

Great Moravia, the Power Centre at Mikulčice and the Issue of the Socio-economic Structure

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Great Moravia existed in the 9th century AD in the region north of the Middle Danube. It was the first state formation of the Slavs. Its political legacy – the model of a Christian state relying on its sovereignty an archbishopric directly subordinate to the pope – was taken up by the later Early Middle Ages states of Central Europe. The stronghold of Valy near Mikulčice was a prominent centre of this state formation and at least temporarily the residence of the ruling Mojmir dynasty. This was an island stronghold located in the flood plain of the Morava River, which merged the attributes of a military fortress with those of an early urban formation. The concentration of churches and other walled 9th century structures in Mikulčice has no analogy far and wide. Archaeological research at Mikulčice has been going on for over fifty years now, conducted by the Mikulčice base of the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Science in Brno. This research has provided an enormous amount of source material, which is currently being processed and analysed. It includes material from 2500 graves explored at Mikulčice as well as other thousands of graves uncovered in the stronghold hinterland. From an archaeological aspect, this represents a very valuable material for the study of the socio-economic structure of the centre and its hinterland. From an anthropological aspect, the grave material represents an inexhaustible source of information and knowledge relating to the population of the time. Processing of the human skeletal remains has been traditionally conducted by the Department of Anthropology of the National Museum in Prague, partly in the form of common projects with the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Science in Brno.

Key words: Great Moravia – Mikulčice – archaeology – anthropology – socio-economic structure

1. Great Moravia

1.1 Great Moravia in the history of Central Europe

Great Moravia was the first Slavic state formation. It left behind a significant political and cultural legacy, taken up later on by the Early Middle Ages states of Central Europe – Bohemia, Poland and Hungary. This legacy was mainly represented by the model of a Christian state whose international recognition and legitimacy were based upon an archbishopric directly subordinate to the pope. Politically and culturally, Great Moravia stood

on the boundary between the spheres of Byzantium, Rome and the Frankish empire. Although Eastern Christian learning associated with the activities of the Byzantine mission did not become permanently rooted in Moravia, it did fundamentally affect further cultural development of the Southern and Eastern Slavs. A distinct and original material culture is what today defines most significantly the cultural domain of Great Moravia. Its character is well known from the results of extensive archaeological excavations especially that, conducted in the second half of the 20th century.²

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² For the position of Great Moravia in the history of the Central Europe see e.g. HAVLÍK 1985 and TŘEŠTÍK

1.2 The territorial and political development of Great Moravia

Two entities lay at the core of the Great Moravian state formation – Old Moravia on both shores of the Morava River and the principality of Nitra in south-western Slovakia. Both entities were demarcated by the White Carpathians and Small Carpathians (Fig. 1). At the time of its greatest expansion in the last quarter of the 9th century, Great Moravia extended from its original territory in Moravia (Czech Republic), western Slovakia and apparently even Lower Austria into Bohemia, Lusatia, Malopolska, partly the Tisa River region and Pannonia.³

The fate of Great Moravia was closely linked with the house of Mojmir and their ambitions and permanent endeavour to assert their own independence from the Frankish empire. The first historically documented prince of Old Moravia Mojmir I. (?-846) expelled Pribina around the year 833 from Nitra and thus apparently laid the foundations of a new state.⁴ The power growth in the reign of Rostislav (848-870) drew Great Moravia more and more frequently into conflict with the Eastern Frankish Empire. In order to rid himself of the dependency on Frankish bishops and to gain international recognition as an independent ruler, Rostislav strove to establish an independent Moravian church diocese. This was only accomplished by his successor, Svatopluk (871-894) in the year 880. Establishment of the Methodius Moravian-Pannonian archbishopric under the direct jurisdiction of Rome strengthened the position of Svatopluk as the supreme ruler and provided him with the patronage necessary

to evangelise within his domain of power. The following phase may be designated as the true era of the “Great Moravian Empire”, the period of greatest territorial expansion of the state. The death of Svatopluk 894 marked the beginning of the break up of the Great Moravian Empire. The individual annexed territories gradually gained independence. Despite the effort to renew the state by Mojmir II (894-906), Moravia, weakened by its internal disputes as well as its wars with the Franks, succumbed in the years 905-906 to the pressure of the Magyars. The state structure disintegrated, the power of the nobles, if it survived the downfall of the state, was restricted to their domains. Apparently, the church organisation survived the state’s downfall, but there exist certain records documenting the resurgence of the pagan cult.⁵

1.3 The socio-economic and political structure of Great Moravia

Both written records and archaeological sources imply the significant proprietary and social differentiation of Moravian society.⁶ On the one hand, we find the privileged echelons of society – the ruler, dukes (*knyędzi*, *principes*), nobles (*velmoři*, *primates*, *opimates a nobiles viri*) and free tenants, and on the other we find inhabitants in various degrees of dependency. In the case of the privileged, these were a dynastic and proprietary aristocracy of private owners. Private ownership, according to the *Zakonъ sudnyj ljudem* Code of Law incorporated villages, estates, houses, fields, vineyards, money, serfs, horses, herds of livestock, various objects etc.

The lowest echelon of the social hierarchy was represented by slaves, i.e. paupers and people with no rights, sold or made over either along with the farms on which they worked or independently. These were not the only individuals without any rights, and they did not play a deciding role in the

1999; for the archaeological excavations and sources generally POULÍK 1985.

