s and 1970s near the village of Březno, the ground plans of two long barrows were discovered (Fig. 1). These were barrow mounds originally reinforced with wooden palisades. The first (No. 62) measured 24 metres in length and contained two graves. The second (No. 86) measured over 144 metres, contained three graves, and had a wooden chamber in its eastern part that served as a sanctuary (Pleinerová 1980). The graves contained almost no artefacts. Based on the typological similarity of one bowl, Evžen Neustupný dated the construction of the longer barrow to the Michelsberg Culture. The shorter barrow is dated by a radiocarbon result (GrN 8803 – Grave LXXIII: 5090±45 BP) to the interval 3980–3777 cal BC. This suggests both barrows were built around the same time.

Another radiocarbon date comes from the westernmost grave in the longer barrow. Although this burial was entirely without grave goods, the date (GrN 8802 –

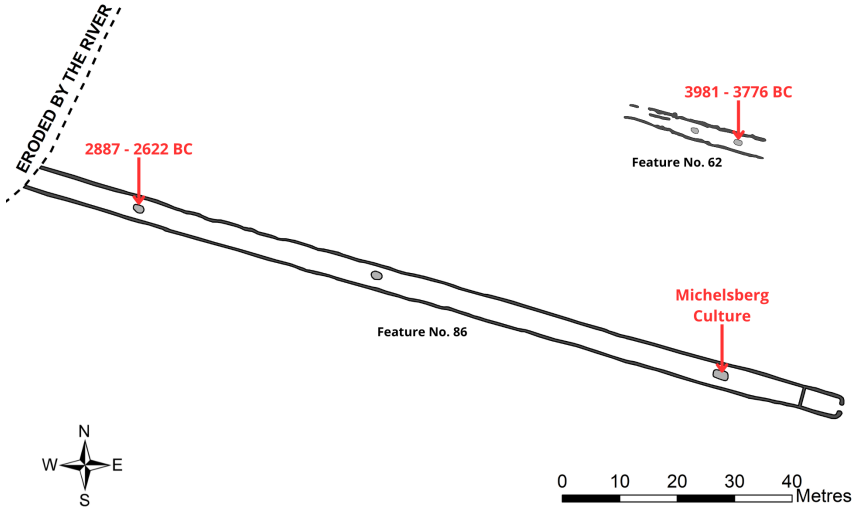


Fig. 1. Březno long barrows (Louny District). Ground plan of the barrows with dating of individual features.

Grave LXXXI: 4165±45 BP) places it within the Corded Ware Culture. This is also supported by the body position (Pleinerová 1980; Neustupný 2013). It can be assumed that the grave was inserted into the already partially eroded barrow mound more than 1000 years after its construction. However, evidence of burials from the 3rd millennium BC at this site does not end there. The barrow was also partially disturbed by a burial associated with the Bell Beaker Culture (Pleinerová 1980).

In the area of Structure 86 and its immediate surroundings, a Únětice Culture cemetery with 23 graves was also discovered. The fact that this cemetery was established on a narrow 80-metre-long strip, and that 20 of the graves were located within structure No. 86, with three more in its immediate vicinity, suggests the presence of a slight elevation in the terrain, probably the remnant of a barrow mound, into which the Únětice graves were inserted (Pleinerová 1980: 39).

The long barrows at Březno represent one of the best examples of the reuse of early 4th millennium BC funerary monuments by communities of the Corded Ware Culture, the Bell Beaker Culture, and the Únětice Culture.

Račiněves long barrow

The long barrow at Račiněves represents a similar type of construction as the barrows at Březno near Louny. It was discovered during a rescue excavation in the 1990s but was not thoroughly investigated until 2022 (Turek and Krištuf 2025). The barrow

