

Archaeology of Conflicts

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The Austro-Prussian Wars in the territory of East Bohemia and their reflection in archaeological sources

Pavel Drnovský – Petr Hejhal – Matouš Holas

The region of Northeast Bohemia is situated on the border with neighbouring historical countries – Kłodzko and the Duchies of Silesia. This entire territory belonged to the Lands of the Bohemian Crown since the medieval times and later also to the Habsburg Monarchy. The main centre of the region since the Early Middle Ages was a settlement agglomeration that emerged on a strategically significant hill at the confluence of Elbe and Orlice rivers and in its surroundings. In the course of the 13th century, this location transformed into the town of Hradec Králové. Important long-distance trade routes led through this town both to the neighbouring regions and to the Bohemian inland. One of these roads led from Hradec along the river Elbe to the north, where it split in three basic branches near Jaroměř (at the confluence of Elbe, Metuje and Úpa rivers).

The fundamental geopolitical change in the region of East Bohemia occurred with the 18th century. In December 1740, the Prussian King Frederick II captured Kłodzko and Silesia, upon which he raised a claim after the death of Emperor Charles VI by non-recognising the right of succession of his daughter Maria Theresa in the hereditary Habsburg lands (Maur 2003). This operation suddenly made the studied region to a border zone with the newly acquired Prussian territory. The urban fortresses in Kłodzko and Świdnica provided the King of Prussia with ideal logistic and starting points for his incursions into the Bohemian territory. The King of Prussia, who preferred a dynamic warfare, was aware of this advantage and used the territory of East Bohemia for his frequent incursions. During the reign of Maria Theresa (1740–1780) and Frederick the Great (1740–1786), four major armed conflicts have taken place: the First and Second Silesian Wars (1740–1745), the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) and the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779). In the course of all these wars, East Bohemia became the scene of many military operations: redeployment and camping of armies, major field battles, numerous minor clashes, build-up of permanent fortresses in Hradec Králové and Ples/Josefov and at the same time also construction of temporary and long-term field fortifications (Duffy 1985; Stellner 2000). For example, during the Silesian Wars and the Seven Years' War, Prussian army passed through the area between Hradec Králové and Jaroměř twelve times in total (Drnovský – Hejhal – Rytíř 2019, 186–187). Austrian army then usually followed the movements of the Prussians depending on their advance to or retreat from, Bohemia. The War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779), on the other hand, was characterised by a lower dynamics and a distinct positional tactics. The Austrian command was able to stop for the first time the Prussian advance to beyond the right bank of the Elbe by building a system of field fortifications – so-called Lacy's Line, which consisted here of more than 160 facilities (Peters 1902). Turbulent events connected with Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the 19th century virtually completely avoided East Bohemia. The Austro-Prussian conflict in the summer of 1866 affected the life of local people much more. After the attempts to restore the French revolution ideas