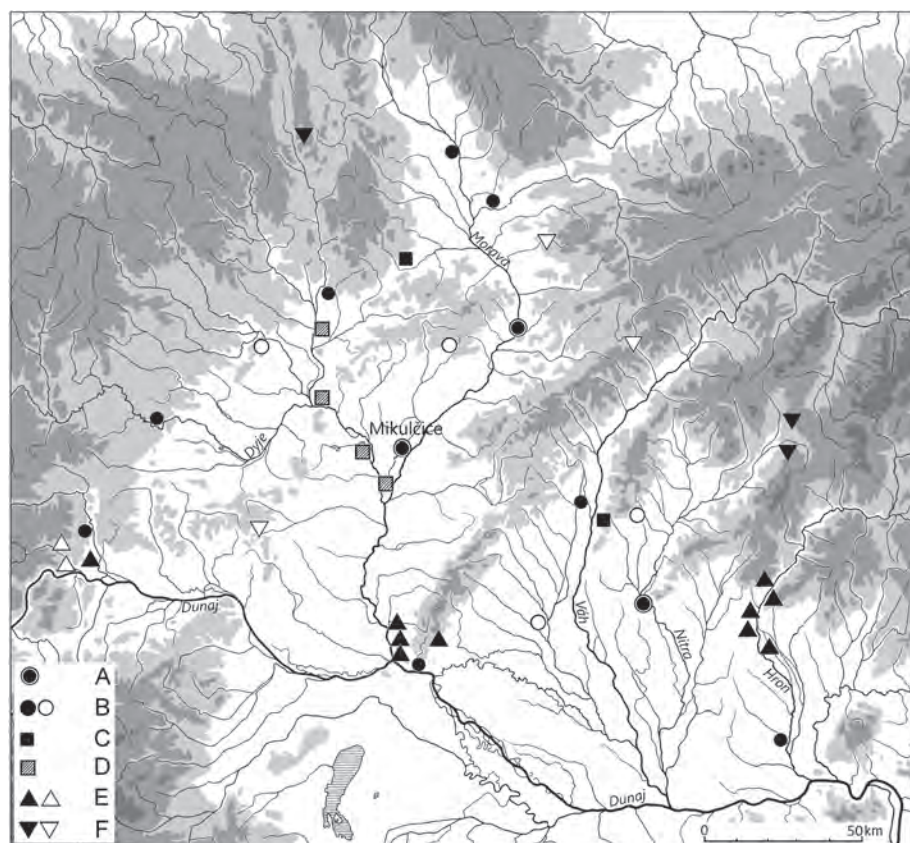
3 For the geographic extent of Great Moravia see HAVLÍK 1964, Fig. after page 208 and 256; DEKAN 1980, Fig. on the page 84-85; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006. We leave aside the “heretic” theories that place great Moravia in the region south of the Danube, eventually to the Tisa River region and that are objectively rejected by national historians and archaeologists (summary see MÜHLE 1997; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006).

4 For a somewhat different model see TŘEŠTÍK 2001, 131–135.

5 For the political history of Great Moravia see NOVOTNÝ 1912; HAVLÍK 1964, 1978; WOLFRAM 1987; PROFANTOVÁ 1999; TŘEŠTÍK 2001; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006.

6 For the social and political structure of Great Moravia see HAVLÍK 1978.

Fig. 1. The centres from the 9th century in Moravia (Czech Republic), south-western Slovakia and Lower Austria according to the formal division of Staňa 1985. A – central strongholds (settlement agglomerations), B – strongholds at the edges of residential and settled regions (provincial strongholds), C – forts on small, steep promontories (strongholds), D – extensive strongholds lacking any distinct division (economic centres with noblemen farmsteads), E – smaller forts in naturally well-protected positions on promontories (frontier defensive line), F – raised forts dominating the countryside, sporadically inhabited (guard forts).



state economy. The largest group in this society included simple people (*prostii ljudje*), members of village commons who gradually became legally dependent on the ruler, but otherwise remained politically and economically free. Their taxes, as a ransom for peace and protection, were gradually transformed into a statutory allowance. The slaves and “simple people” began evolving into a group of retainers.

The ruler, a member of the ruling Mojmir dynasty and owner of the land and its inhabitants, stood at the head of the state. According to written records and sources, he was attended by dukes with whom he held council. The dukes (*principes*) were apparently distinguished from the other category, designated as “the Moravians”. It is a question to what extent these so-called Moravians overlap with the Moravian nobles (*primates, optimates, nobiles viri*). The central political power was concentrated at the ruler’s court and relied on a system of strongholds that apparently corresponded to the eleven “*civitates*” of the Moravians, mentioned in the Bavarian treatise “*Descriptio*

civitatum at regionum ad septentrionalem plagam Danubii”.

A visible sign of the proprietary relationship of the state (ruler) was the exploitation of village commons by introducing tax and labour obligations and their subordination to the administrative and judicial organs of the state and ruler. Apart from the administrative, judicial and fiscal organisation, a paramount role was played by the executive power of the ruler and his apparatus. This was basically a military organisation that ensured the safety and security of the state within and especially outwards. This function was mainly ensured by the ruler’s military company, which formed the core of the military forces of Moravia. Its members included nobles, as well as other privileged classes. At first, their reward was material, from the captured booty and then from tributes. Eventually, parts of the tributes and proceeds were conferred on them and later still, they were rewarded with the contingent demesne of land and people.

The army consisted of both cavalry and infantry, mostly represented by free, humble people who often served with their own horses in the cavalry. We have been graphically informed about the military capabilities of the Moravians by the numerous reports regarding their military campaigns and battles, especially against the East Frankish Empire. The soldiers were armed with spears, long-bows, pikes, axes and swords (RUTKAY 1982, 2002b).

Church organisations were also a component of the state apparatus. The inclination of Moravian rulers towards Christianity as an official ideology of the Moravian state in the 9th century played a fundamental role. The Pannonian archbishopric acquired a seat in Moravia in 873 and was designated as Moravian in 880, although canonically, it was still a Pannonian archbishopric (TŘEŠTÍK 2001; MARSINA 2001; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006).

