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Settlements of Local Phase of Corded Ware culture in Moravia

ABSTRACT

In the context of the long discussion on the (non-)existence of permanent Corded Ware culture (CWC) settlements and the semi-nomadic way of life of their inhabitants, ongoing excavations of common settlements have newly gained immense significance, as in almost all other regions, also in Moravia (Olomouc-Slavonín, Horní lán; Vřesovice; Seloutky; Hulín-Pravčice 1; Prostějov, Za tržištěm). Earlier sporadic indications have been joined by a series of records of settlements with sunken features and typical local ceramics identical with burial grounds, together with which they formed complete settlement areas in a number of sites. Light wattle structures, wells(?), textile production, animal husbandry, etc., have been identified, as were some very unconventional inhumation burials in pits (Olomouc-Slavonín, two cases). The cord element clearly formed a part of the mixed horizon of Strachotín-Držovice with elements of Makó/Kosihi-Čaka culture, Globular Amphora culture and Moravian Group of CWC. Absolute dating indicated the 26th–23rd century cal. BC. Absence of foundations of (residential) structures could be explained by the lower level of recognisability of CWC settlements. In other aspects, it showed no particular difference from other prehistoric farmers and cattle breeders.

KEYWORDS

Corded Ware culture (CWC), Moravian Group of Corded Ware culture (MCWC), settlement of local phase, ceramics, daub wattle destruction, kiln?, absolute dating



Contrary to the earlier belief about the non-existence of permanent Corded Ware culture (CWC) settlements in connection with the discussion on the semi-nomadic way of life of their inhabitants, or their different nature of settlement (cf. Neustupný 1969; 1997; Bantelmann 1989; Neustupný, Smrž 1989; Beneš 1994; Vencl 1994; Turek 1995; Peška 2000a; and others), the latest research has shown quite the opposite in practically almost all regional groups of Central European CWC, revealing smaller homesteads or hamlets (*Weiler*) of 1–5 foundations or larger of beam/cabin or stake/post structures (recently also more complex postholes structures) with clear records of agricultural activities and animal husbandry, craft production and long distance trade (most recently e.g. Müller, Seregély 2008; Seregély 2008; Ullrich 2008; Conrad 2019; Friederich 2019; Friederich, Jarecki 2019, Abb. 13, Taf. 1-6; Friederich, Kleinecke 2019; Fröhlich 2019; Kűßner, Walter 2019, Abb. 1 and more). Despite the fact that in Moravia only sporadic finds from the polycultural site of Palonín-Sékorník in the Šumperk district (Šebela 1993, 215; 1999, 121, f. 79) have been known, on the map of Europe of CWC settlements only the site of Olomouc-Slavonín, Horní lán (Witkowska 2006, f. 1) have been entered, where the filling of several chronologically later features yielded typical ceramics of the earliest “Pan-European” horizon (Peška 1998a, 137–138, f. 4:5-7; 1998b, 72–73, f. 3:1-3; 2000a, 342, f. 1:1-7) as well as new local CWC ceramics from separate settlement pits (Peška 2000b, 258 ad, f. 9).

Today, the Moravian group of the Corded Ware culture (MCWC) comprises more than 550 graves with prevalence of inhumation graves (cremation graves were present in 5–10%). Also at this southern periphery of MCWC, modern archaeological research has produced convincing evidence of existence of settlement areas from the period of MCWC late (local) phase with all attributes of plain agricultural settlements. In addition to several earlier unconfirmed archaeological sites (Hradisko u Kroměříže, Němčice nad Hanou, Ohrozim, Velatice), it concerns the rather exceptional findings from caves (Holštejn-Hladomorna, Lužánky-Umlčí jeskyně, Mokrá-Pekárna: Peška 2020) and the already mentioned settlements in Palonín and Olomouc-Slavonín. Such a significant increase in recent years, particularly in central Moravia as the traditional MCWC oecumene, can be explained in connection with results of large rescue excavations. To this day, there is only one unique find of the earliest Corded Ware pottery – the A-pots (*Wellenleistentöpfe*) with differently washed “muddy” clay dough and typical plastic decoration (Fig. 2: 1) in Olomouc-Slavonín, Horní lán (see above). The absence of sunken features does not allow performing absolute dating. Numerous counterparts were

found in Bohemia (Matoušek, Turek 1998; Prostředník, Vokolek 1998) as were direct analogies in the area of lake dwellings of the Northern Alps. Several new settlements of the local phase were recorded in the vicinity of Olomouc, in the Prostějov and Vyškov districts, as well as in eastern Moravia (Fig. 1). Research of settlement areas of this component, however, has just begun.

During rescue archaeological research of the site of Hulín-Pravčice, U obrázku, eastern Moravia, settlement feature no. 730 (a part of a pit) was discovered under the cultural layer with ceramics showing all typical characteristics of the local MCWC in the context of two smaller groups of CWC graves (in the distance of 207 and 328 m) of the same age, having thus made the MCWC settlement area complete (Fig. 2: 2). It is a typical prehistoric settlement location on a gentle slope with a watercourse at the altitude of 196-201 m ASL. The originally round-shaped pit (preserved dimensions of 1.4 x 1.3 x 0.28 m) was completely filled with fragments of ceramics and, above all, numerous fragments of daub, animal bones (mainly of domestic animals) and

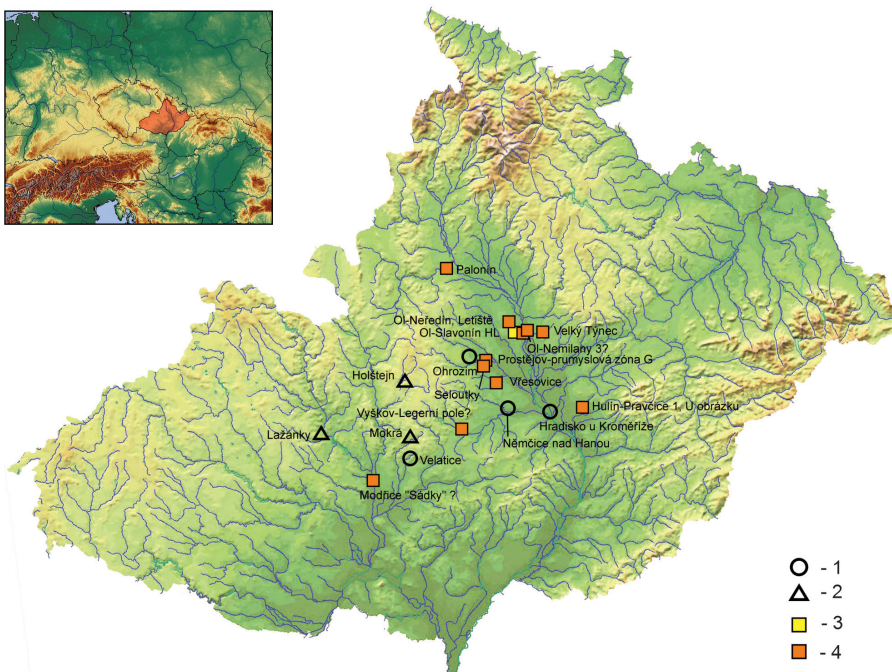


FIG. 1. A map of Moravia with the current state of knowledge of the Moravian Group of Corded Ware culture (MCWC). 1 – older unverified sites, 2 – cave sites, 3 – new sites, A-horizon, 4 – new sites, local phase (map by P. Grenar)