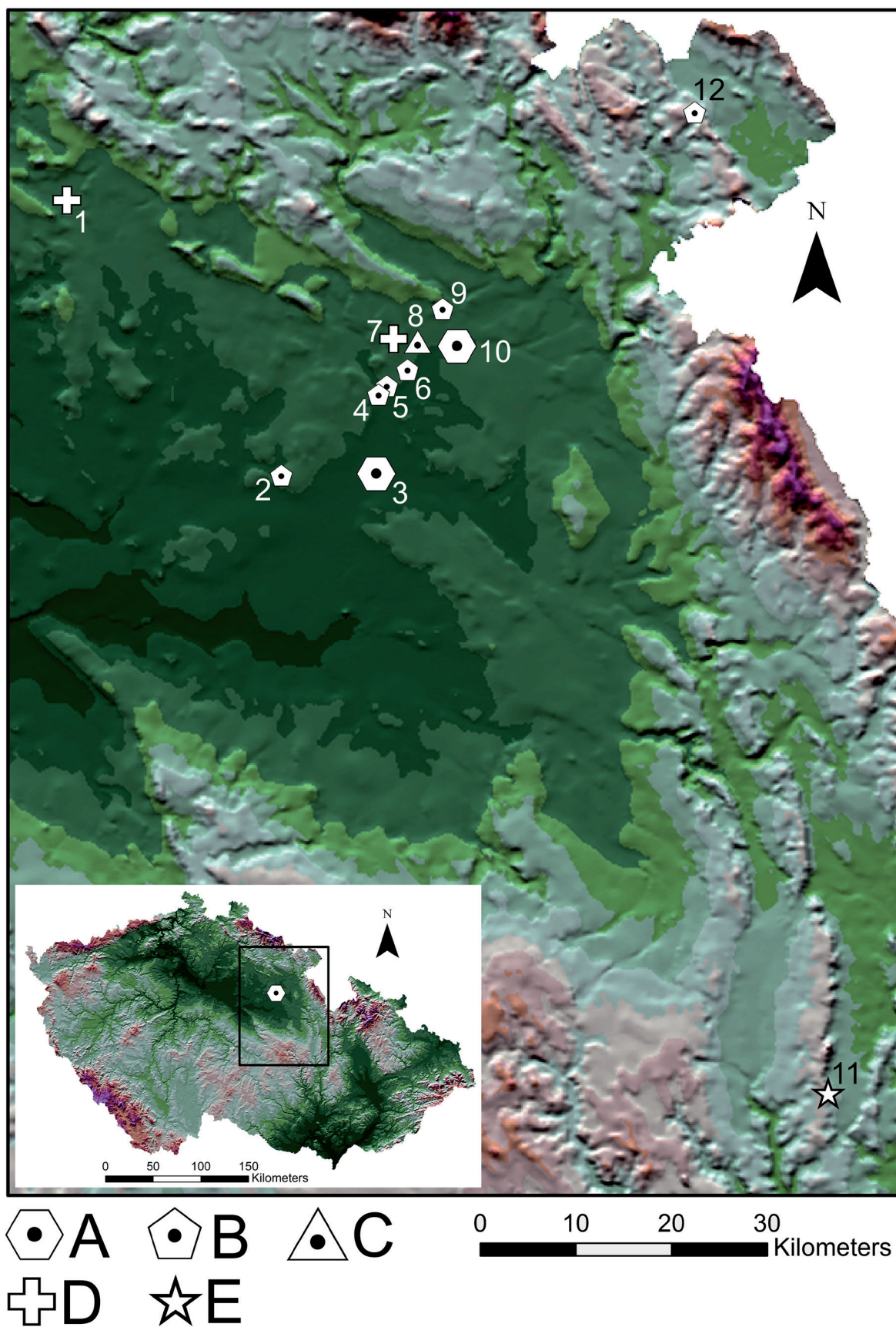


Fig. 1. Archaeologically explored sites in East Bohemia related to the 18th century warfare. A – fortresses, B – field fortifications, C – military camps, D – graves, E – battlefields. 1. Jičín – U hvězdárny, 2. Radíkovice, 3. Hradec Králové, 4. Ločenice/Trotina, 5. Rodov, 6. Holohlavy, 7. and 8. Semonice, 9. Hořenice, 10. Josefov, 11. Křenov, 12. Hony.