1.4 Adoption of Christianity and learning

Christianity extended into Moravia no later than the beginning of the 9th century, in connection with the missionary activities of the East Frankish episcopacy and the Aquiline patriarchate in Pannonia. The initial stages of the Christianisation of Great Moravia were apparently unrestrained and mainly involved the prince and his military company. Around 830, Pribina's church in Nitra was consecrated by Adalram, the archbishop of Salzburg, although Pribina remained a pagan for some time yet. In 831, Reginhar, the bishop of Passau, "baptised all Moravians" i.e. Mojmir and his faithful. Iconoclastically, Moravia fell under the power of the bishop of Passau who administered it through his archipresbyter. The country was thus exposed to a strong cultural, but at the same time political, influence of the Frankish Empire (VAVŘÍNEK 1963a, 1963b; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006).

In 863, at the request of the Prince, the Byzantine Emperor sent to Moravia a mission led by the brothers Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius. They founded their missionary activities on translations of Biblical texts into the Slavic language. For this purpose, Constantine created a special alphabet – the glagolic alphabet. In contrast to the practices of the Frankish missions, which used

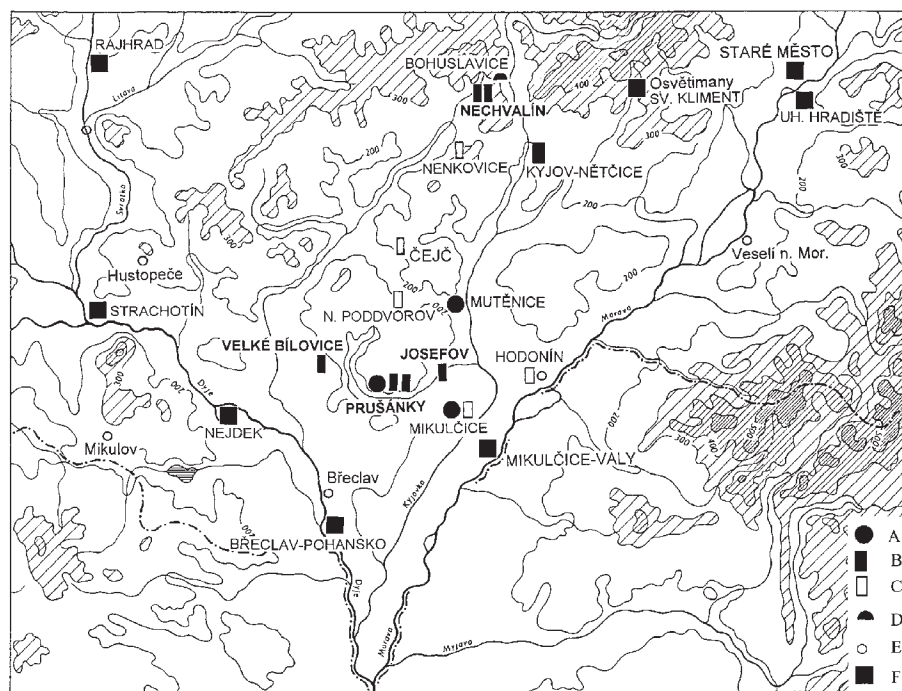
the Slavic language only to a necessary extent in the interpretation of the basic articles of the Christian faith, the Moravians had for the first time the opportunity to hear the texts of the Holy Writ in a comprehensible language. Twice – in 868 and 879 – Methodius successfully vindicated his missionary activity based on the Slavic liturgy in front of the Pope in Rome. On this occasion, Methodius and his disciples were ordained and Methodius was confirmed as the archbishop of Pannonia and Moravia. Constantine entered a monastic order in Rome and died there in 869. The schism between the Eastern and Western Christian Church, though, deepened in Moravia under the rule of Svatopluk. After the death of Methodius in 885, Slavic clerics were expelled from Moravia and they sought refuge in Bulgaria, which became the heir to the work of the Cyril and Methodius mission in Moravia. The development of the Moravian archdiocese culminated in the year 900, with the arrival of Latin clergy – one archbishop and three other bishops who were sent by the pope at the request of Mojmir II (VAVŘÍNEK 1963a; VAVŘÍNEK 1963b; DVORNÍK 1970).

Thanks to the mission of Cyril and Methodius, learning in Moravia reached an exceptional level. Constantine's and Methodius' idea to create a literature in Slavic language had no parallel in Middle Age Europe at the time. A complete translation of the Bible, Psalter and all necessary liturgy texts was made. On the basis of Byzantine model, Methodius compiled a secular and clerical code of law (*Zákon sudnyj ljudem* and *Nomokanon*), which did not win official acceptance. A remarkable work of the disciples of Constantine and Methodius were the magnificent legends – the Old Church Slavonic lives of both brothers (VAVŘÍNEK 1963a; VAŠICA 1966; VAVŘÍNEK 1986).

1.5 Archaeological sources

Archaeology plays a leading and unique role in understanding the history of Great Moravia. The phase of large-scale archaeological excavations in the 1950s to 1980s uncovered a great amount of source material (Fig. 2; POULÍK 1985), whose critical processing and analysis is a task that will

Fig. 2. A map of the most prominent Early Middle Age settlements and burial sites in the wider surroundings of Mikulčice, the research of which involved employees of the Mikulčice base of the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Science in Brno in the years 1954-2007. A – settlements, B – “completely” explored burial sites, C – partially explored burial sites, D – partially explored burial-mound necropolises. The two remaining letters represent the cities and towns of today (E) and the Great Moravian strongholds (F) as landmarks. Amended according to STAŇA 1996b.



take decades to complete (e.g. STAŇA/POLÁČEK 1996). Historically, this phase of the Great Moravian state falls into the period between the decline of the Avar kaganate at the end of the 8th century and the arrival of the Magyars at the beginning of the 10th century. According to the archaeological periodisation, the Great Moravian relics are classified as belonging to the Middle ‘Hilfort’ period (800-950). At the same time, the first half of the 10th century is viewed as the period of the decline of Great Moravian structures.