FIG. 2. 1 – Olomouc-Slavonín, Olomouc district, Horní lán 1995-7, 2001. A fragment of an A-pot, the earliest settlement Corded Ware pottery in Moravia with predecessors in the western part of Central Europe (photo by M. Mucha). 2 – Hulín-Pravčice 1, Kroměříž county, U obrázku 2006-2009. A sample of finds from the burial ground (photo by M. Bém). 3 – Hulín-Pravčice 1, Kroměříž county, U obrázku 2006-2009. Daub wattle destruction at the bottom of feature 730 together with fragments of vessels and animal bones. Wattle impressions in the daub indicate a lighter structure (a kiln?; photo by M. Daňhel and M. Bém)

charcoals (Pl. 1). The daub wattle destruction belonged to a feature of light wattle structure (e.g. kiln?) and it may be assumed that the placement of the structural element into the pit was a one-off act. Some pieces of daub were rounded with several very obvious rows of negatives of thin twigs, crossing at its top (Fig. 2: 3). Ceramics partially deformed due to the heat had all typological features of final (local) MCWC (extended or inverted rims, plastic protrusions, tunnel-shaped handles) with remarkable presence of egg-shaped pots, amphorae, cups or jugs, Moravian-type bowls, profiled bowls, etc. (Pls. 1-3). The economic character of the settlement was underlined by the presence of oval loom weighs with horizontal holes (Pl. 3: 3,4). The ceramics were practically indistinguishable both typologically and technologically from grave finds of cups with cord impressions, local pottery, stone axe-hammers and copper decorations (torcs, lock rings) (Fig. 2: 2) (unpublished). Also the absolute dating of both components was, in principle, identical. The overall setting strongly reminded of the MCWC settlement on the site of Olomouc-Slavonín, Horní lán which had been uncovered earlier (Peška 1998a; 1998b; 2000a; 2000b; 2009, 42–46, f. 30; 2011a, 27 ad., f. 29, 30, 35) (see below).

Analogical settlement material was obtained during smaller rescue research of M. Šmíd (to whom we are grateful for making his documentation available) in the Prostějov district (Vřesovice, Pod silnicí and Kandia 2003), where only partially treated feature no. 502 (a clay pit?) yielded identical ceramic finds, including egg-shaped pots, Moravian-type bowls and shards with special furrowed stitch decoration (Pl. 4).

In June and July 2019, ground works took place at plot number 1693/6 in the cadastre area of Seloutky, Na Šťastných (Fig. 3: 4) as part of the construction of a house where a unique and hardly noticeable smaller feature was discovered in the subsoil layer only partly protruding to the loess layer (Fojtík 2020). A set of three pottery vessels capable of partial reconstruction was found in the feature (a Nagyrev culture jug of the Balkan type, Letonice variant; (possibly) double-handle amphora with taller oblong body and a bottom part of a vessel with slightly set-back bottom: Pl. 5) as well as a single fragment of an antler. The dimension of a hole, possibly round-shaped (80 cm in diameter), in spite of partial damage due to excavation, allows for the ruling out of an inhumation grave; and the situation as a whole and the evident absence of any traces of cremation remains do not give any indication of a cremation grave. That being said, we cannot rule out completely the theoretical possibility of the placement of vessels in relation to accompanying rituals (cf. the evident ritual-based secondary burial of two sheep above a grave in Služín,

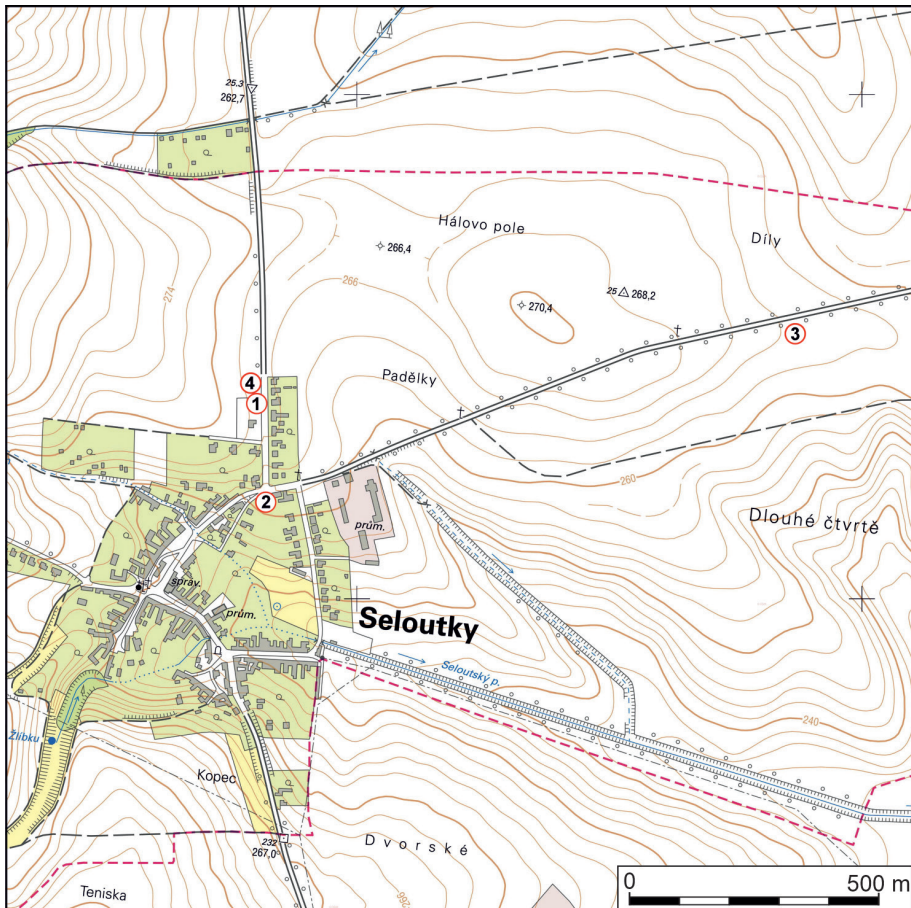


FIG. 3. Topography of known MCWC site at the cadastre unit of the village of Seloutky, Prostějov district. 1 – two inhumation graves from 1926 at the site locally known as Na Šťastných, 2 – inhumation grave discovered at the beginning of the 20th century during the construction of homestead for Mr. Kaprál (house number 104), 3 – inhumation grave found in 2010 at the site locally known as Dlouhé čtvrtě, 4 – localisation of the set of finds of pottery items in 2019 (according to P. Fojtík; map source: ČÚZK)

or broken pottery vessels placed in a similar way above graves in Mostkovice and Kostelec na Hané, e.g. Peška 2013, 122–123). Immediately to the south of the plot of land mentioned above (Fig. 3: 1) a Late Bronze Age cremation burial ground was discovered in 1926, also with two MCWC inhumation graves (Gottwald 1928, 17; Šebela 1999, 139, Pl. 95:3, 189:5; the more precise present-day localisation of the site was based on a more recent find of others Lusatian

culture graves in 2012; Fojtík 2013). They represent parts of a larger necropolis and are therefore related to a different MCWC grave discovered during the construction of a homestead of Mr. Kaprál (Seloutky, house number 104; Gotwald 1924, 67; Šebela 1999, 139, Pl. 95:1-2) situated approximately 190 metres to the South (Fig. 3: 2). The topography of known sites of the MCWC within the cadastre unit of the village of Seloutky, Prostějov district, include an isolated inhumation grave with evidence of wooden boards (see Peška 2002 on more details) disrupted in 2010 during the excavation of a ditch for high voltage cables at the site locally known as Dlouhé čtvrtě (Fojtík 2011a; Fojtík 2011b; Geislerová, Parma, eds. 2013, 287); however, this place is situated more than 1 km to the East from the site of discovery of the vessels and the aforementioned inhumation graves at the site locally known as Na Šťastných (Fig. 3: 3).

The spatial ties among settlements and burial grounds attributed to the final stages of the local CWC can be seen from the results of massive excavation preceding the construction of a factory of the MUBEA company in 2017-2018 where, at the site locally known as Za tržištěm in the cadastre unit of Prostějov, a group of approximately 25 settlement features and 10 inhumation graves was found (Fojtík 2019). The aforementioned data will be published together in separate article.