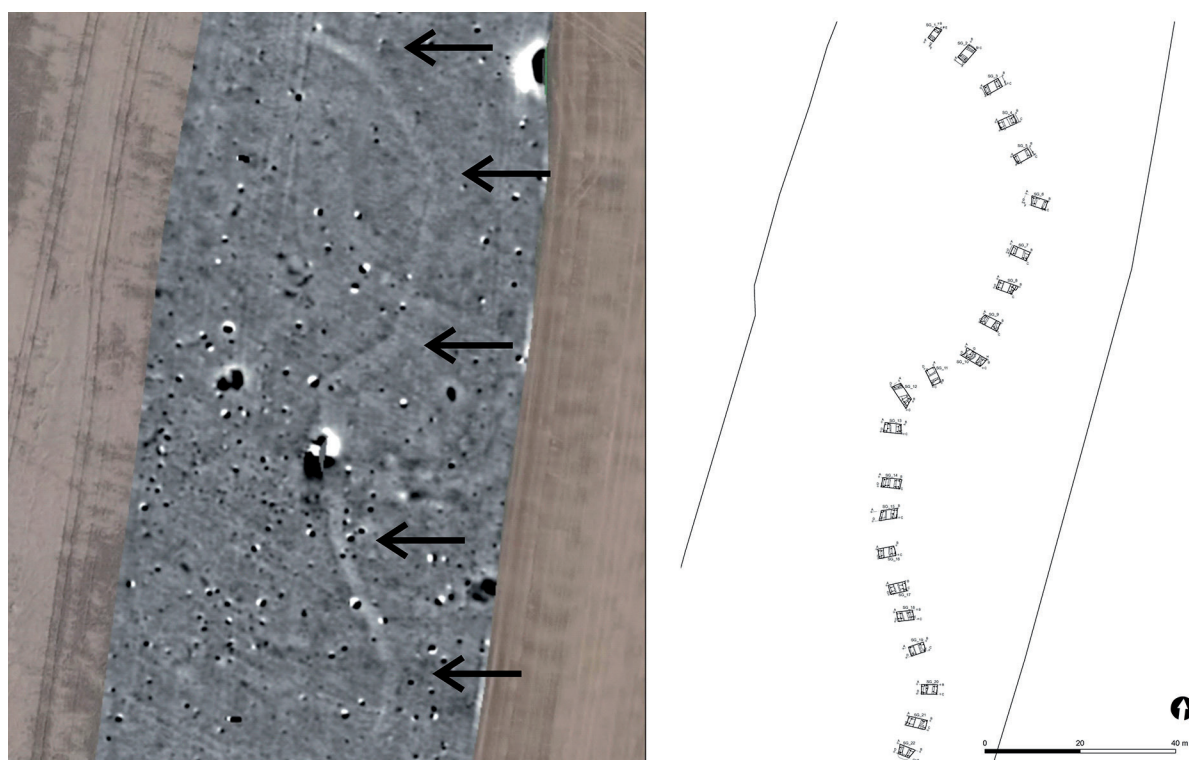


Fig. 2. Austrian field fortifications from the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779), cadastral district of Hořenice. On the left is the result of magnetometric survey, on the right is the localisation of archaeological trenches (Rytíř – Schimerová 2019).

in 1848–1849, many Europeans of that time felt an increasing need for national awakening, which was most noticeable in the militant Prussia. These ideas became more intensive since 1862 due to regulations made by the new Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck, whose policy was very strictly defined. Already in the first month of his tenure, Bismarck made a famous speech to the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, in which he expounded that great questions of the time will not be resolved by speeches “but by iron and blood” (Urban 1986, 28–29). The far-seeing statesman secured an advantageous position for a military conflict not only by the means of force, more precisely thanks to the most progressively trained army which underwent a fundamental reorganisation and remilitarisation since 1860, but also from the perspective of foreign policy. At the beginning of the war, he first negotiated neutrality with France and later concluded an agreement on promotion with another opponent of Austria – Italy with its unsolved territorial problem of the Veneto region (Bělina – Fučík 2005, 80–85). Austria therefore responded to the situation with a quick mobilisation of all military troops. It organised the Southern Army for the fights in Italy and later also the Northern Army for the planned defence in Bohemia. The Italian army in the south was clearly defeated, but the crucial military operations have taken place in the north, namely on the main line formed by the river Jizera and later primarily the river Elbe, in the neighbourhood of which also the decisive Battle of Königgrätz (Hradec Králové) took place on 3 June. The defeated Austrian army had no choice but to retreat to Olomouc and prepare the defence of Vienna, which devalued the triumph in the south. The last task after a victorious advance of all three Prussian armies was to cross the Danube in the suburban area of present-day Bratislava. The course of the last clash of the war on 22 July was terminated by a ceasefire, which was negotiated during peace talks in the Moravian town of Mikulov (Kudr 1936, 453–458).