The fundamental supporting blocks of the state were the strongholds in their role as centres of political power, of clerical and economic authority, of crafts, trade and learning. The strongholds rank among the best explored objects of the 9th century in Moravia (Fig. 2). Of at least 30 fortified settlements on the territory of Great Moravia, central strongholds (*zentrale Burgwallstädte*) are most important, as the seats of the holders of the main political power in the state (Mikulčice, Staré Město-Uherské Hradiště, Nitra). These are extensive and rugged residential complexes with fortified and non-fortified formations, extending tens of hectares in size, with more church buildings, rich burial sites and many valuable findings. Of

these centres, only Nitra can be associated with references in written sources (Nitrava), although the principal centre of Great Moravia must have been located on the territory of Mikulčice or Staré Město-Uherské Hradiště (both localities lie in the flood plain of the middle stream of the Morava River). Attempts to identify one of these with the “*inefabilis Rastici Munitio*” and “*urbs antiqua Rastici*” of the Fulda annals (869, 871), or with the capital centre of the state have been unsuccessful. Similarly, the issue of the location of Methodius’ seat with the cathedral and the site of the archbishop’s grave remains open, despite the most probably localisation being at Sady near Uherské Hradiště. The cited central strongholds could also have included Olomouc; Zalavár, the principal stronghold of the Platten principality, also meets these criteria (ŠTĚPÁNEK 1965; STAŇA 1985; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2001).⁷

Churches are among the most significant discoveries in the strongholds (Fig. 3). They were discovered at seven localities in the central region of Great Moravia. These include the settlement agglomerations in the area of Staré Město-Uherské

⁷ For specific function of the stronghold at Břeclav-Pohansko see MACHÁČEK 2007.

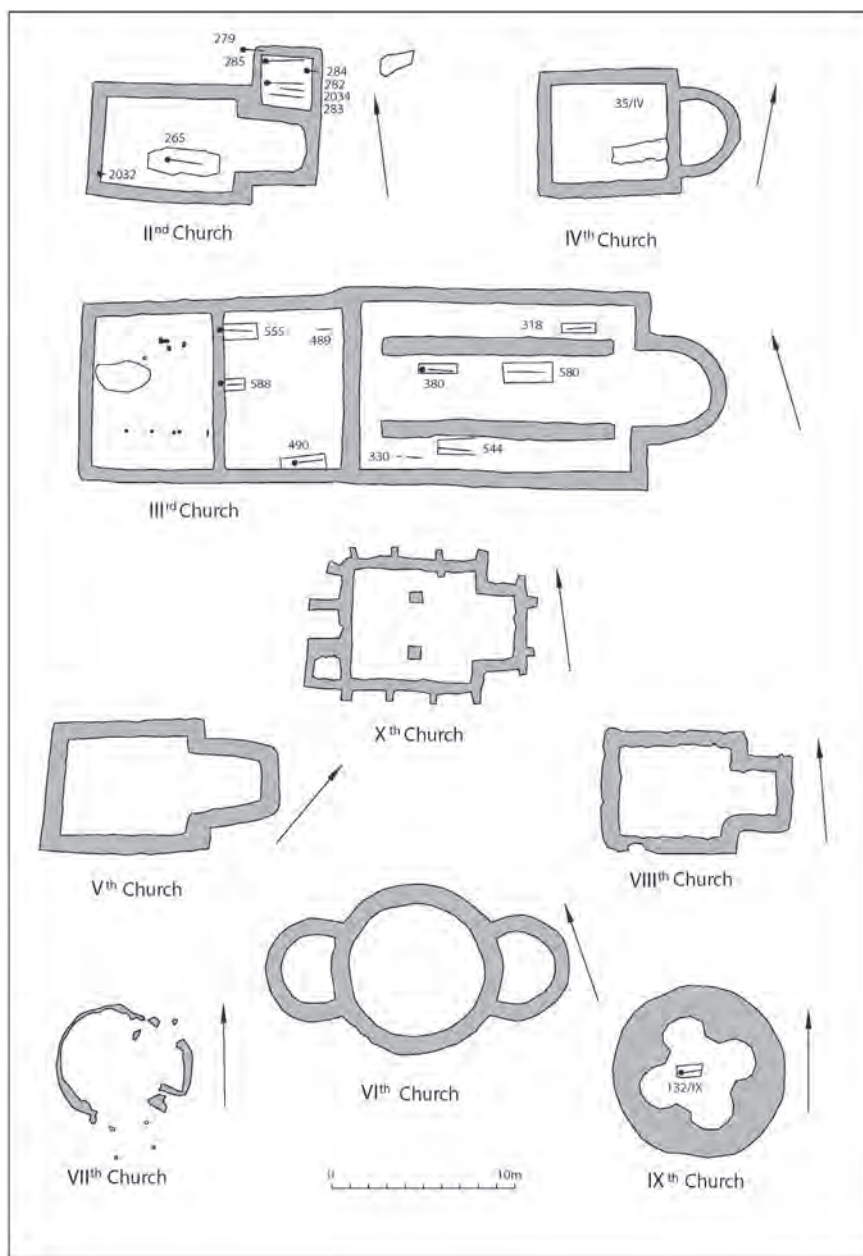


Fig. 3. Ground plans of the churches in Mikulčice with interior graves and graves disturbed by foundations denoted.

