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Interdisciplinary Research of the Migration Period Cemetery at Prague-Zličín, Czech Republic

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Welcome to the first issue of IANSA for 2016. This time the whole issue is devoted to the results of an interdisciplinary excavation of the largest known skeletal burial ground from the Migration Period in Bohemia. Before you read the articles, let me share some basic facts with you about the cemetery.

The rescue archaeological excavation of the burial site took place along Hrozenkovská Street in Prague-Zličín, Czech Republic. It was carried out between November 2005 and August 2008 in cooperation with the Prague City Museum (excavation in 2005–2006) and Labrys Company (2007–2008). The excavation leaders were the Prague City Museum's Milan Kuchařík and Jiří Vávra for the Labrys Company. The archaeologists Eduard Droberjar and Jaroslav Jiřík, who specialize in the Roman and Migration Periods, also took part in the research as consultants.

The complete skeletal burial ground belongs to the so-called Vinařice Group from the earlier phase of the Migration Period. Based on portable finds such as metal brooches, buckles, pendants, fine glassware, *etc.*, the duration of the cemetery is dated to stages D2 to D3 according to Jaroslav Tejral, *i.e.* to the period from the 2nd third of the 5th century AD to around the turn of the century (from the 5th to the 6th century AD). Altogether 173 graves with 176 inhumation burials were recorded in the field in which at least 179 individuals were buried. There were several double burials at the site.

During the excavation we lowered the entire fill of all the graves at certain intervals in mechanical layers, thus creating and documenting horizontal profiles of the natural strata within the graves. This methodology was partly inspired by the archaeological excavation of the burial site at Immenbeck-Kattenberg by Buxtehude (dist. Stade, Lower Saxony, Germany). In this way a sequence of documentation levels is available for every grave complex, describing the grave cut, secondary pit, and their entire contents. Artefacts were collected and recorded by natural strata. Already

in the field we were employing methods leading to future interdisciplinary research. Therefore we made a sieving and flotation of the grave fill and collected samples for palynological and palaeo-parasitological analyses from the bottom level of graves, and so on.

Taking a look at the overall plan of the cemetery, we can see that the graves are situated in irregular and incomplete rows in an approximately north-south orientation (Figure 1). They form a main group in the central position accompanied by two smaller groups and four solitary graves. The grave cuts were rectangular in shape and approximately west-east in orientation. Their vertical walls usually became perimeter ledges at a certain level above the bottom, thus establishing a place for putting the wooden coffin with the deceased into the grave. The buried people were placed in graves with their heads to the west, supine. The depth of the grave cuts from the surface (after soil stripping) varied from 12 centimetres to 2.6 metres with the average being 1.2 metres. A total of 28 graves contained niches of various sizes, at different levels from the bottom and over the head of the buried individuals, usually situated in the west walls. They usually contained ceramic and especially glass vessels.

Almost all the graves at Prague-Zličín had been disturbed by secondary interference, which had left traces of the ancient reopening of graves. This was a very important circumstance which affected the inner structure and arrangement of all the disturbed burials. Every such grave complex consisted of two cuts and their fillings: the original grave cut and the secondary pit, which occurred usually at the west side of the graves. According to several field observations it can be concluded that the graves had been reopened shortly after their creation. The structure of layers within the secondary pits implies that the process of refilling took place gradually and over a longer period of time by erosion of walls and the surrounding surface. In some graves, such layers spread even into the hollow space within the undisturbed parts of coffins. During the processing and evaluating of artefacts, as well as



Figure 1. The overall plan of the excavation area at Prague-Zličín.

the human and animal bones and especially environmental samples, it was necessary to take into account whether the investigated object or sample had come from the grave fill or from that of a secondary pit, which could include a variety of intrusions and various structures for the environmental record.

The cemetery at Prague-Zličín is the only one of this period to have been excavated in its totality. At the same time it is the largest yet-known burial site of the early Migration Period in the Czech Republic – and also an important site for the research of the little-explored transition period between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The research of this burial site changes our established ideas about the culture of the Migration Period in Bohemia: it illustrates broad cultural contacts with geographically-remote areas in Europe and also offers a rich set of sources for further anthropological and interdisciplinary scientific research, *e.g.* in the study of reopening of graves in the Migration Period.