Archaeological excavations of sites associated with the 18th and 19th century warfare are not very numerous in the Czech Republic. However, a promising development of this topic can be followed up

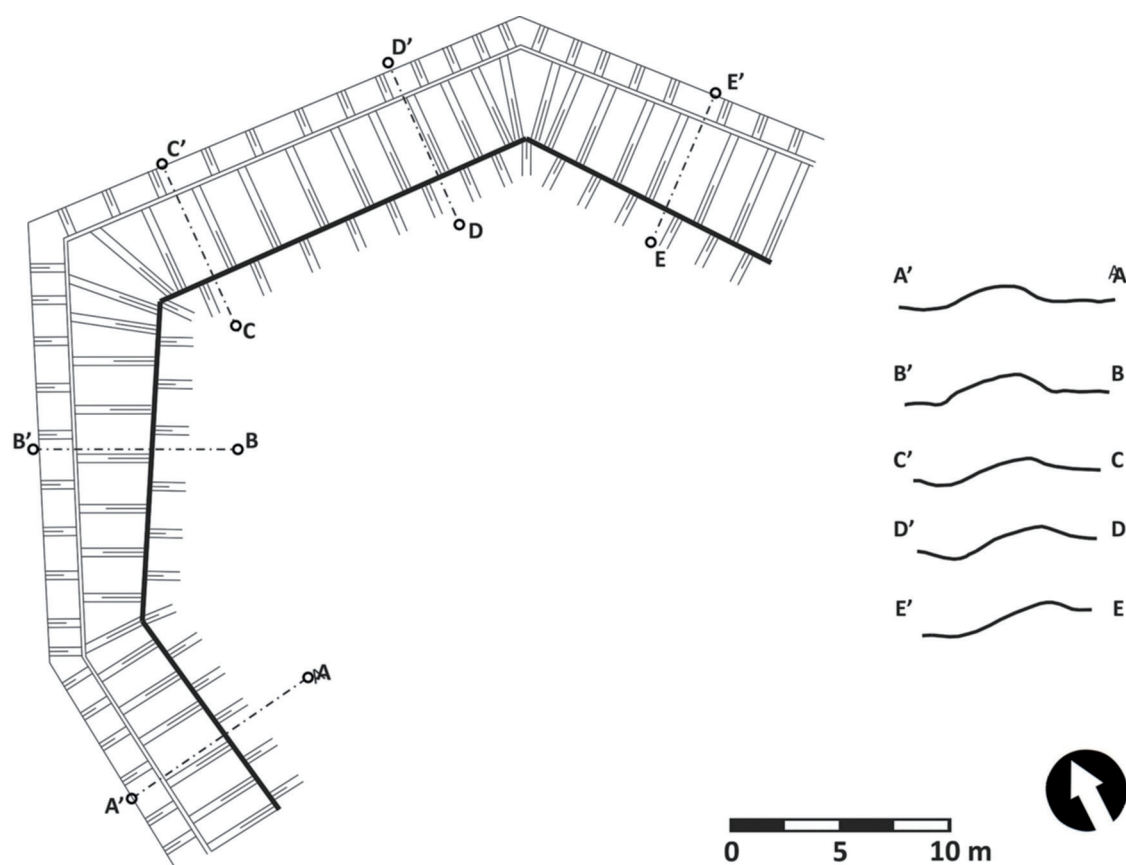


Fig. 3. Prussian field fortifications near Trutnov in 1778. At the top is a plan of current situation and cross-sections through the rampart and ditch (surveying was conducted by P. Drnovský and P. Hejhal). At the bottom is a depiction of the same fortification as recorded by the First Military Survey.