Hradiště and Mikulčice, as well as the stronghold of Břeclav-Pohansko and possibly Bratislava, Devín, Ducové and Nitra. Church or generally walled structures have been indirectly documented at other localities.⁸ The Mikulčice three-nave basilica (the 3rd church), and the cathedral complex in Sady near Uherské Hradiště hold an exceptional position. Both architectures stand out among the other Great Moravian churches thanks

to their size, disposition, complicated building development, the presence of graves (apparently dynastic) in the main church premises and the concentration of richly equipped noble graves with swords, gold jewellery, ostentatious garnitures of wrought girdles and spurs, coffins wrought with iron bands etc. located in the neighbouring burial sites (Fig. 4).⁹

⁸ For the archaeological problematic of the Great Moravian churches see POŠMOURNÝ 1971; POULÍK 1978; VAVŘÍNEK 1980; KLANICA 1985c; ŠTEFANOVIČOVÁ 2001; RUTTKAY 2002a; GALUŠKA/POLÁČEK 2006; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006; POLÁČEK 2008a.

⁹ For the archaeological research of the Mikulčice basilica see POULÍK 1975; KLANICA 1985c; SCHULZE-DÖRRLAMM 1995; GALUŠKA/POLÁČEK 2006; POLÁČEK 2008a; for the supposed grave of archbishop Methodius in Mikulčice basilica see problematically KLANICA 1993,



Fig. 4. One of the magnate's graves with sword at the IIIth church in Mikulčice. Photo Archive AI ASCR Brno.

The churches were mainly surrounded by burial sites. The largest of these included the necropolises near the church “Na Valách” in Staré Město, near the IIIrd church, basilica, in Mikulčice and near the church in Břeclav-Pohansko (HRUBÝ 1955; POULÍK 1975; KALOUSEK 1971). From the aspect of the representation of graves with gold jewellery, the richest group was that from the church complex in Uherské Hradiště-Sady (GALUŠKA 1996; STAŇA 2001). The differences in the equipment (“richness”) of the necropolises need not only reflect different social and proprietary conditions of the respective communities, but also, for example, different degrees of Christianisation. It is probable that the proportion of traditional (pre-Christian) customs, including the burial of gifts with the dead, receded during the 9th century, especially under the influence of Church prohibition. This most probably explains the absence of arms, vessels and other grave additions in otherwise richly equipped burial sites of the late 9th century. In contrast to churches whose function practically ended with the downfall of the Great Moravian state and its principal centres at the beginning of the 10th century, interments continued to some extent at some church burial sites for some time during the 10th century (DOSTÁL 1966; KLANICA 1985c; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 1986).

1994; critical e.g. STAŇA 1996a; generally MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006. For Uherské Hradiště-Sady see GALUŠKA 1996.

Apart from church cemeteries, there existed in strongholds and their immediate vicinity simple burial sites that in some cases demonstrated signs similar to those of the “richest” burial sites near churches (e.g. “Kostelisko” in the suburb of Mikulčice fortified centre; KLANICA 1987b).

Archaeological research of churches and simple necropolises uncovered extensive and valuable findings. This is a basic source of knowledge and understanding of the social structures and material culture of the inhabitants of Great Moravia (DOSTÁL 1966; POULÍK 1985; HANULIAK 2004). The skeletal material from the graves is an inexhaustible source of information regarding the anthropology, demography and pathology of the Old Slavs (STLOUKAL/VYHNÁNEK 1976). In the case of grave findings, these often include masterful artistic handicraft products, which to a certain extent characterise the court culture of Great Moravia. An example of this may be the luxurious jewellery, garnitures of wrought spurs and girdles and other decorative objects. In the first half of the 9th century, handicrafts in Moravia were affected by the declining influence of the Avar molten metal industry and especially by contacts with the Carolingian milieu.¹⁰ At the

¹⁰ A diverse group of bronze cast, gold-plated fittings and spurs, often decorated using the notching technique, and iron fittings and spurs, sometimes with Tauszin decoration is generally termed, rather problematically,



Fig. 5. Position of Mikulčice in the frame of Czech Republic.

beginning of the second half of the 9th century, new influences intensified, infiltrating into the Old Moravian milieu from Byzantium and the Orient. The jewellery of “Byzantine-Oriental” (“veligradian”) character with assorted variations of gold, silver or gold-plated bronze earrings and rings whose decoration mainly applied filigree and granulations became an important component of the production of home workshops in the second half of the 9th century. Hollow buttons (gombíky), which were a characteristic part of the clothes of old Moravians, represented a distinctive and varied group of local handicraft products. The specific types of Old Moravian jewellery demonstrate the existence of several centres of jewellery production, associated with important centres of power (Staré Město, Mikulčice, Nitra, Pohansko u Břeclavi) and other local centres (Dolní Věstonice, Rajhrad). It is probable that the production of veligradian jewellery ended with the downfall of the Great Moravian state formation at the beginning of the 10th century, when the producers probably left for the perspective, especially Czech, centres (Stará Kouřim, Prague). A numerous group of handicraft products carried Christian symbols (crosses, captorgs, ironwork in the shape of the cross, styled depictions of Christ, the saints, fish, birds, etc.).¹¹

the Blatnica-Mikulčice style/horizon (POULÍK 1963; BIALEKOVÁ 1980, 1996; WACHOWSKI 1992; PROFANTOVÁ 1997; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006).

11 For the problematic of artistic handicraft production of the Great Moravia see EISNER 1947; HRUBÝ 1955;

2. The power centre at Mikulčice

2.1 Significance

The stronghold of “Valy” near Mikulčice, along with the agglomeration in the area of Staré Město-Uherské Hradiště, ranked among the most important centres of Great Moravia. Unfortunately, neither of these centres can be unequivocally identified with the locations cited in contemporary written sources. The importance of this locality from the aspect of today’s research lies in its relative preservation, in that it is undamaged by later city developments as in the case e.g. of Staré Město-Uherské Hradiště. The other merits of this locality are the relatively developed stratigraphy, the rich findings, including a number of luxurious and archaeologically valuable objects, as well as the partial preservation of wood. This all makes the Mikulčice stronghold locality unique, enabling the study and resolution of archaeological and historical issues inaccessible elsewhere (POLÁČEK 1996 with lit., 2001b; POLÁČEK/MAZUCH/BAXA 2006).