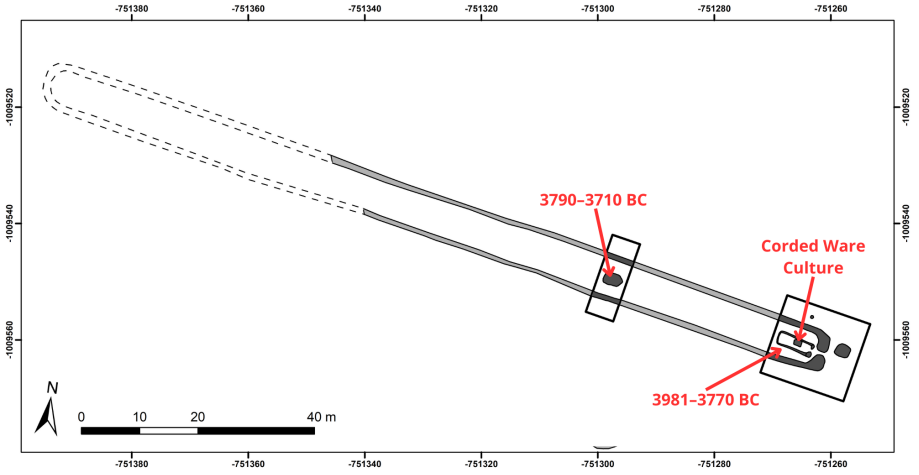


Fig. 2. Račiněves long barrow (Litoměřice District). Ground plan of the barrow with dating of individual features.

is 122 metres long and was probably surrounded by a wooden palisade (Fig. 2). In its eastern part, there was an open-access wooden chamber that served as a sanctuary. The primary burial was located approximately 28 metres behind this chamber. The burial of an adult male in a monumentally sized grave pit was accompanied by a set of 12 quartzite arrowheads. The dating of the barrow is based primarily on a collection of radiocarbon dates from charred remains of the wooden structure (Turek and Krištuf 2025: table 4.3). Nine radiocarbon dates suggest the barrow was built some time between 3981–3770 cal BC. Another radiocarbon date was obtained from the primary burial. Due to poor collagen preservation, bioapatite was used for dating. The resulting date (UGAMS 66882, 4990±25 BP, 3790–3710 cal BC) coincides with the upper boundary of dates from the wooden structure but bioapatite dates are generally younger than those from collagen. The barrow may have been constructed within the period of the Funnel Beaker Culture. However, the types of quartzite arrowheads found, which in Bohemia appear in graves associated with pottery of the later Michelsberg Culture, also suggest a possible pre-Baalberge origin of the barrow structure.

A later burial, associated with the Corded Ware Culture, was added to this barrow (Fig. 3). The burial, probably of a woman in a crouched position on her left side, was placed in the area of the wooden chamber in the eastern part of the barrow. Given the presence of a large amount of charcoal from the destroyed wooden structure of the chamber, this burial must have taken place after the chamber's



Fig. 3. Račiněves long barrow (Litoměřice District). Detail of the Corded Ware grave and burial assemblage.

destruction. Based on current knowledge of the chronology of the Corded Ware Culture in Bohemia, the burial was inserted into the partially eroded barrow roughly 1000–1500 years after its original construction.

In addition, another Corded Ware Culture burial was discovered near the barrow during a rescue excavation in the 1990s. Burials from the Late Bronze Age and the Hallstatt period have also been recorded in the vicinity (Turek and Krištuf 2025).

Vražkov long barrow

The Vražkov long barrow represents one of the first long barrows discovered in Bohemia. It is a closed linear feature with a trapezoidal ground plan (Fig. 4). Its longer axis is oriented WNW–ESE. The length of the feature is 32 metres. The length of the

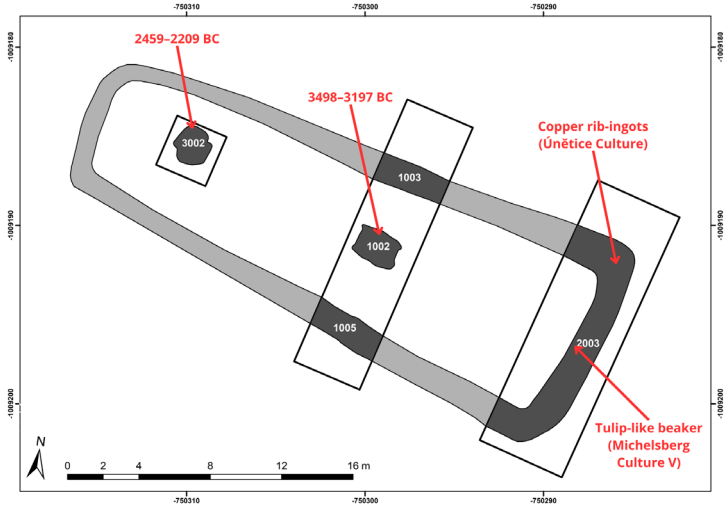


Fig. 4. Vražkov long barrow (Litoměřice District). Ground plan of the barrow with dating of individual features.

eastern side is 11 m. Towards the west, the feature narrows, and the western wall is 7 m long. It was excavated in 2021.