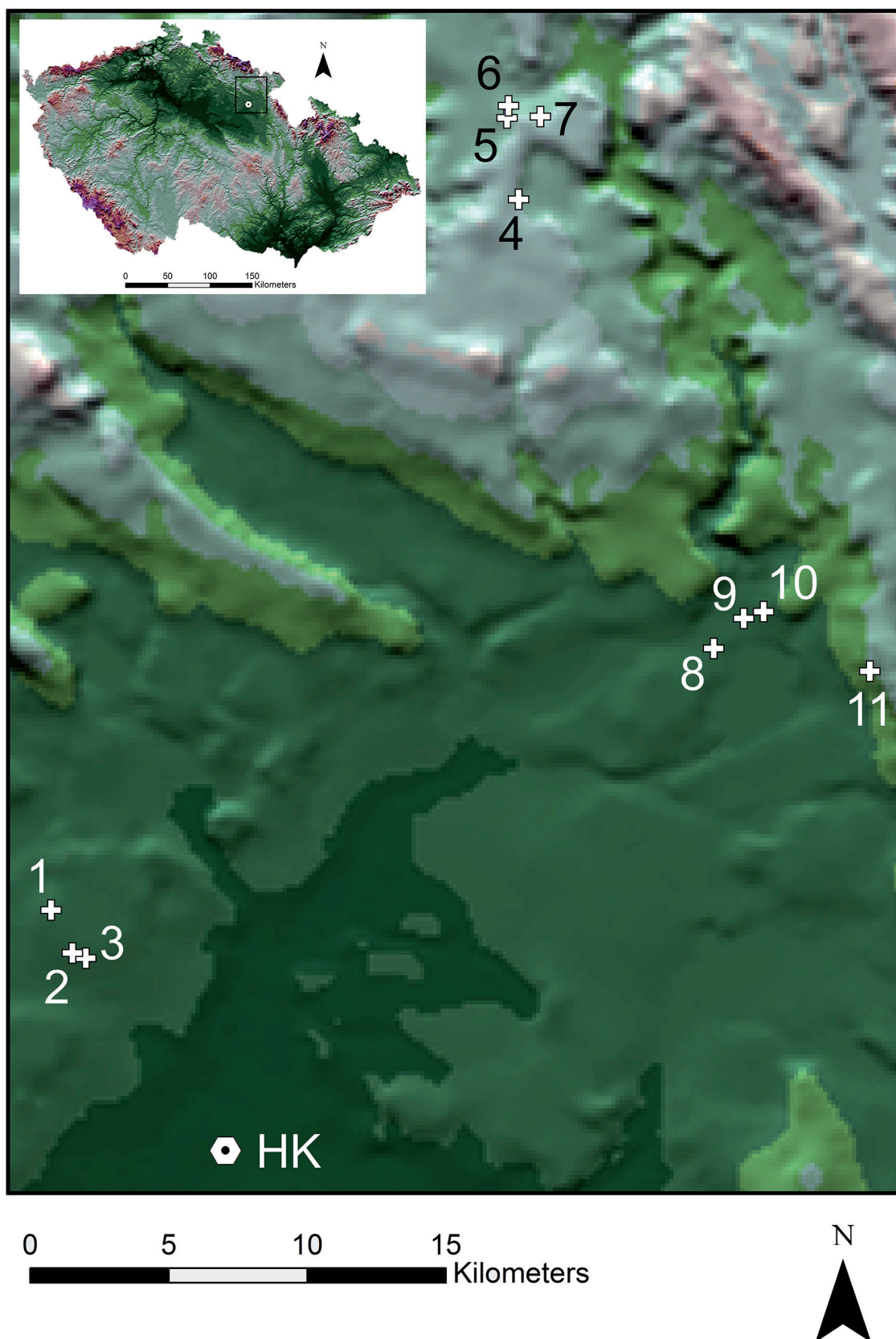


Fig. 4. Archaeologically explored military graves from the 1866 war. HK – Hradec Králové. 1. Lípa u Hradce Králové/municipality, 2. Rozběřice/Hejcmanka, 3. Rozběřice/municipality, 4. Starý Rokytník/Airoidiho vrch, 5. Bojiště u Trutnova/Chmelnice, 6. Trutnov/Krybllice, 7. Trutnov/Kacíř, 8. Česká Skalice/senior citizens' home, 9. Česká Skalice/town's orbital road, 10. Kleny/Dubno forest, 11. Šonov u Nového Města nad Metují/Zádolí.