2.2 Natural conditions and the topography of the settlement

Mikulčice lie in the south-eastern tip of the Czech Republic (Moravia), on the border with Slovakia, about 7 km south-westerly from Hodonín (Fig. 5).¹² The “Valy” stronghold near Mikulčice is located in the geo-morphological complex of the Lower Morava River valley, approximately in the middle of the flood plain of the Morava River, between the Czech (Moravian) Mikulčice and the Slovak Kopčany. The width of the flood plain here is around 6 km (Fig. 6, 7).

The landscape of the flood plain, where the stronghold was located, had quite a different character in the 9th century that it does today. It was a terrain broken up by sand dunes, the rest

POULÍK 1963; DOSTÁL 1965, 1991; BENDA 1963, 1965; CAPELLE 1968; KLANICA 1970, 1974; DEKAN 1980; GALUŠKA 1989; STAŇA 1995; PAVLOVIČOVÁ 1996; ŠTEFANOVIČOVÁ 2004; PROFANTOVÁ/FRÁNA 2003; UNGERMAN 2002, 2005.

12 The exact position of the stronghold: 48°48’16” north latitude and 17°05’29” east longitude.

Fig. 6. Aerial image of the meadow enclave with the „Valy“ stronghold near Mikulčice from the west. In the background, the buildings of the Kopčany village with the second sector of hinterland settlement, as well as the slopes of the Chvojnice hills. Photo M. Bálek.



Fig. 7. Aerial image of the meadow enclave with the „Valy“ stronghold near Mikulčice from the east. In the background, the buildings of Mikulčice village with the second sector of hinterland settlement; also, the slopes of the Kyjov hills. Photo M. Bálek.



consisting of shingle terraces and a thick network of river channels. The landscape was not flooded, as it has been in the last centuries. In the 8th-9th century, it apparently provided the best conditions for life. The vegetation was characterised by tough woodland with a predominance of oak, elm and ash. The woods were open and backlit due to forest clearing, pasture and collection of twigs. The land closely surrounding the Great

Moravian stronghold was of a partially park-like character with variously large areas of pastures, meadows and possibly fields (OPRAVIL 1972, 1998, 2000, 2003).

The presence of sand dunes in this part of the flood plain was important from the aspect of conditions for settling and populating. These dunes date from the advent of the Pleistocene and Holocene and represent the most significant

location of prehistoric and Early Middle Age settlement. These positions were sought out especially for their dry, heating surface and their slight elevation above the lowest parts of the countryside afflicted by humidity and ground inversions. The elevations of the sand dunes around the stronghold were also a favourite place for founding burial grounds (POLÁČEK 1997; HAVLÍČEK/POLÁČEK/VACHEK 2003; CULEK/IVAN/KIRCHNER 1999).

Intense expansion of settlements into the less favourable lower localities consisting of flood-loams, took place especially in the later Great Moravian period, in the second half of the 9th century. The reason for this was not only the demographic growth of the agglomeration's population, but also the displacement of the original inhabitants of the *acropolis* by the foundation of churches and their sacral grounds (POLÁČEK 1997; STAŇA 1997; POLÁČEK/MAZUCH/BAXA 2006).

Beginning in the 10th century, post-Great Moravian settlements again retreated to the elevated positions of the sand dunes. The reason for this may have been the incipient floods that began occurring repeatedly in cycles from around the 13th century. These changes led to the degradation of the original cultural landscape of the flood plain into an uninhabited land, henceforth exploited only as a subsidiary farming space. The originally broken up landscape with islands and branching river beds disappeared below the detritus of young flood-loams (POLÁČEK 1996, 1998a, 1999, 2004).

The agglomeration of the settlement complex in Mikulčice originally occupied several islands among the network of the Morava River channels. The pre-Great Moravian, apparently fortified, central 8th century settlement occupied an elevated formation of half-moon shape at the site of the later bailey and northern part of the *acropolis*. Expansion of this formation to include the area of "Dolní Valy" located below this and the building of new fortifications gave rise in the 9th century to the Great Moravian stronghold itself. This consisted of the *acropolis* covering an area of 7.7 hectares and the bailey covering

an area of 2.4 hectares. The suburb gradually grew around his fortified core (POLÁČEK/MAREK 1995; POLÁČEK 1996; POLÁČEK/MAZUCH/BAXA 2006).¹³

The most significant walled structures existed in the 9th century in the northern elevated section of the *acropolis* – at least four churches and a palace (Fig. 9). These were surrounded by an extensive burial site. This was the main residential area of the agglomeration – the Prince's residence. On the other hand, no churches or burial sites were found in the area of the fortified bailey. This was purely a residential area with dense, regular development, apparently an estate housing the military retinue of the prince (POULÍK 1975; POLÁČEK/MAZUCH/BAXA 2006).

The *acropolis* and bailey as the fortified core of the agglomeration were surrounded by the suburb (Fig. 10). This term refers to the settled area over a range of 700 m around the fictional centre of the agglomeration. This demarcation is merely a working convention that requires further verification. The settled area of the suburb, originally estimated to cover 100-200 hectares, actually covered maximally 30 hectares. In the suburb, there existed several churches, settlements and burial sites. The settlements had a partial artisan character and livestock breeding also played some role. The local inhabitants evidently participated in ensuring the running of the centre and in providing services for the privileged classes. It is thought that the churches in the suburb were parts of the estate founded by the nobles in the vicinity of the Prince's residence (POLÁČEK/MAREK 2005; POLÁČEK/MAZUCH/BAXA 2006; HLADÍK/MAZUCH/POLÁČEK 2008).

The most distinctive settlements and burial areas of the suburb were located on the sand dunes in the immediate vicinity of the fortified centre. This area included the "Těšický les" in the north-east and "Kostelisko" in the south (Fig. 11). Extensive burial sites existed in both

¹³ In the following anthropological part of this book are used different terms: *acropolis* and bailey as a fortified centre of the agglomeration = castle; suburb at area beneath the walls = sub-castle.