It was most likely a simple earthen mound without any wooden or stone construction. The barrow was surrounded by a V-shaped ditch approximately 2 metres wide and about 1 metre deep. Two graves were discovered within the area of the barrow.

The first burial pit has a rectangular plan. The dimensions of the grave are 230 x 120 cm and it was dug 50 cm into sandy substrate. Post impressions are visible in the corners of the grave pit, probably remnants of wall reinforcement using a wooden construction. An adult male was buried here. He was lying on his right side, oriented in a W–E direction with the head to the west and facing south. The burial did not contain any grave goods. Dating of the Vražkov barrow is challenging due to the absence of artefacts in the primary burial pit and also lack of suitable charcoal for radiocarbon dating. Therefore, the only option was absolute dating based on human bones. However, their poor preservation did not allow for collagen extraction. As a result, radiocarbon dating was conducted based on carbon from bioapatite. The obtained date UGA66881: 4600±25 BP (3498–3197 cal BC) suggests a relatively recent origin of the barrow, but comparing it with dates obtained from collagen is problematic. Generally, bioapatite seems to provide significantly later data. The exact dating of the barrow remains unclear. Nevertheless, the almost complete tulip-shaped

beaker in the ditch fill in front of the eastern facade of the barrow links the construction to the V phase of the Michelsberg Culture.

The second grave was located in the western part of the barrow. It reached a depth of up to 8 cm into the substrate and was massively damaged by modern ploughing. Due to this, it is not possible to accurately reconstruct the shape or dimensions of the grave pit. The remains of an adult individual were preserved only in isolated fragments scattered throughout the grave pit. This is most likely a consequence of damage caused by ploughing. The grave goods consisted of at least three vessels, the fragments of which are concentrated in the northern part of the grave. This included an Únětice Culture jug and two additional vessels whose character does not exclude the same cultural classification. The ^{14}C date comes from the Únětice Culture grave, supporting its placement in the Early Bronze Age CRL22_1398: 3864±21 BP (2459–2209 cal BC).

The ditch surrounding the barrow on all sides was practically devoid of finds. The exception is the beaker mentioned above, which dates the construction and use of the monument. In the northwest corner of the ditch, a deposit of 100 bronze rib ingots (*Spangenbarren*) was discovered, buried in the Early Bronze Age in the partially filled ditch. Fragments of another two bronze ribs were also found elsewhere in the topsoil of the barrow, suggesting that the sacrificial activity was carried out on multiple events on this site. Even in the case of this barrow, we record the continuation of burials about 1000 years after its construction.

Continuity of barrow cemeteries

The three aforementioned cases do not necessarily represent a clear trend. However, it is important to note that they involve some of the best-explored long barrows in Bohemia, and all of them contain secondary burials from the 3rd millennium BC. Given that only a minimal number of long barrows in Bohemia have been thoroughly investigated (Krištuf *et al.*, 2024), we decided to examine the use of all Funnel Beaker Culture cemeteries throughout the periods of the Corded Ware, Bell Beaker, and Únětice Cultures.

The Archaeological Map of the Czech Republic (https://www.aiscr.cz/), which is the most extensive archaeological information system in the country, records 75 Funnel Beaker Culture cemeteries in Bohemia (Table 2). Most of these have no evidence of long barrows, which is not surprising and does not necessarily mean that barrows were never constructed over the graves. At many of these cemeteries, we can observe continual burial activity during the 3rd millennium BC. We examined whether burials from the 3rd millennium BC occur within a 500-metre radius of Funnel Beaker Culture graves.