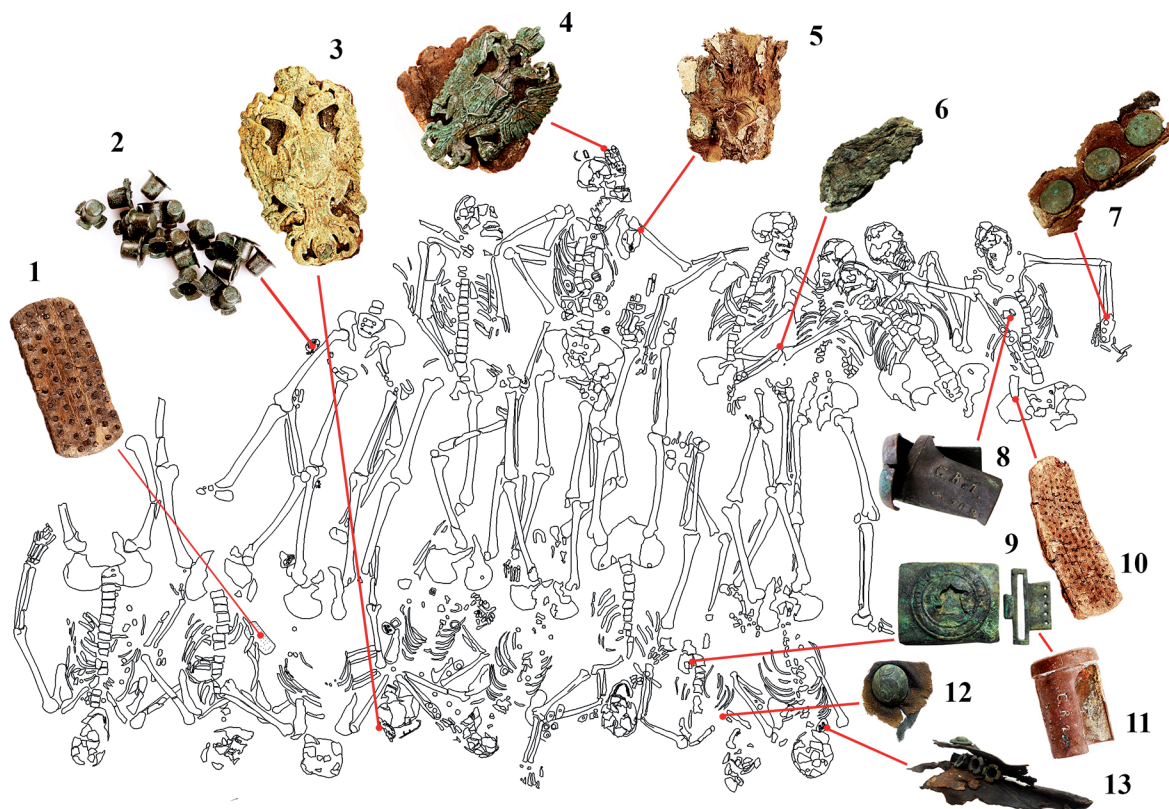


Fig. 5. Česká Skalice, grave No. 1: 1. wooden brush (individual No. 13, Austrian infantryman); 2. copper percussion caps (individual No. 15, Austrian infantryman); 3. symbol of the Austrian imperial eagle from a shako (individual No. 11, Austrian infantryman); 4. symbol of the Austrian imperial eagle from a shako (individual No. 6, Austrian infantryman); 5. fragments of a leather pouch for percussion caps (individual No. 6, Austrian infantryman); 6. zinc splinter from an Austrian artillery shell (individual No. 2, Prussian infantryman); 7. fragments of a cuff with buttons (individual No. 1, Prussian infantryman); 8. brass muzzle cap for a Prussian rifle (individual No. 1, Prussian infantryman); 9. belt buckle (individual No. 8, Prussian infantryman); 10. wooden brush (individual No. 1, Prussian infantryman); 11. brass muzzle cap for a Prussian rifle (individual No. 8, Prussian infantryman); 12. shoulder board button with marking of the company No. 5 (individual No. 8, Prussian infantryman); 13. fragments of a leather pouch for percussion caps (individual No. 7, Austrian infantryman). Artefacts are stored in the Museum of the Náchod Region in Náchod (Holas 2019).

in East Bohemia – thanks to the above-mentioned historical events in the region. Research activities performed in this area involve both rescue and systematic excavations, non-destructive and “destructive” survey. Besides occasional activities (mostly in connection with archaeological rescue excavations) also long-term systematic research has been conducted. Archaeology thus covers a wide spectrum of military installations.