The so far largest complex of CWC settlements was uncovered during large excavation of polycultural site of Olomouc-Slavonín, Horní lán, Olomouc district. In addition to the already mentioned totally destroyed settlement of the earliest MCWC (A-horizon), represented only by fragments of A-pots secondarily placed in Middle Bronze Age pit fillings, a rather large local phase MCWC settlement was identified on the area of 3,5 ha with more than 20 sunken features and pottery intrusions in at least 10 pits of later age. They were mostly common settlement pits of smaller irregular clay pits, scattered randomly around the area (Fig. 4). They contained typical fragments of pottery (egg-shaped pots and sharply profiled bowls with reinforced rims, goods with sporadic cord impressions, fragments of large amphorae, Moravian-type bowls, etc.), spindle whorls, daub, animal bones, etc. (Pls. 6 and 7). Similarly, pottery shapes unknown from burial grounds were found in Hulín-Pravčice or Vřesovice (Pl. 1: 11).

In two cases (features 315/H15 and K 749) the pit fillings contained crouched skeletons, which is a very rare phenomenon for this time period (the only analogy was found in Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany: Balfanz 2003; Becker *et al.* 2015, 724). A small-group burial ground (comprising 6 graves) in the immediate vicinity showed a traditional burial rite (the only difference, though

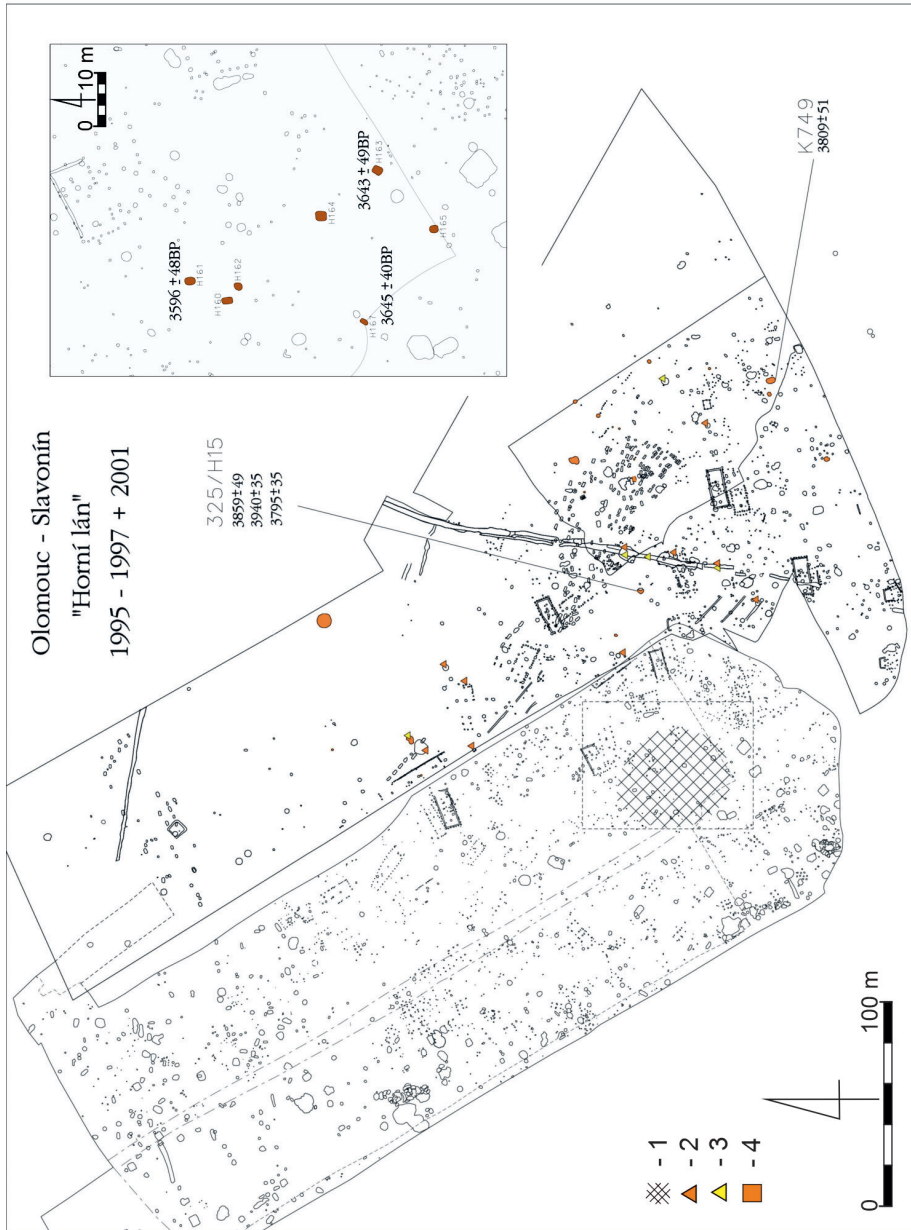


FIG. 4. Olomouc-Slavonín, Olomouc district, Horní lán 1995-7, 2001. An overall plan of the site with a settlement and a small MCWC group burial ground. Settlement pits as well as the graves provided for absolute dating (focus)

typical for central Moravia, being the prevailing north-east orientation), inner structures, added goods as well as non-ceramic equipment. The pottery content was completely identical with the settlement finds and, according to L. Šebela, it can be dated to the middle period of the local phase, or IIIb, of the MCWC. The only difference consisted in the absolute dating, which repeatedly indicated approximately 200-300 years less. This disproportion has not been sufficiently explained yet; also, it is not a unique phenomenon within other MCWC data, unfortunately (cf. Peška 2010).

One smaller irregular MCWC pit (feature 129) at the site of Olomouc-Neředín, Letiště 2004, also containing several smaller sets of finds (for example necks of vessels with cord impressions, Pl. 8: A). It was difficult to interpret the situation on the largest MCWC site of Olomouc-Nemilany 3, Pravák Nedvězí 2000, where 37 graves with inner structures and a certain level of separation of male gifts were excavated (Peška 2017). The distribution of small rounded or oval features among graves and their content in form of occasionally complete vessels (Pl. 8: B) did not make it possible to decide whether it was indeed a separate settlement or whether these were grave goods damaged by subsequent settlement. The pottery in the filling was identical, yet no suitable material for absolute dating of the settlement was available.

Aside from the increasing amount of evidence of local phase MCWC settlements, a clearly identifiable Corded Ware element was also present in Moravia as a part of mixed units of finds of the Strachotín-Držovice horizon (Pl. 9) and its presence in central Moravia blends elements of Makó/Kosihy-Čaka culture (MKC), Globular Amphora culture (GAC) and MCWC (Peška 2000b). Yet the actual presence or representation of MKC population remains problematic to prove as the MKC material is, owing to the origins of local MCWC shapes, very similar, though not identical, with the Carpathian Basin, or, more precisely, with south-western Slovakia or the territory beyond the Danube river (Pl. 10). The most recent research (including absolute dating) has indicated even more clearly the concurrence of MKC with at least the local-phase MCWC.

A settlement feature with daub wattle destruction from Hulín-Pravčice 1, Olomouc district, provided absolute dating from an animal bone (UGAMS-9500-3880±20 BP), the calibrated date of 2384±53 BC cal. Nearby graves showed values only slightly higher (H 19: KIA-34732-3910±35 BP; H 20: KIA-34733-3955±30 BP) and thus could be practically considered as contemporary. Similar were data provided by settlement features with a skeleton from Olomouc-Slaponín, Horní Lán (feature 325/H 15), a pit with typical ceramics,