At 24 sites (32%), Corded Ware Culture burials are recorded (Fig. 5:1). Bell Beaker Culture burials are also recorded at 24 sites (32%; Fig. 5:2). Most frequently, we

Table 1. Number of Funnel Beaker Culture cemeteries in Bohemia with evidence of burials from the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

	Corded Ware Culture	Bell Beaker Culture	Únětice Culture	Corded Ware Culture + Bell Beaker Culture	Corded Ware Culture + Únětice Culture	Bell Beaker Culture + Únětice Culture	All Cultures	SUM
No. of Funnel Beaker cemeteries	3	4	11	3	8	7	10	46
%	6,5	8,7	23,9	6,5	17,4	15,2	21,7	100,0

encounter Únětice Culture graves at Funnel Beaker cemeteries – 36 sites in total, representing 48% of all known Funnel Beaker cemeteries (Fig. 5:3). Overall, we can state that 62% of known Funnel Beaker cemeteries in Bohemia show evidence of subsequent burials from the Corded Ware, Bell Beaker, or Únětice Cultures. In some cases, evidence comes from just one of these cultures (18 sites), but we also encounter instances with burials from two (18 sites) or even all three cultures (10 sites; Fig. 6 and Table 1). The data used come from excavations conducted from the late 19th century to the present day and are of varying quality. They include both large-scale excavations and isolated grave finds whose surroundings were not further investigated. It is therefore possible that in many cases, continuity of cemeteries has escaped our detection. In this context, we consider the postulated subsequent use of 62% of Funnel Beaker Culture cemeteries as evidence of a significant spatial continuity of the funerary areas of this culture and those of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.

It is thus evident that the earlier Funnel Beaker cemeteries, defined by long barrows, continued to be used in Bohemia for more than 1000 years by cultures whose members typically constructed round barrows. This did not involve just isolated graves inserted into the mounds of earlier barrows. For example, at the Brandýsek site (Central Bohemia; Fig. 7), it appears that a barrow cemetery of the Corded Ware and Bell Beaker cultures, containing at least 24 graves, was established around what was probably a single long barrow (Šmejda 2001). At Velké Žernoseky (North Bohemia), the area of approximately two to three long barrows was reused to establish a large Únětice Culture cemetery (Krištuf and Švejcar 2013).

Table 2. List of known Funnel Beaker Culture burial sites in Bohemia used in this study, based on the aiscr.cz database. The presence of later burials of the Corded Ware, Bell Beaker, and the Únětice cultures is indicated. The site number (No. of site) follows the aiscr.cz database, where further details can be found (https://digiarchiv.aiscr.cz/home).

Site	District	No. of site	Corded Ware Culture	Bell Beaker Culture	Únětice Culture
Běchovice	Hlavní město Praha	C-9145996A-K023	no	no	yes
Bílina	Teplice	C-9163319A-K001	no	yes	no
Brandýs nad Labem 1	Praha-východ	C-9152623A-K001	no	no	yes
Brandýs nad Labem 2	Praha-východ	C-9152627A-K001	no	yes	yes
Braník	Hlavní město Praha	C-9142977A-K001	no	no	no
Brázdim	Praha-východ	C-9152849A-K010	yes	no	yes
Brozany nad Ohří	Litoměřice	C-9134141A-K001	no	no	no
Březany u Žatce	Louny	C-9103298A-K004	no	yes	no
Bubeneč 1	Hlavní město Praha	C-9144654A-K001	yes	yes	yes
Bubeneč 2	Hlavní město Praha	C-9144757A-K003	yes	yes	yes
Černuc	Kladno	C-9128043A-K001	no	no	yes
Červené Pečky	Kolín	C-9129323A-K001	no	no	no
Dejvice	Hlavní město Praha	C-9144836A-K001	yes	no	yes
Dolínek	Praha-východ	C-9153064A-K001	no	no	yes
Dolní Chabry	Hlavní město Praha	C-9145708A-K001	no	no	no
Drnov	Kladno	C-9128077A-K001	no	no	no
Dřísy	Praha-východ	C-9136768A-K001	no	no	no
Hořín	Mělník	C-9136819A-K001	no	yes	yes
Chbany 1	Chomutov	C-9110053A-K001	yes	yes	no
Chbany 2	Chomutov	C-9110052A-K001	yes	yes	no
Chržín	Kladno	C-9102662A-K002	yes	no	yes
Chudeřín	Louny	C-9133038A-K001	yes	yes	yes
Jenštejn	Praha-východ	C-9153309A-K001	no	no	yes