The field excavation has already been the work of a team and this is even more true in the evaluation of its results. Very

early on it was quite clear to us that a thorough interpretation of such a cemetery would require a broad interdisciplinary approach and even international cooperation and research. We therefore collected the environmental samples, made contact with local as well as foreign scientific institutions and experts, such as the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz and colleagues in Munich and Regensburg in Germany, and consulted certain topics with other experts Europe-wide, from as far afield as Great Britain, France, Germany, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Turkey. One of the results of such international cooperation is the book “Barbarian Graves at Prague-Zličín. The World of the Living and the Dead of the Migration Period”, which was published by the City of Prague Museum in 2015 to accompany an exhibition of the same name. The book won the prize *Gloria musealis* for 2015 in the category Museum publication of the year and you can read a review of it by Eduard Droberjar in the current issue.

The articles presented in this issue of IANSa deal with various environmental and anthropological aspects of the

site and its population at Prague-Zličín, including dental microwear and teeth analyses, evaluation of botanical macrofossils, charcoals and pollens, and the investigation of the pathological features on human bones and a rare find of human hair. All environmental and anthropological analyses that have been done so far are listed in the Table 1. The article with the analysis of animal bones from the graves

also presents another unusual find for this period: that of a dog burial which was discovered not far from the cemetery. In addition, the issue also contains contributions by German authors, presenting an evaluation and archaeological excavation of burial sites from the same historical period in Bavaria, thus bringing a broader and comparative context for further future research.

Table 1. Summary of analysed individuals/graves from Prague-Zličín cemetery and performed analyses.

Skeleton	Feature	Skull preservation	Postcranial preservation	Sex	Age	Body height	Microwear analysis	Pathological observations	Geochemical analysis	Parasitological analysis	Archaeobotanical and palynological analyses	Trichological analysis	¹⁴ C dating	Grave goods
1	500	1	1	N	adult									yes
2	501	1	3	M	30–40	yes								
3	502	1	1	N	adult									yes
4	503	1	1	N	adult						macro	yes		
5	504	1	1	N	adult									yes
6	506	1	1	N	subadult									
7	507	2	1	N	6–7									yes
8	518	2	1	N	14–17	yes	yes		yes	yes				yes
11	519	2	2	N	juv-ad		yes		yes	yes	macro	yes	yes	
9	520	2	2	N	adultus I									yes
12	521	1	1	N	adult		yes		yes				yes	
10	522	3	3	M	50+	yes								yes
13	523	2	2	N	4.5–5	yes	yes		yes	yes				yes
14	524	1	3	N	adult									yes
15	525	1	1	N	subadult									yes
16	527	2	2	F	16–19	yes	yes		yes					yes
17	528	3	3	F	40–50 (45)		yes		yes		macro			yes
18	528	3	3	M	45–47		yes		yes	yes				yes
25	529	4	3	F	45+	182.1		yes						yes
19	530	4	3	F	45–50	168.7	yes	yes	yes					yes
21	531	1	1	N	adult									yes
20	532	1	1	N	adult				yes		macro			yes
22	533	3	1	N	adult									
23	534	3	1	M	adult									
24	535	3	3	F	30–40	160.1	yes							yes
27	536	1	1	N	subadult									
26	537	2	1	N	3–4		yes							yes
28	538	3	2	N	adult				yes					yes
29	539	1	1	N	adult									
30	540	1	3	N	adult				yes					yes
31	541	1	1	N	adult									yes
32	542	1	1	N	adult				yes					yes
33	543	1	2	N	juv-ad									
34	544	5	3	F	30–40	167.7	yes							yes
35	545	4	2	F	45–50		yes							yes
36	546	1	2	N	adult									
37	547	1	1	N	adult									yes
38	548	1	1	N	adult									
39	549	1	1	N	subadult									