only slightly lower (K 749: Erl-7616–3809±51 BP), and feature 2030 (Erl-4681–3861±51 BP) which was typologically closer to the Bell Beaker culture. The calibrated dating oscillated within 2490–2370, 2427–2249, 2286–2172, 2360–2180, and 2429–2249 BC cal. With the exception of problematic high-level data from the grave unit on the site of Olomouc-Nemilany 4, Lidická ulice H1 (Kalábek, Peška 2006; Peška 2011b, 190–197, f. 5-8, Pl. 2) and those indicating remarkably later period of the Earlier Bronze Period (Peška 2010), the substantial majority of the local phase MCWC data belong to the period between the 26th–23rd / 22nd century BC (Fig. 5). Similar dating is generally valid also for the final phase of CWC in Germany (2425–2100 BC) or Poland (2460–2200 BC). The majority of known CWC settlements will most probably be dated back to the earliest *Wellenleisten* style of CWC. For example, B. Witkowska (2006) mentioned, among other things, the settlements of later (Halle-Lettin, Gross Lehna, Luckaer Forst) and final phase (Halle-Döläuer Heide, Gleina, caves of the Kraków-Częstochowa Jurassic Highland Chain). Also on the basis of the absolute dating, settlements in Wattendorf (2630–2480 BC) and Ergersheim (24th century BC) (northern Bavaria) (Müller, Seregély 2008; Seregély 2008; Ullrich 2008) were placed to the later phase CWC. In Lower Lusatia, Sachsen and Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany, excavations have revealed more frequently foundations of houses and more recently also of wells (Quedlinburg, Eythra, Zwenkau – West: Stäuble 2019; Stäuble, Friederich 2019) or sacrificial pits (Balfanz *et al.* 2019). A similar situation was ascertained also on the territory of the Single Grave culture or Schönfeld culture (Beran 2001; Meller 2011; Blödorn *et al.* 2019; Planert *et al.* 2019). CWC settlements are present more frequently in the Kujawy region, Poland (Czebreszuk 2000), Lower Poland (Jarosz *et al.* 2010) or in other regions.

Recent research has thus demonstrated existence of CWC settlements (including MCWC) in Europe almost in all areas of archaeological excavations. These include settlements from the earliest period (A-horizon) as well as from later/final local phases. In general, the ban on digging pits, or crossing the horizontal line for other than funeral reasons, was not observed (most recently Neustupný 2008). Dozens of small villages have been recorded with all necessary facilities, though some parts of settlement areas (gathering of raw materials, pasturing, collection, rituals, etc.) are rather anticipated and their excavation is a task for future research. Better recognition of CWC settlements (cf. Peška 1998b; 2000b; Turek, Peška 2001; Turek *et al.* 2003, etc.) is hampered e.g. in Moravia by the lower possibility of their identification (hundreds of pits with no finds: Velký Týnec or Prostějov, industrial zone G) with

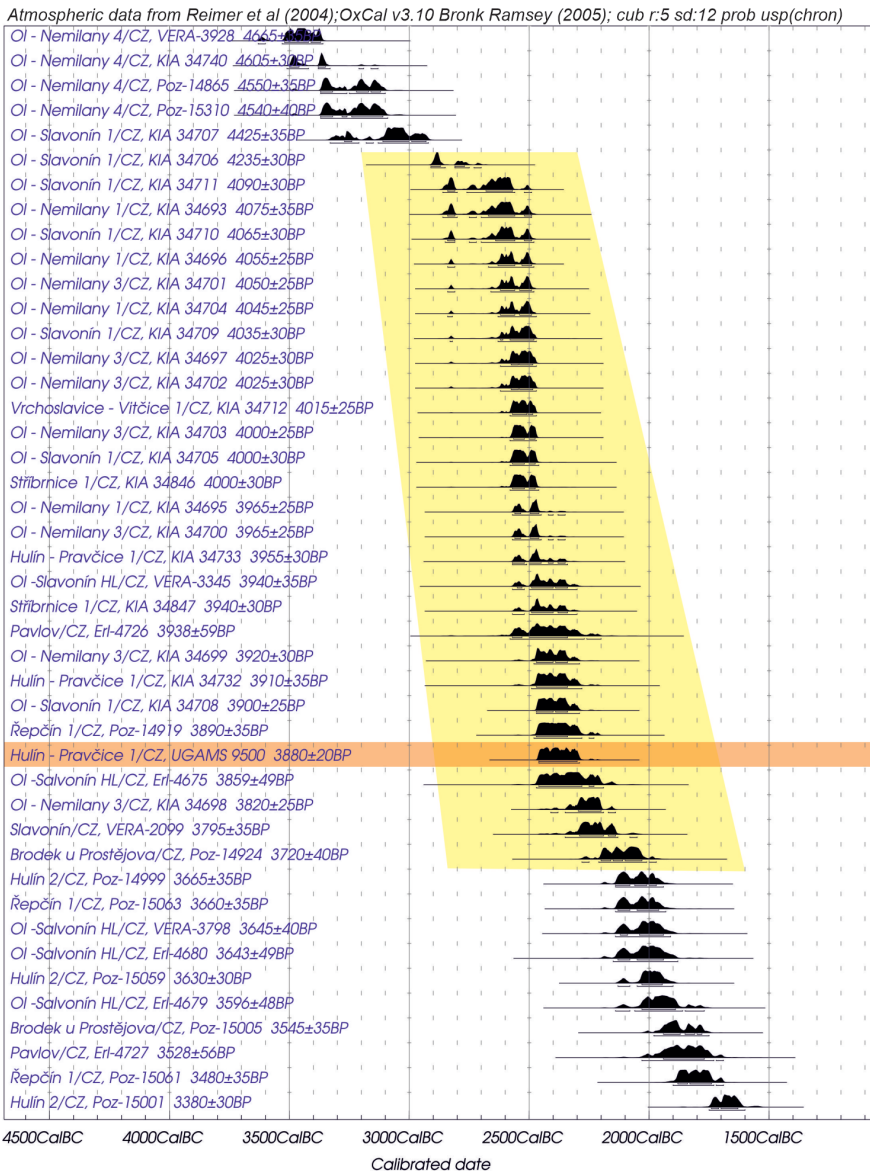


FIG. 5. An overview of the collected MCWC absolute dating

a lower level of reflection or record in archaeological sources. A consequence of it is absence of otherwise common foundations of above-ground structures (Germany, Scandinavia, Holland: Conrad 2019; Fokkens 2019; Friederich

2019; Friederich, Jarecki 2019, Abb. 13, Taf. 1-6; Friederich, Kleinecke 2019; Fröhlich 2019; Küßner, Walter 2019, Abb. 1; Nielsen 2019 and others) and other structures, though indications have been found (Prostějov, industrial zone G – wells?; Šmíd 2006).

The so far rather sporadic Moravian finds have shown the MCWC population as resident in traditional settlement regions, engaged in agricultural production, animal husbandry and pasturing, and showing no particular difference from other prehistoric communities.