As regards the 18th century relics, the most attention has been paid to archaeological excavations of field fortifications. Research was made on field fortification features of both Austrian and Prussian armies (e.g. Rytíř – Schimerová 2019). Some fortifications in the region were built *ad hoc* within individual military operations, often as a standard addition to military camps. However, the most numerous field fortifications preserved in the territory of East Bohemia are components of the so-called Lacy's Line from the 1778–1779 War of the Bavarian Succession (Peters 1902). So far isolated is archaeological excavation of the area of a presumed Austrian military camp in the cadastral district of Semonice. The pre-development rescue excavation before the construction of motorway D11 revealed several sunken

features, maybe dwellings, partly sunken constructions of field kitchens and one part of the linear fortification of the camp. The question of dating is currently open, all of the 18th century Austro-Prussian conflicts come into consideration. A specific category is represented by archaeological excavations in the area of former fortresses in Hradec Králové and Josefov (Ples). Construction works in this area relatively often disturb features and contexts associated with the fortress phase of these locations (for Hradec Králové e.g. Bláha 2012; Sigl 1978). From the recent time we can mention a large-scale archaeological excavation in the area of Gayer's Barracks in Hradec Králové. Construction works in this area disturbed the masonry of cavalier XXXIII in bastion No. VIII (Bláha, in print; Bláha – Šrůtek 2019). In connection with the build-up of the Josefov Fortress we can mention an archaeological excavation of a brickworks in the cadastral district of Jaroměř, conducted in 2003 and 2004 (Bláha – Sigl 2007). This brickworks was one of the producers of building material for the fortress. Archaeological excavations of burials of victims of the 18th century war events are relatively rare so far. Exceptions are represented by the excavation of a collective grave near Jičín (Novák 2015) or the excavation of a cemetery connected with the existence of a military camp, most probably of the Austrian army, in the cadastral district of Semonice (Drnovský – Průchová, in print). Archaeological research on field battles and clash sites was not yet paid much attention. An exception is represented by archaeologically documented artefacts, which might be associated with the Austro-Prussian battle at Křenov on 7 July 1758 (basic information Vích 2012). Systematic activities are represented by a long-term, mostly non-destructive, research into military structures from the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779). A great deal of attention has been paid to the already-mentioned Austrian installations within the Lacy's Line (Drnovský – Hejhal 2019; Drnovský – Hejhal – Rytíř 2019; Hejhal – Horník 2017), but also to Prussian military facilities, which were built to create a standard part of military camps (Drnovský – Hejhal 2018) and to defend strategically important locations. As an example, we can name a fortification system around the town of Trutnov, where Prussian bakeries and storehouses were placed for some time during the 1778 campaign.

Systematic archaeological interest in relics of the Austro-Prussian conflict in 1866 can be followed up since the 1990s. Most attention was so far paid to the war graves. Many of them were marked after the war with crosses or gravestones, but human remains are often found in unmarked graves. Until 2020, a total of 6 collective graves (with partly or completely uncovered remains of 45 individuals in total) and 5 individual burials were archaeologically explored. Systematic non-destructive survey of artillery and infantry field fortifications of the Austrian army has been conducted near Hradec Králové since 2016 (Hejhal – Holas 2018). Within this research, fortifications with preserved aboveground parts are surveyed and those with unpreserved aboveground parts are localised with the help of a magnetometer. Metal detector survey is conducted in the surroundings of these fortifications. The aim is to acquire complex information on these military features and related events. These data are then confronted with existing written reports. Considerable potential is hidden in the research on spatial distribution of military material, which was lost by the soldiers themselves on battlefields. Many metal components of military uniforms are currently found in various areas, such as agriculturally cultivated fields, grassland or forests (Holas 2017). This material can be localised and recovered with the help of surface survey using a metal detector. The results can indicate particular activities, which have taken place before, during, or after the battle. However, the battlefields most frequently contain shoot-out remains, whose localisation and interpretation must be based on the study of many historical sources. Every shooter first had to load his gun and then, after reaching the battle line, to open the fire. These places can be easily identified with gunmen of the Austrian army who were armed with percussion rifles. In firing positions of Prussian gunmen on battlefields we mostly find unspent projectiles which were lost during quick firing and handling of the ammunition. The spatial distribution of ammunition then indicates from where the gunmen fired, in which direction they aimed and where they were threatened by the enemy fire (Holas 2019).

Conclusions

East Bohemia represents a region, in which the archaeological research on the 18th and 19th century war events can develop in a promising way. The already accomplished excavations and surveys showed that archaeological methodology can in many regards complete the results of historical research. Moreover, in some aspects it can provide new information to which we lack any historical sources.

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