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Skeleton	Feature	Skull preservation	Postcranial preservation	Sex	Age	Body height	Microwear analysis	Pathological observations	Geochemical analysis	Parasitological analysis	Archaeobotanical and palynological analyses	Trichological analysis	¹⁴ C dating	Grave goods
40	550	2	1	N	24–30		yes							yes
41	551	2	1	N	9–12									yes
42	552	2	1	N	24–30									yes
43	554	1	1	N	adult									
44a	555	2	2	M	16–20		yes							yes
44b	555	2	1	N	5									yes
45	556	1	1	N	adult									
46	557	1	1	N	adult									yes
47	563	2	3	M	30–35		yes							yes
48	564	2	2	N	15–18									yes
49	565	1	1	N	subadult				yes					yes
50	566	1	1	N	adult									
52	570	1	1	N	adult									yes
53	571	2	1	N	adult									yes
54	572	5	4	F	35–45	171.9	yes	yes						yes
55	573	2	2	M	20–40	177.3							yes	yes
56	574	4	3	F	35–45	161.7	yes	yes						
57	575	2	2	N	17–20									yes
58	585	2	2	N	16–19									yes
61	586	2	3	N	35–40		yes							yes
60	587	2	3	F	35–40	186.8	yes							yes
59	588	1	2	N	adult									yes
62	590	3	2	M	45–55 (55)					yes				yes
63	591	5	4	M	45	168.9	yes	yes	yes					yes
64	592	2	1	N	40–50									yes
65	594	4	3	M	40–50	168	yes	yes	yes	yes				yes
66	596	2	2	N	22–25									yes
67	599	3	3	N	16–20		yes	yes			pollen			yes
68	600	1	1	N	adult									
69	601	1	1	N	adult									
70	602	1	1	N	subadult				yes					yes
71	603	1	1	N	adult									yes
72	604	1	1	N	adult				yes	yes				yes
73	606	1	1	N	adult									yes
74	607	1	1	N	adult									yes
75	608	2	1	N	4–5		yes							yes
76	609	1	1	N	subadult				yes					yes
79	612	3	3	M	45+									yes

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80	613	1	1	N	adult									yes
81	614	1	1	N	adult									
82	615	1	1	N	adult									yes
83	650	1	1	N	adult									yes
84	651	1	2	N	adult									yes
85	660	1	1	N	adult				yes					yes
77	721	4	4	M	40–50 (50)	177.6	yes	yes	yes	yes				yes
78	722	5	3	F	45–55	160.4	yes	yes	yes	yes				yes
86	723	1	1	N	adult									
87	724	2	2	N	30–35				yes					yes
88	725	2	1	N	7									yes
89	726	2	1	N	adult				yes					yes
90	729	1	1	N	adult									yes
91	730	1	1	N	adult				yes					yes
92	773	2	2	N	30–35									yes
93	774	1	1	N	adult				yes					yes
95	778	3	3	F	50	165.6	yes	yes						yes
96	779	1	1	N	adult									yes
94	780	1	1	N	adult				yes					yes
97	781	1	1	N	adult				yes		macro+ pollen			yes
98	782	1	3	F	adult									yes
99	783	1	2	N	adult									yes
100	784	2	3	N	40+									yes
101	785	3	3	N	3–4		yes							yes
102	786	1	1	N	adult									yes
103	787	2	1	N	7									yes
104	788	1	1	N	adult									yes
105	789	2	1	N	35–40		yes							yes
106	790	1	1	N	adult									yes
107	795	1	3	M	maturus	181.2		yes	yes		pollen			yes
108	796	2	2	N	10		yes				pollen			yes
109	797	3	3	M	40?		yes		yes	yes	pollen			yes
110	798	3	3	F	40–50		yes							yes
111	799	1	3	N	adult									yes
112	800	3	3	M	45–55		yes	yes			pollen			yes
113	801	3	3	M	45–50			yes	yes	yes	pollen			yes
114	802	2	3	F	20–24			yes			pollen			yes
115	803	1	1	N	subadult						pollen			yes