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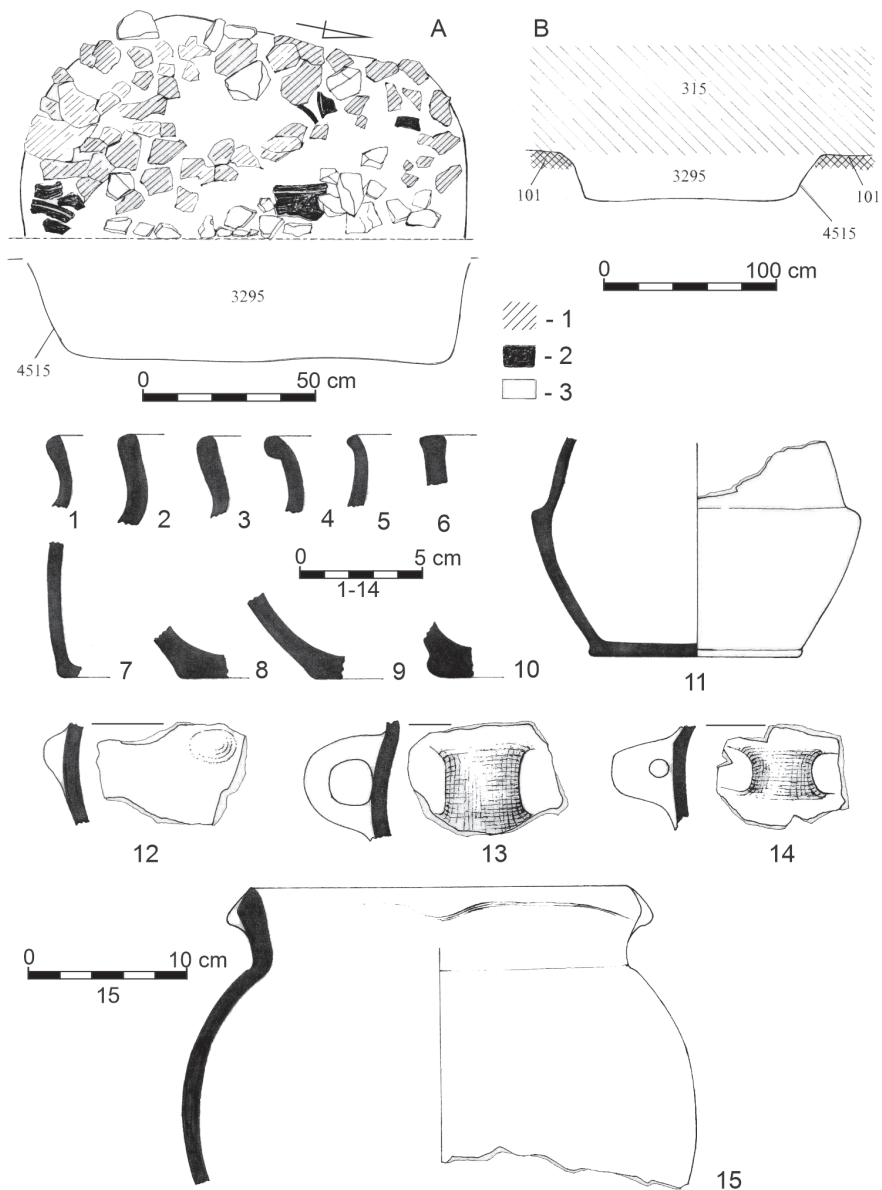
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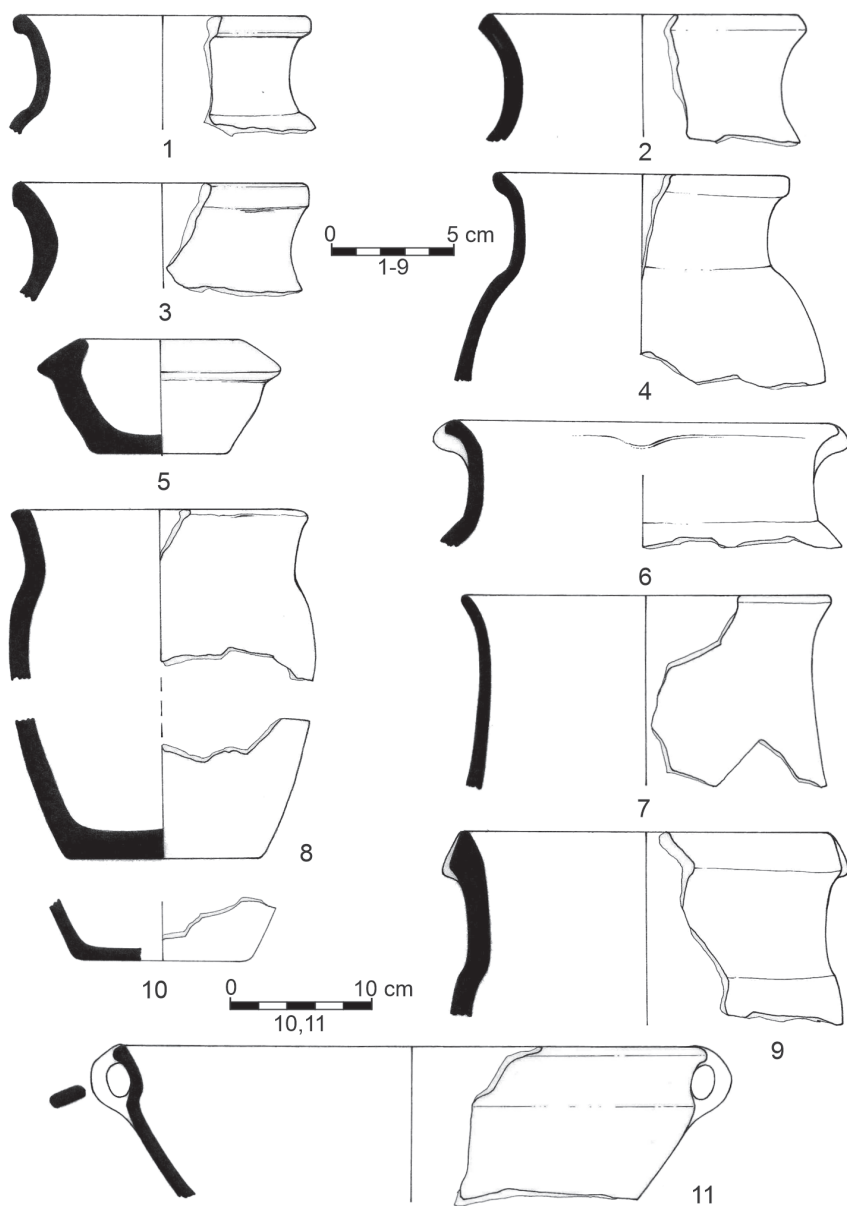
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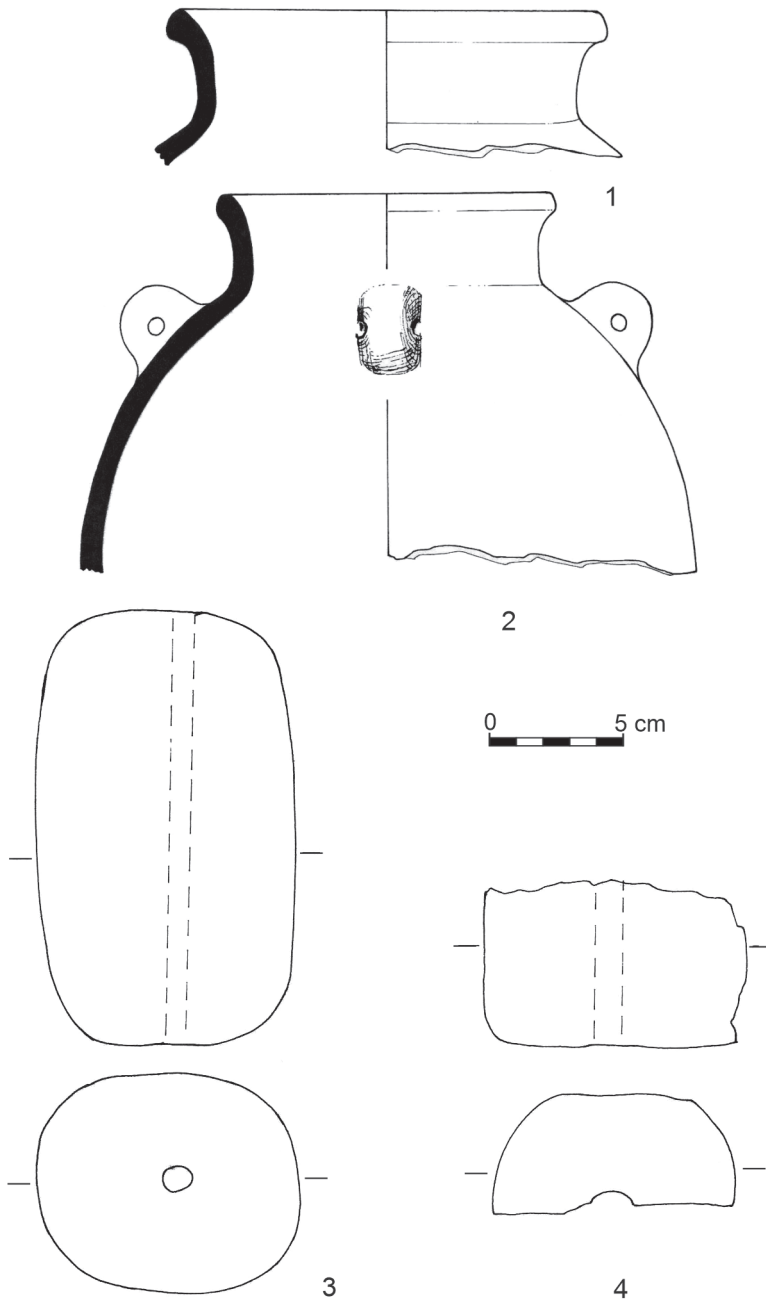