Site	District	No. of site	Corded Ware Culture	Bell Beaker Culture	Únětice Culture
Jinonice	Hlavní město Praha	C-9143796A-K001	yes	yes	yes
Kbely	Hlavní město Praha	C-9146377A-K007	no	no	yes
Keblice	Litoměřice	C-9134499A-K001	yes	no	no
Klecany	Praha-východ	C-201772965A-K001	no	no	yes
Kluk	Nymburk	C-9140861A-K001	no	no	no
Kolín	Kolín	C-200912982O-K005	no	no	yes
Kopidlno	Jičín	C-201225932A-K003	no	no	no
Kostelec nad Labem 1	Mělník	C-9137092A-K006	yes	yes	yes
Kostelec nad Labem 2	Mělník	C-9137099A-K001	no	yes	yes
Kouty u Poděbrad	Nymburk	C-9140967A-K001	no	no	no
Kutná Hora	Kutná Hora	C-9126910A-K001	no	no	no
Ledčice	Mělník	C-9137382A-K001	no	no	no
Libenice	Kolín	C-9130421A-K002	no	no	no
Litovice 1	Praha-západ	C-9107889A-K002	yes	yes	yes
Litovice 2	Praha-západ	C-9107892A-K001	no	yes	no
Louny	Louny	C-9133236A-K002	no	no	yes
Lužec nad Vltavou	Mělník	C-9137678A-K002	no	no	no
Máslovice	Praha-východ	C-9153545A-K002	no	no	no
Měšice u Prahy	Praha-východ	C-9001324A-K002	no	no	yes
Mlékojedy u Neratovic	Mělník	C-9138000A-K005	no	yes	yes
Mradice	Louny	C-9133304A-K001	no	no	no
Neratovice	Mělník	C-9138153A-K002	yes	yes	yes
Neuměřice	Kladno	C-9128583A-K001	no	no	no
Nížebohy	Litoměřice	C-9135202A-K001	no	no	yes
Ovčáry u Kolína	Kolín	C-9130697A-K001	no	no	no

Site	District	No. of site	Corded Ware Culture	Bell Beaker Culture	Únětice Culture
Polerady	Most	C-9139472A-K001	yes	no	no
Postoloprty	Louny	C-9133514A-K002	yes	no	no
Ratboř	Kolín	C-9130962A-K002	no	no	no
Rybitví	Pardubice	C-9147544A-K001	no	no	no
Selibice	Louny	C-9133596A-K001	no	yes	yes
Siřem	Louny	C-9133597A-K001	no	no	no
Soběsuky nad Ohří	Chomutov	C-9120871A-K001	yes	yes	yes
Světec	Teplice	C-9164314A-K003	no	no	no
Svinčice	Most	C-9139550A-K001	no	no	no
Svojšice u Kouřimi	Kolín	C-9131147A-K001	no	yes	yes
Tatce	Kolín	C-9142025A-K001	no	no	no
Teplice	Teplice	C-9164332A-K001	no	no	no
Tišice	Mělník	C-9138502A-K011	no	yes	yes
Třebusice	Kladno	C-9128956A-K008	yes	yes	no
Veliká Ves u Prahy	Praha-východ	C-9154550A-K001	yes	no	yes
Velké Žernoseky	Litoměřice	C-9135710A-K001	no	yes	no
Vikletice	Chomutov	C-9000551A-K004	yes	no	yes
Vliněves	Mělník	C-9111440A-K014	yes	yes	yes
Vražkov	Litoměřice	C-9135762A-K001	yes	no	yes
Vrbčany	Kolín	C-9131597A-K001	no	no	no
Vrbice u Mšeného-lázní	Litoměřice	C-9135773A-K001	no	no	no
Všetaty	Mělník	C-9138754A-K001	no	no	no
Zdětín u Benátek nad Jizerou	Mladá Boleslav	C-9136565A-K001	no	no	no
Žabovřesky nad Ohří	Litoměřice	C-9135798A-K002	yes	yes	yes
Žatec 1	Louny	C-9133875A-K001	no	no	no
Žatec 2	Louny	C-9133909A-K001	yes	no	yes
Žatec 3	Louny	C-9133957A-K001	yes	no	yes