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116	804	1	2	N	adult						pollen			yes
117	805	2	2	N	50+		yes				pollen			yes
118	806	2	1	N	40+						pollen			yes
119	807	3	3	M	45–50 (50)		yes	yes	yes		pollen			yes
120	808	1	1	N	subadult						macro + pollen			yes
122	809	1	1	N	adult				yes		pollen			yes
121a	818	4	3	F	40–50			yes			pollen			yes
121b	818	2	1	N	5									yes
123	821	1	3	N	adult						pollen			yes
125	826	1	1	N	adult									yes
126	1504	2	1	N	30–40		yes							
127	1505	2	3	F	20–24						pollen			yes
128	1506	3	4	F	20–25	167.8	yes		yes	yes	pollen			yes
129	1507	2	2	F	15–17		yes							yes
130	1508	1	1	N	adult						macro + pollen			yes
131	1509	3	3	M	50+	171.6	yes	yes	yes	yes	pollen			yes
132	1544	3	3	M	35–45		yes	yes			macro + pollen	yes		yes
133	1545	2	1	F	30–40			yes			macro	yes		yes
134	1546	2	1	N	20–35						macro	yes		yes
135	1547	2	1	N	5						macro	yes		yes
136a	1548	2	2	N	20–35						macro	yes		yes
136b	1548	2	1	N	4–6									yes
137	1549	2	1	N	50+						macro	yes		yes
138	1550	2	2	N	50+						macro	yes		yes
139	1551	2	1	N	0.5–2 r						pollen			
140	1552	2	1	N	subadult						pollen			
141	1553	3	3	M	15–17		yes				macro	yes		
142	1555	4	4	M	50+	183.6	yes	yes	yes	yes	macro + pollen		yes	yes
143	1556	3	5	N	5				yes	yes	pollen	yes		yes
144	1557	3	4	N	12		yes				macro	yes		yes
145	1559	3	3	M	50+			yes			macro + pollen	yes		yes
146	1565	1	2	N	adult						macro + pollen	yes		yes
147	1566	1	1	N	subadult						macro	yes		
148	1567	1	1	N	subadult						macro	yes		
149	1568	1	1	N	subadult						macro + pollen	yes		
150	1569	4	3	F	40–50			yes	yes	yes	macro + pollen			yes
151	1570	3	3	F	40–50		yes		yes	yes	macro	yes		yes
152	1571	3	2	N	24–30		yes				macro	yes		yes

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153	1572	3	2	M	18–20					macro	yes		yes
154	1573	4	4	M	35–45	169.4	yes	yes	yes	macro + pollen	yes		yes
155	1574	1	1	N	adult					macro	yes		yes
156	1575	1	1	N	adult					macro	yes		yes
157	1576	2	2	F	13–14	yes				pollen			yes
158	1579	1	1	N	adult					macro	yes		yes
159	1593	2	2	N	30–35		yes			macro	yes		yes
160	1594	3	3	F	50+	yes	yes			macro	yes		yes
161	1595	2	3	N	35–45	167.8	yes			macro	yes		yes
162	1596	4	3	F	30–40	167.3	yes	yes	yes	macro	yes		yes
163	1597	4	4	F	50+	165.8				macro	yes		yes
164	1598	4	3	M	55+	179.5	yes			macro	yes		yes
165	1599	2	2	F	45–55					macro	yes		yes
166	1600	1	3	M	adult					macro	yes		yes
167	1601	3	2	N	5–6					macro	yes		yes
168	1602	2	1	F	55+		yes			macro	yes		yes
169	1603	2	2	N	30–40					macro	yes		yes
170	1604	1	1	N	subadult					macro + pollen	yes		yes
171	1609	4	2	N	45–55					macro	yes		yes
172a	1610	4	3	F	20–24					macro	yes		yes
172b	1610	1	3	F	adult								yes
173	1611	3	2	N	55+		yes			macro	yes		yes
174	1612	2	2	F	40–50					macro	yes		yes
175	1613	5	5	F	40–50	164.8				macro	yes		yes
176	1614	3	3	F	35–40					macro	yes		yes
177	1615	2	1	N	4–7					macro	yes		yes
178	1616	2	1	N	1–3					macro			