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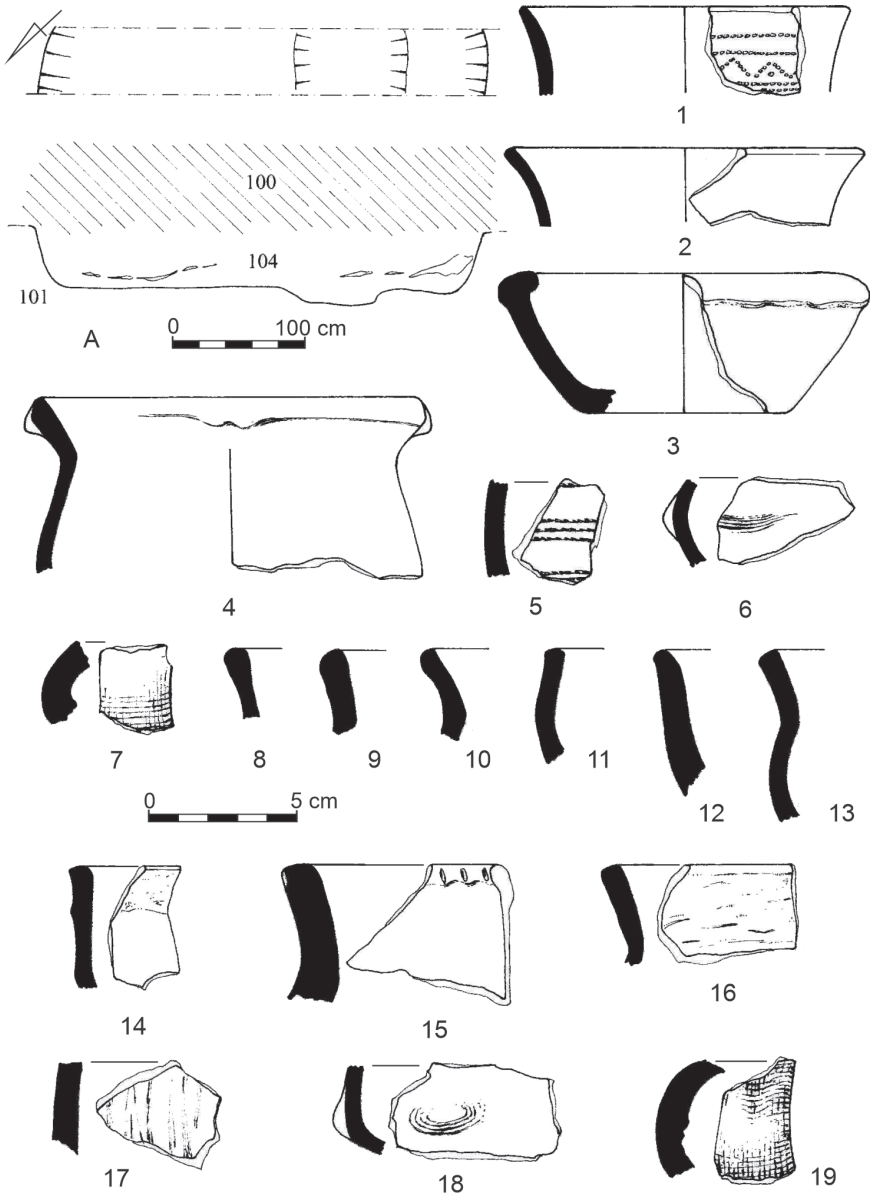
Pl. 1. Hulín-Pravčice 1, Kroměříž district, U obrázku 2006-2009. A settlement feature (no. 730) with daub wattle destruction and selection of finds (drawing by A. Pešková)