Fig. 8. Mikulčice-Valy, Great Moravian stronghold with suburb. Diagram of the topographic situation. Caption: 1 – *acropolis* ramparts, 2 – archaeologically documented fortification of the baily, 3 – outer ramparts on the eastern perimeter of the “Těšický les” in the suburb, 4 – terrain crests of the elevated sections of the *acropolis* and suburb, 5 – established numbering of churches and palace, 6 – expected course of the original river channels.



these positions in the 9th century. Approximately in the second half of the 9th century, we become the witnesses of a significant increase in the settlement of the sections of the suburb located further below, on the flood-loams. This mainly involved the area of the north suburb (POLÁČEK/MAREK 2005; HLADÍK/MAZUCH/POLÁČEK 2008).

The natural protection of the centre was ensured by the river channels, which on the one hand spanned the fortified core of the agglomeration and on the other divided the area of the suburb. For the life of the stronghold, these channels were not only of strategic but also of economic importance. These channels could be surmounted by three wooden bridges (POLÁČEK 1997, 2007 with lit.).

As early as the 8th century, Mikulčice were an important centre of power. The presence of the social elite here is documented especially by the

large collection of spurs with hooks and Avar bronzes.¹⁴ In the 9th century, Mikulčice became the centre of political power of the ruling Mojmir dynasty. The importance of the military function of the stronghold is illustrated by the findings of arms and riding tackle. The court culture is represented by the remarkable products of local handicraft as well as luxurious objects of foreign provenance (Fig. 12; e.g. POULÍK 1975, 1986). The superior standard of living of the ruling class also included a diverse diet supplemented by fruits, vegetables, apices, wine etc. (OPRAVIL 2000). Mikulčice were an important centre of Christianity as illustrated by the concentration of churches, the findings with Christian symbols, as well as documents affirming the level of learning at the time (POULÍK 1970;

¹⁴ KLANICA 1986, 1995; POULÍK 1988; ZÁBOJNÍK 2005; POLÁČEK 2008c.