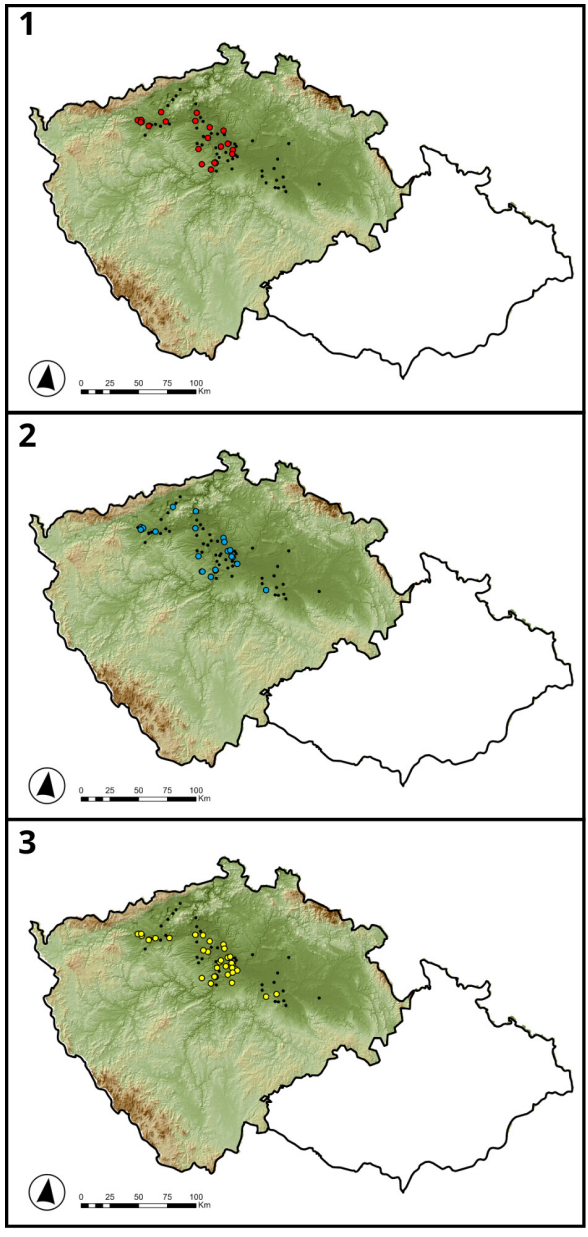


Fig. 5. Spatial distribution of Funnel Beaker Culture cemeteries in Bohemia. Black – Funnel Beaker Culture only, Red – with Corded Ware Culture burials, Blue – with Bell Beaker Culture burials, Yellow – with Únětice Culture burials.

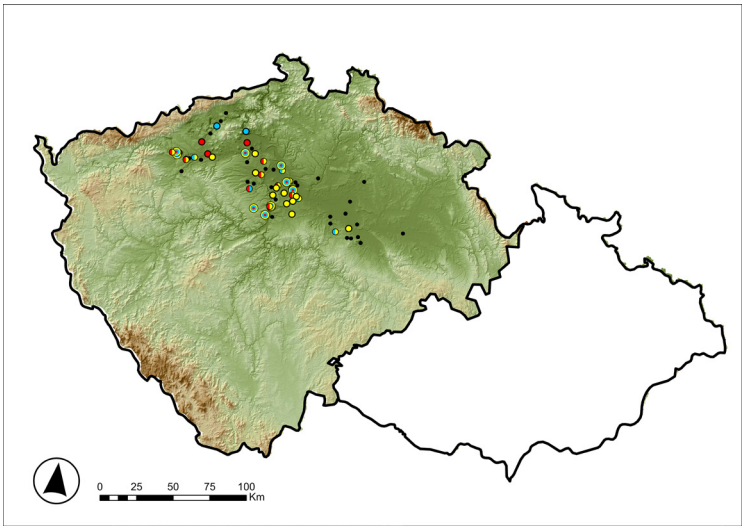


Fig. 6. Synthesis of spatial distribution of Funnel Beaker Culture cemeteries in Bohemia, demonstrating the continuity of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age funerary activities. Black – Funnel Beaker Culture only, Red – with Corded Ware Culture burials, Blue – with Bell Beaker Culture burials, Yellow – with Únětice Culture burials.

It thus appears that the communities who increasingly began to construct circular barrows in Central Europe often reused old barrow cemeteries that, from their perspective, were defined by archaic long barrows.

CONTINUITY OR NEW BARROW TRADITION?

One of the key questions regarding the emergence of the Corded Ware phenomenon is the origin of the new form of round barrows. Indeed, the circular shape of these barrows, also known as kurgans, forms part of the new expression of ritual behaviour associated with the *Single Grave Burial Rite Complex* (Furholt 2020). In Central and Northwestern Europe, circular barrows first appeared with the Corded Ware Culture.