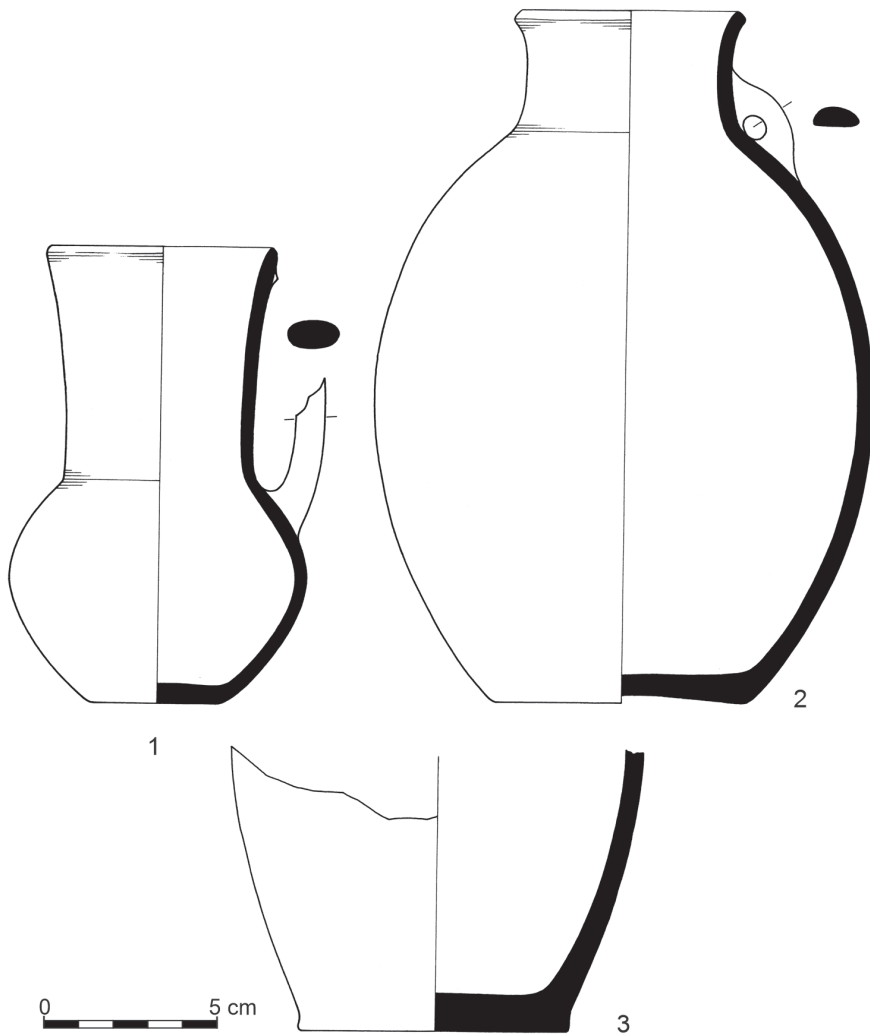
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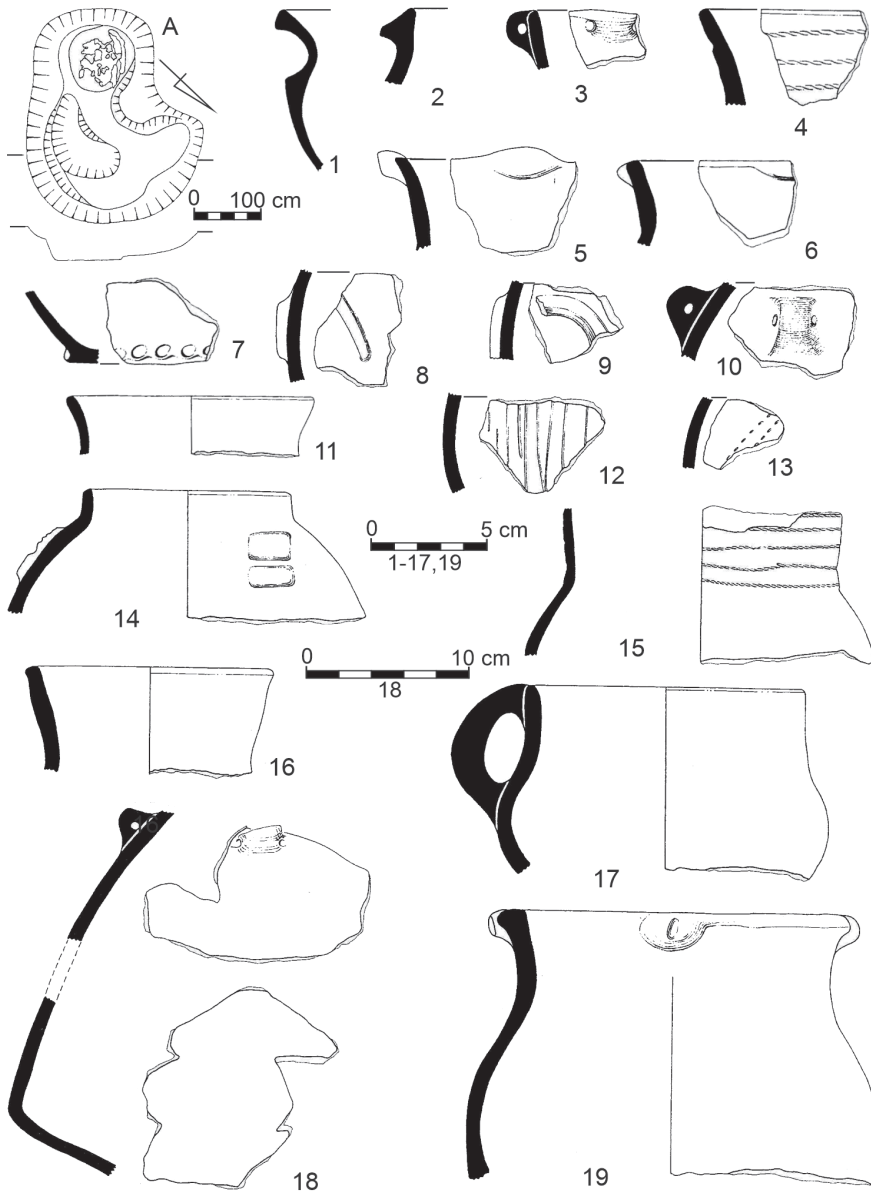
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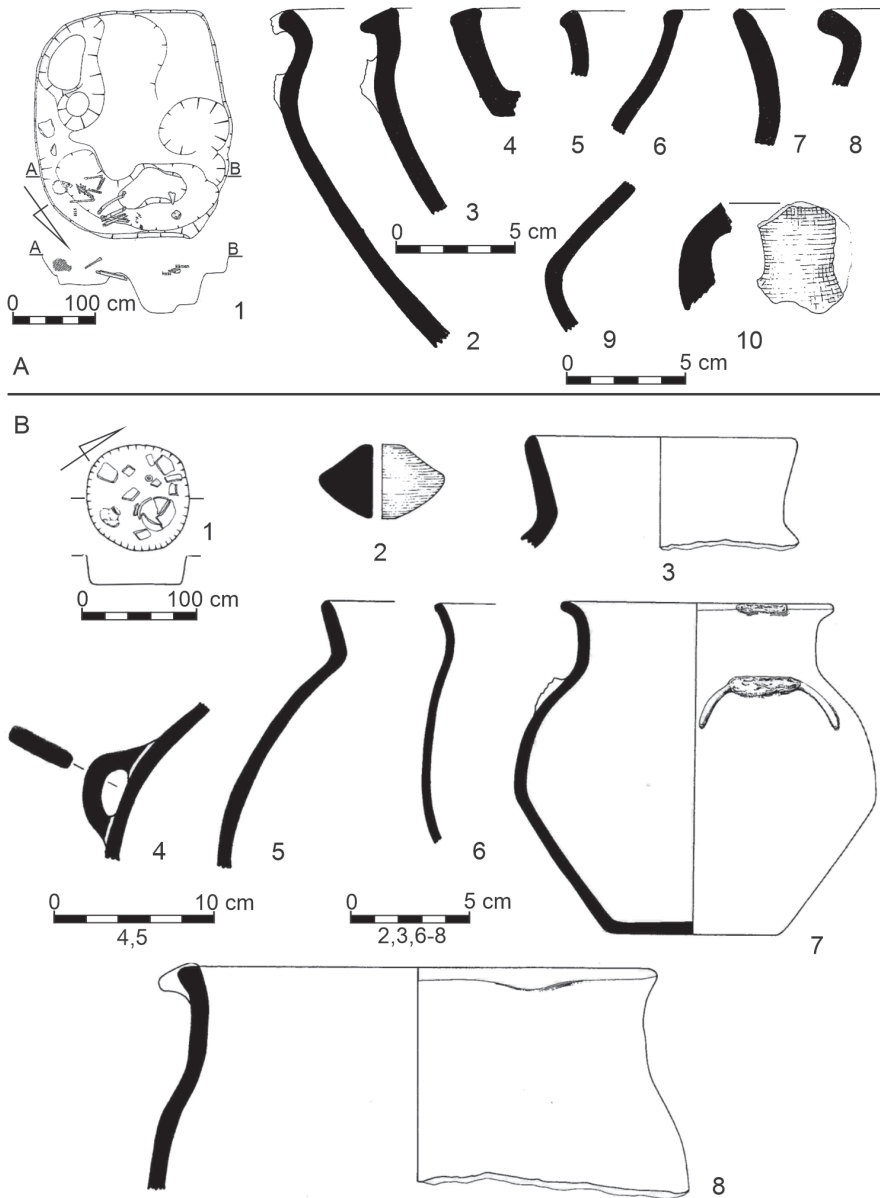
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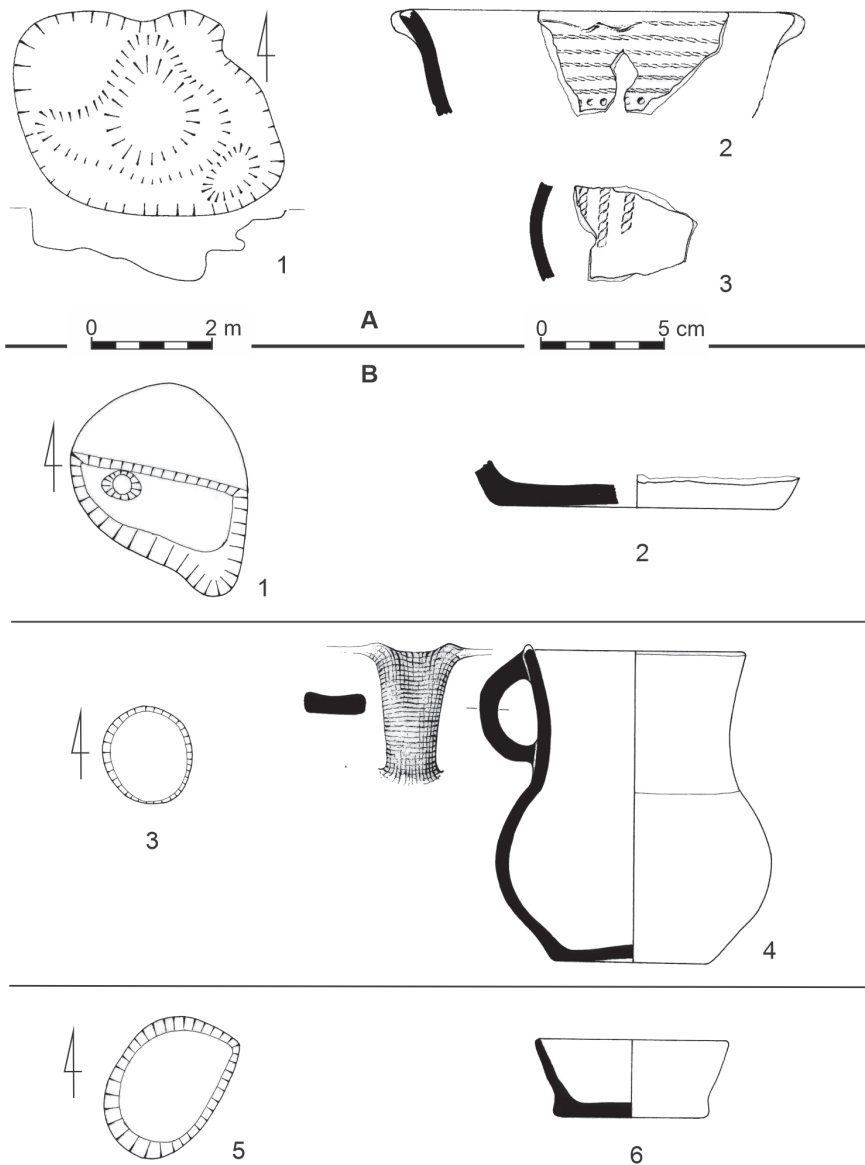
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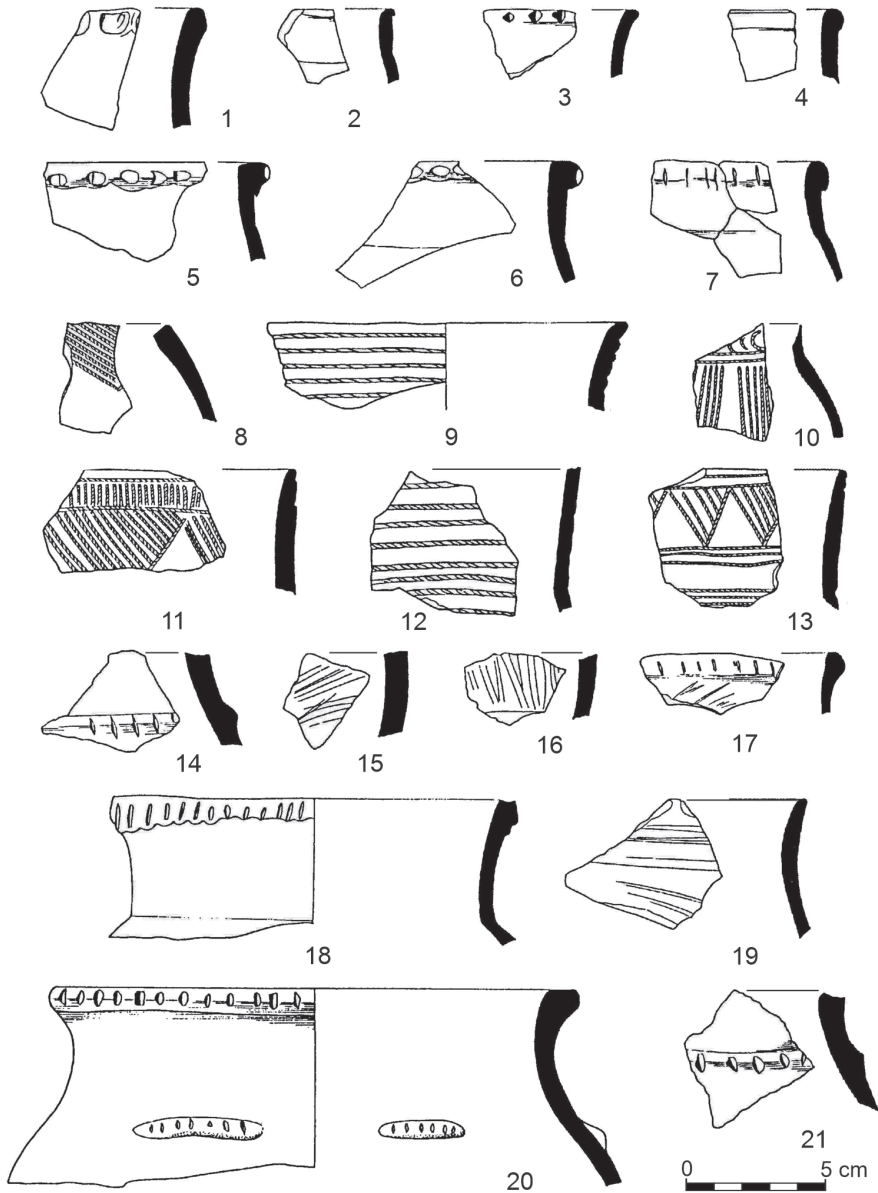
