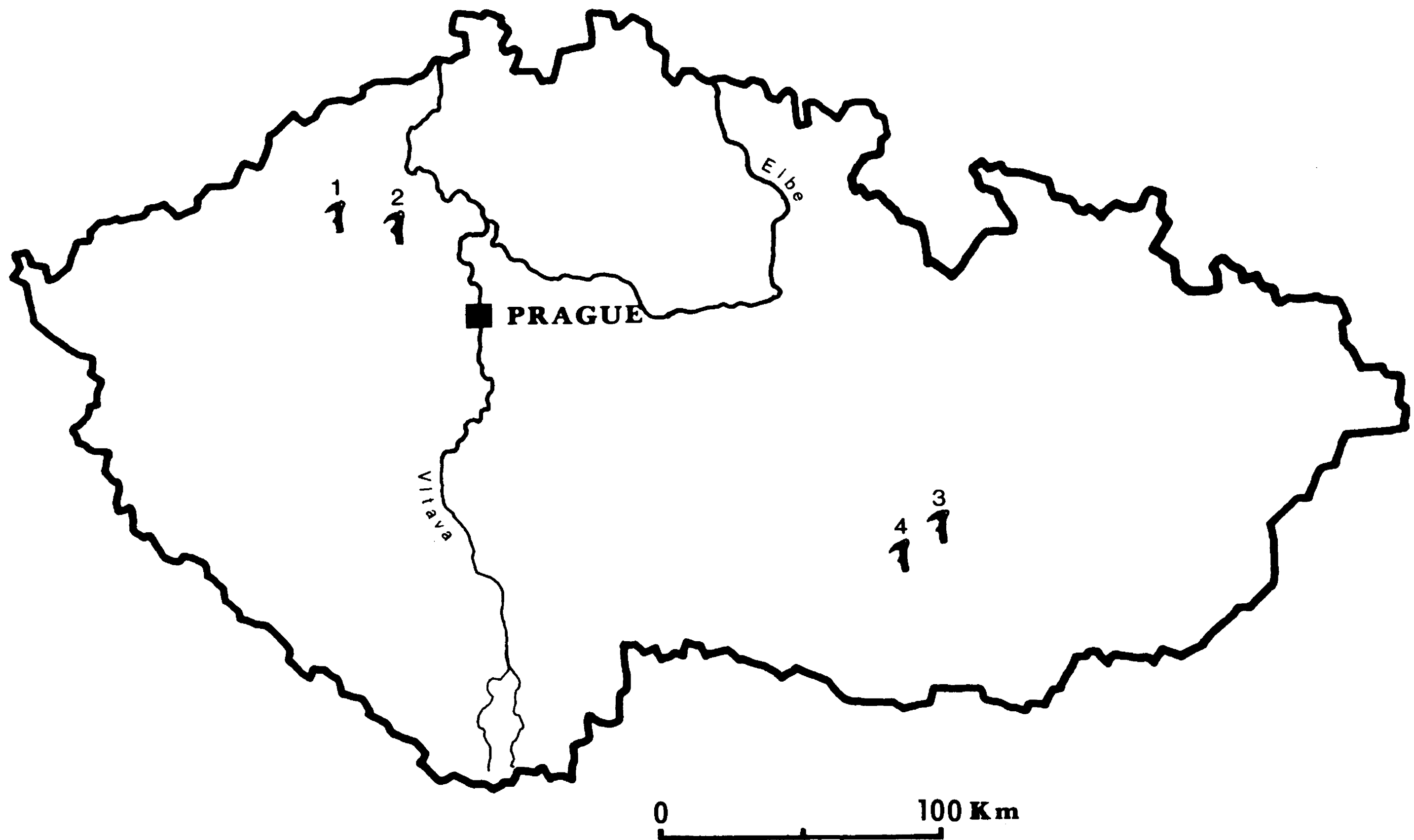


CZ 2 Bečov, Most district

Jacek Lech, Inna Mateiciucová

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CZ Czech Republic

CZ 1 Tušimice

CZ 2 Bečov

CZ 3 Stránská skála

CZ 4 Krumlovský les

CZ 2 BEČOV, MOST DISTRICT

Jacek Lech and Inna Mateiciucová

The Bečov type quartzite mine lies in north-west Bohemia, in the České středohoří area (German: *Böhmische Mittelgebirge*), between Louny and Most, in Bečov. The mine field is located on a hill, “Písečný vrch”, rising 55 m above the surrounding land (317 m above sea level) and covers an area of 1300 by 900 m. The mine was discovered in 1964 by K. Žebera (1966) during a geological survey. Systematic archaeological excavations have been carried out intermittently since 1965. The first exploitation units were described by V. Kruta (1966) and J. Fridrich (1972).

The “Písečný vrch” hill is located on deposits of the Middle Cretaceous Period and is made up of deposits of various ages, from the Older Cretaceous to the Quaternary. The hill itself is of volcanic origin and is a natural outcrop of whitish and yellowish quartzite and siliceous sandstone which were intensively mined here. The Bečov type of quartzite usually has a more coarse-grained structure than the Tušimice type and the colour varies from whitish to bluish and on to grey. It occurs in the form of blocks and concretions which attain large dimensions. Bečov type quartzite occurs in many different forms and variants. It probably comes from the Upper Cretaceous Period (Fridrich 1972:249; Lech 1981:11). The best quality raw material was found around the eastern outcrop.

The mine field at Bečov is large and covers an area of about 2 km² (Schenk 1981:56). The exploitation units here are pits and open shafts. In 1966 Kruta excavated the area in the depression between the central and eastern peaks of the hill. He found shallow exploitation units. In profile M there was a feature with a diameter of 250 cm at the mouth and 2.2 m deep but no prehistoric material was found. In profile N, which was the wall of an old quarry, there were four exploitation units 2–3 m deep. Single pottery sherds of the Stroke-ornamented Pottery