Certainly, there were numerous intergroup contacts, particularly those between the steppe pastoralists and Corded Ware groups (e.g., Furholt 2021; Heyd *et al.*, 2021; Haak *et al.*, 2023; Hofmann *et al.*, 2025), and between the local Funnel Beaker and Corded Ware communities (e.g., Van der Velde and Bouma 2023; Bourgeois *et al.*, 2025). This cultural context clearly implies the environment in which

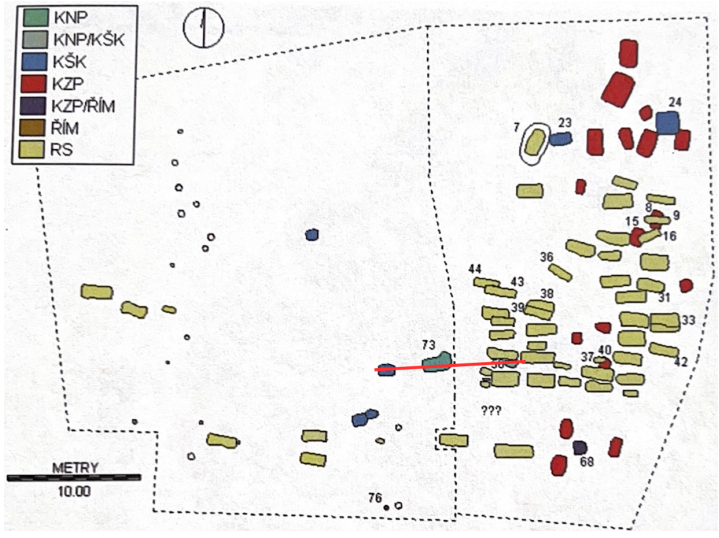


Fig. 7. Digitised overall plan of the cemetery in Brandýsek (Kladno District), with the chronological phases represented by colours: KNP – Funnel Beaker Culture; KŠK – Corded Ware Culture; KZP – Bell Beaker Culture, ŘÍM – Roman Period; RS – Early Middle Ages. The long barrow probably covered Graves 73 and 56 (the axis of the presumed long barrow is marked with a red line). The layout of the Early Medieval graves respects the original round mounds of the Corded Ware Culture and the Bell Beaker Culture. After Šmejda 2001.

such developments could have occurred, and this process should be understood as a synthesis of cultural elements rather than merely as an isolated impact of alien population infiltration. Let us now focus on the question of how and where this new burial tradition originated. Theoretically, there are two possible explanations. The first, an autochthonous interpretation, assumes a continuity in the development of the Middle Neolithic (in British/German chronological terminology) Funnel Beaker long barrows, with a trend of their shortening and division into segments. Such a process can be observed, for example, at burial sites of late Funnel Beaker and Boleráz long barrows in the forests of Central Moravia (Šmíd 2003). At cemeteries such as Křemela 1, we can still observe long barrows of various lengths in combination with "circular" barrows. At first glance, it appears as if the ground plan of a long barrow had disintegrated into a series of individual circular barrows arranged in a row. While this process of shortening the barrows is possible, excavations of some of these mounds show that the original shape defined by features such as stone kerbs was still rectangular. This is evidenced by uncovered perimeter stone

constructions. The seemingly circular mounds are, in fact, the result of later erosion. This transformation preserves purely rectangular layouts and has nothing to do with the emergence of circular structures. Additionally, the relatively latest long barrow in Bohemia (dated to the Globular Amphora Culture) at Ctiněves, cannot be regarded as a direct predecessor to later round barrows. It is of trapezoidal ground plan and measures 14 metres in length and 10 and 8 metres in width (Turek and Krištuf 2025). Therefore represents the continuation of the preceding trend of long barrow design. Given the current state of knowledge, it does not seem likely that there is a direct continuity between the tradition of Neolithic long barrows and the barrows of the Corded Ware Culture. Similar observations of spatial affinity of the Funnel Beaker long barrow and later Corded Ware and Mierzanowice culture round barrow burials was uncovered during excavation of part of an extensive barrow cemetery in Malżyce the Czarnocin commune district of Kazimierza Wielka, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (Tunia and Włodarczak 2011; Jarosz *et al.*, 2013a; 2013b).