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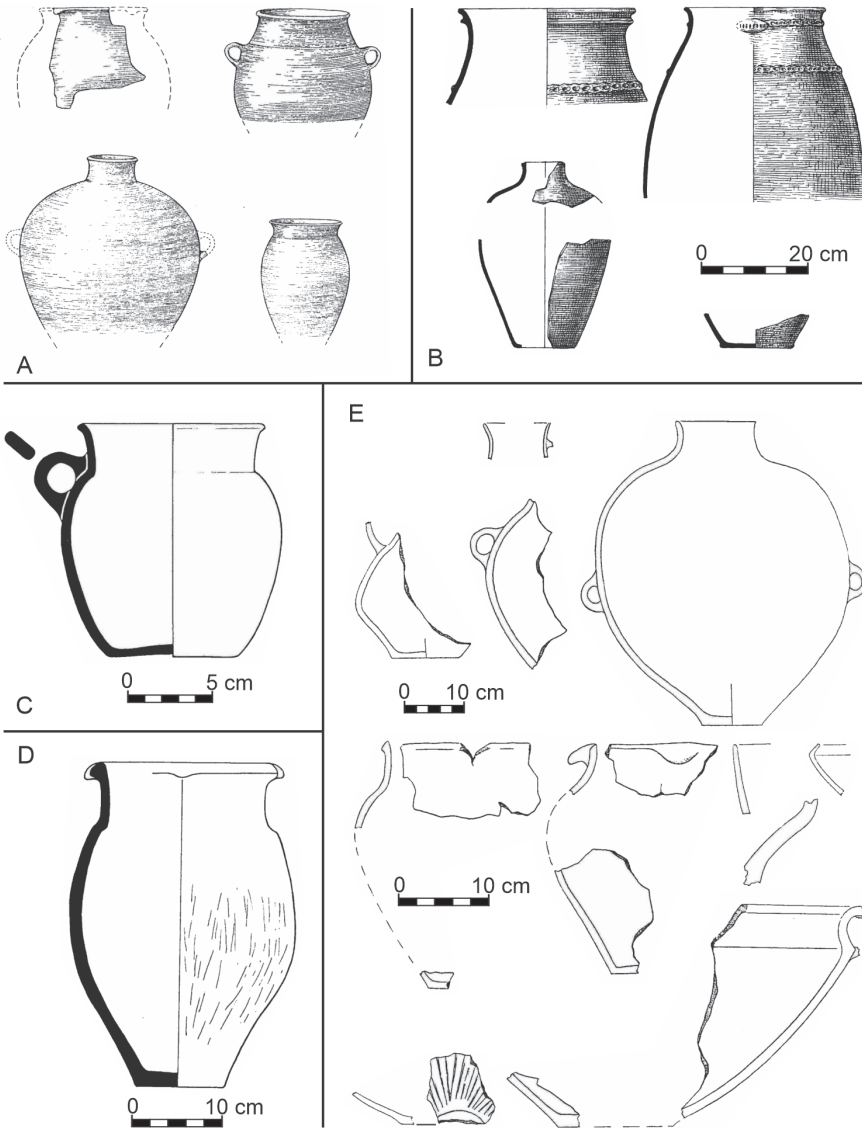
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Pl. 9. The mixed horizon of Strachotín - Držovice. Selection of ceramics containing partly items of the Makó/Kosihy-Čaka culture, Globular Amphora culture and MCWC



Pl. 10. An overview of Moravian sites and finds classified traditionally as Makó/Kosihy-Čaka culture