Culture were found and some from BA II. Within the area of the mine field and in the pits and shafts were recovered quantities of industrial debris: early roughouts, flakes and waste, blade and blade-flake cores, and a small number of blades (Kruta 1966). On the west slope of the hill Fridrich found and began to excavate a whole group of shallow exploitation pits, probe shafts and heaps of waste material. Mining had progressed here up the slope towards the top of the hill. The Bečov quartzite mined here was of the coarse-grained variety. The mining methods used were documented and numerous mining tools were found, as well as some pottery sherds, probably from the Early and Middle Bronze Age (Fridrich 1972:250).

Bečov type quartzite was probably used beginning in the Lower, and most certainly from the Middle Palaeolithic. It could have been mined in the Middle or Upper Palaeolithic Age. Rich workshops producing blade blanks from Bečov type quartzite can be associated with the Magdalenian Culture. Quartzite was also widely used in the Mesolithic (Vencl 1990:236–9), while farming communities exploited it with varying intensity at intervals up to the Middle Bronze Age. The late dating for quartzite mining at Bečov is confirmed by radiocarbon dates obtained for exploitation pits no. 1 and 5, from a depth of about 2 m, by Fridrich in 1965. For pit no. 5 the date Bln 552: 3480 ± 80 BP was obtained and for pit no. 1 the date was Bln 553: 3395 ± 80 BP (Kohl and Quitta 1970; Fridrich 1972:250). Both dates apply to exploitation in the Middle Bronze Age by people of the Tumulus Culture (*Hügelgräber Kultur*).

In the Magdalenian Culture Bečov type quartzite spread to Saxony, Czech Kras and to west and south Moravia (Brno-Maloměřice). In the Mesolithic it dominated in the Prague region (Praha-Ďáblice), about 60 km from the deposits, while single artefacts have been found all over Bohemia (Fridrich 1972; Přichystal 1994:48; Vencl 1990:238–9). Among the farming communities it was less popular than the Skršín and Tušimice types of quartzite and was only used more widely in north-west Bohemia.

Translated by Alicja Petrus-Zagroba

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