The second, allochthonous interpretation, involves the introduction of a new tradition of circular barrows with single burials. The origin of this type of funerary monument can be traced to the North Black Sea/Pontic-Caspian region, where members of the Yamna Culture buried their dead under circular mounds around 3300 BC (Włodarczak 2021 with further references). Round barrows of the Yamna Culture spread across a large territory from the North Caspian area to the Eastern Hungarian Plain and Bulgaria. It is plausible to suppose that the new "kurghan" element of circular ground-plan monuments spread along with the Yamna population. On the northwestern edge of Yamna expansion, in the north-west of present day Ukraine, there is a contact zone with the Subcarpathian group of the Corded Ware Culture. Therefore, it is likely that the typical round burial mounds originated here and then expanded into Central Europe alongside the Corded Ware and later the Bell Beaker phenomenon.

Ring ditches encircling some 3rd millennium graves are a widely spread phenomenon in Central and North-Western Europe. Corded Ware ring ditches are known from Bohemia, Moravia, Lower Austria, Lesser Poland, Silesia, central Germany, Bavaria and the Netherlands. Bell Beaker ring ditches have been recorded in Bohemia, Moravia, Bavaria, Central Germany, Tuscany, Middle and Lower Rhine valley etc. In Bohemia and Moravia, ring ditches occurred in both the Corded Ware and Bell Beaker periods. Their shape is roughly circular, with a grave pit in the centre (such as in Chudeřín in North Bohemia; see Fig. 8). Diameters of these round ditches vary from 5.64 m to 10.50 m in the Corded Ware period and from 3.0 m to 12.0 m in the Bell Beaker period, with medians for Corded Ware ring ditches about 9.4 m in diameter and just over 7 m for Bell Beaker ring ditches. The ring ditches are clearly the result



Fig. 8. Chudeřín (Chomutov District). The ring ditch originally encircling the Corded Ware round barrow. Photo: J. Turek.

of a new round design of funerary monuments in the form of barrows or funerary ditch enclosures (Turek 2006).

From the very inception of the Corded Ware Culture, its spread was associated with this new phenomenon of single-grave round barrows. It is also important to emphasise that round barrows as symbolic artefacts entered the range of burial customs of prehistoric Europeans at that time, and in the northern part of the continent, they persisted – though with short gaps – until the end of the Early Medieval period.

CONCLUSION

By examining the transition of funerary practices from the 4th to the 3rd millennia BC in Bohemia, this study highlights a complex interaction between continuity and innovation in burial traditions. The evidence of long barrows, originally constructed by the Funnel Beaker Culture, underscores their multiple roles as funerary, ancestral and ritual monuments. These structures, representing the earliest form of monumental funerary architecture in Central Europe, were in Bohemia primarily used for single burials.

The rise of the Corded Ware Culture after 2900 BC marks a major shift in perception of funerary landscapes, signified by the introduction of round barrows. While

these new structures appear to delineate a cultural departure from the long barrows, they also reflect an intriguing cultural continuity. The secondary use of existing long barrows by Corded Ware and later Bell Beaker and Únětice cultures illustrates an ongoing reverence for these funerary areas. This reuse suggests that newly established communities sought to establish connections with the sacred landscapes of their ancestors, perhaps to legitimise their own cultural and territorial claims.

The transition from long to round barrows in Bohemia cannot be attributed merely to an evolution in architectural style but rather to the influence of external cultural exchanges, particularly with the Yamna Culture from the Pontic-Caspian steppes (Anthony 2023). The introduction of round barrows aligns with the broader dissemination of the Corded Ware, a phenomenon probably spurred by northward and westward migrations, which brought new funerary rites to the area. This process of cultural assimilation indicates an incorporation of new burial customs alongside a retention of certain local traditions.

Despite their differing origins, both the long and round barrows served as enduring structures within the cultural landscape, embodying the ritual and social values of the farming communities. Since the Corded Ware period, the utilisation of round barrows became a fundamental aspect of burial customs and funerary architecture across Europe north of the Alps. Despite intermittent interruptions, this tradition endured throughout later prehistoric periods and persisted until the conclusion of the Early Middle Ages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is part of the research project "Long-term land use dynamics within the areas of prehistoric ritual places" (grant No. 25–15795K) financed by the GACR – Czech Science Foundation. We are grateful to Ondřej Švejcar of the Prague Institute of Archaeology for providing data from AMČR database on funerary sites analysed in this study.

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