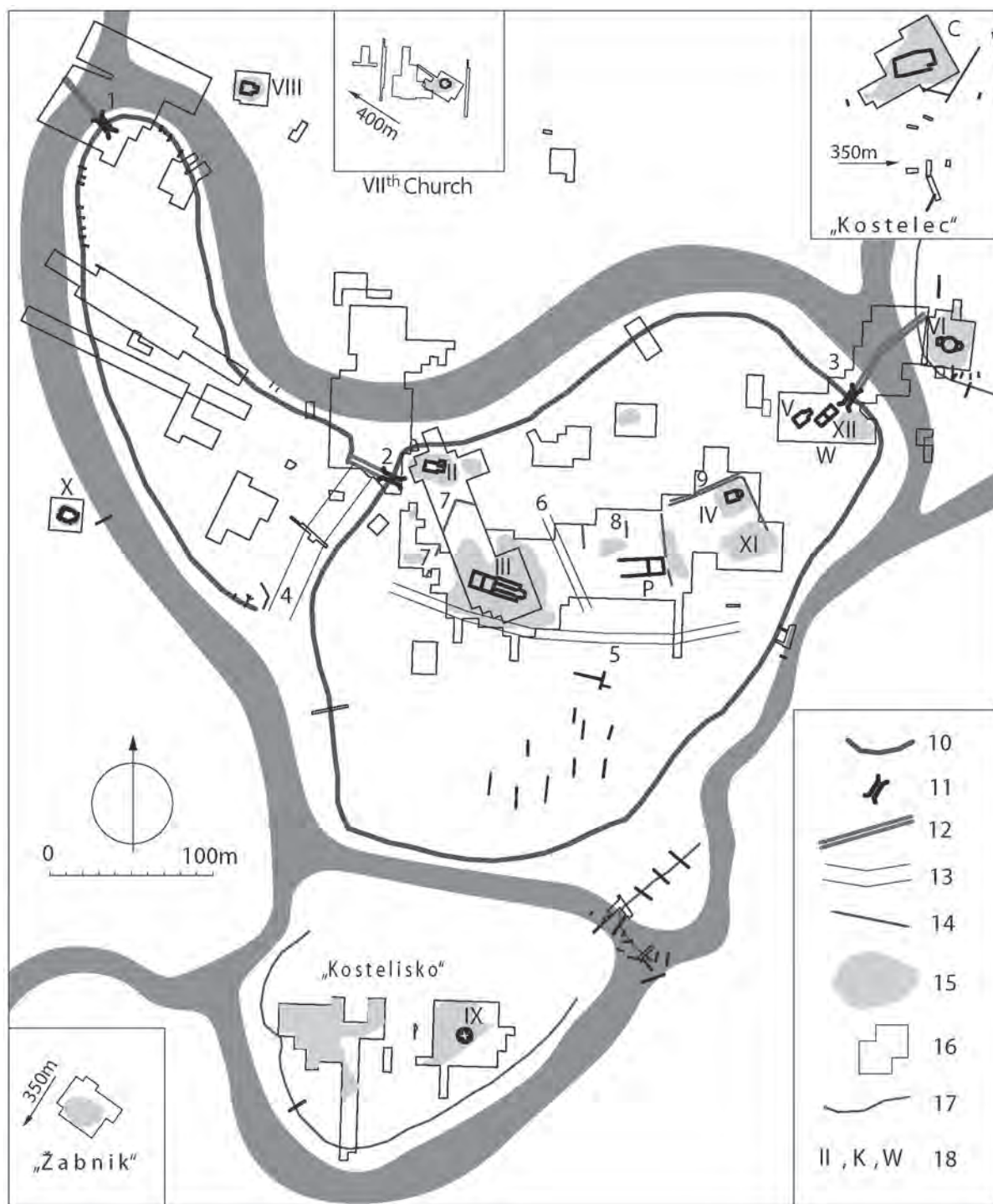


Fig. 9. Mikulčice-Valy, the stronghold of the 9th century. Ground plan of the stronghold with identification of the most significant objects: 1 – north-west gate of the bailey, 2 – western gate of the *acropolis*, 3 – north-east gate of the *acropolis*, 4 – ditch between the *acropolis* and bailey, 5 – ditch south of the IIIrd church, 6 – ditch between the basilica and palace, 7 – palisade wall of the area around the basilica, 8 – traces of palisade walls north of the palace, 9 – road and fence of the area around the IVth church. Legend: 10 – fortification, 11 – gates, 12 – bridges, 13 – ditches splitting the internal area of the fortified centre, 14 – fences and palisades inside the *acropolis*, 15 – burial places or significant groups of graves, 16 – investigated area, 17 – significant terrain edges, 18 – established numbering of churches, identification of the palace on the *acropolis* (P), pagan temple in the place called “Klášteřisko” (C) and jewellery workshop by the Vth church (W).

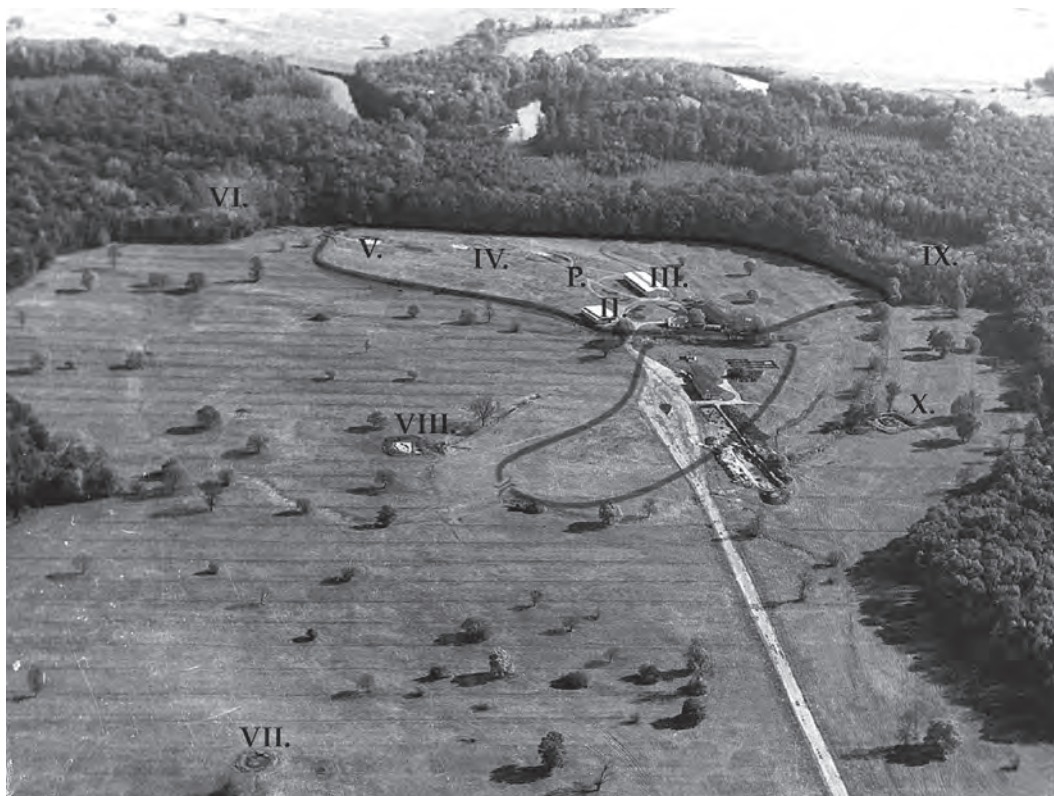


Fig. 10. Mikulčice-Valy. Aerial image of the stronghold from 1964 with the course of the fortifications and the positions of walled structures – churches and palace – denoted. View from the north-west. In the background, the meanders of the Morava River, regulated at the beginning of the 1970s. Photo Archive of AI ASCR Brno.

KLANICA 1993). On the other hand, the supposed existence of a pagan temple dating to the second half of the 9th century at the summit of one of the dunes in the suburb (“Klášteřisko”; KLANICA 1985b) is difficult to explain.

As the foremost centre of Great Moravia, Mikulčice shared the fate of the whole state. At the beginning of the 10th century, they fell to the Magyars who apparently significantly damaged the stronghold and surrounding settlements. Life continued to a restricted degree, though. This is attested by documents of reduced settlement in the 10th to 13th century. It is possible that a certain centre of local power remained, although some historians refute this (MĚŘÍNSKÝ 1986; TŘEŠTÍK 1991; POLÁČEK 1998a, 1999).

2.3 The state of archaeological research

“Valy” near Mikulčice were discovered for science and the public by Josef Poulík in 1954 (POULÍK 1957). This discovery was followed

by 38 seasons of systematic field research, which uncovered an area of almost 5 hectares (Fig. 13, 14). These excavations are especially associated with the names of J. Poulík and Z. Klanica (POULÍK 1975; KLANICA 1985a). Mikulčice found their place among the most significant European archaeological localities. The rich source material thus acquired, though, is still waiting to be processed and made public. It represents one of the main foundations for the historical evaluation of Great Moravia and its role in the development of Early Middle Age Central Europe.

At the beginning of the 1990s, systematic uncovering and exposure was temporarily suspended and the attention of the Mikulčice base of the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Science in Brno focused on the processing and evaluation of the results of field works up till then („concluded phase of research, 1954-1992“). Although excavations within the “new phase of research” after 1993 were restricted

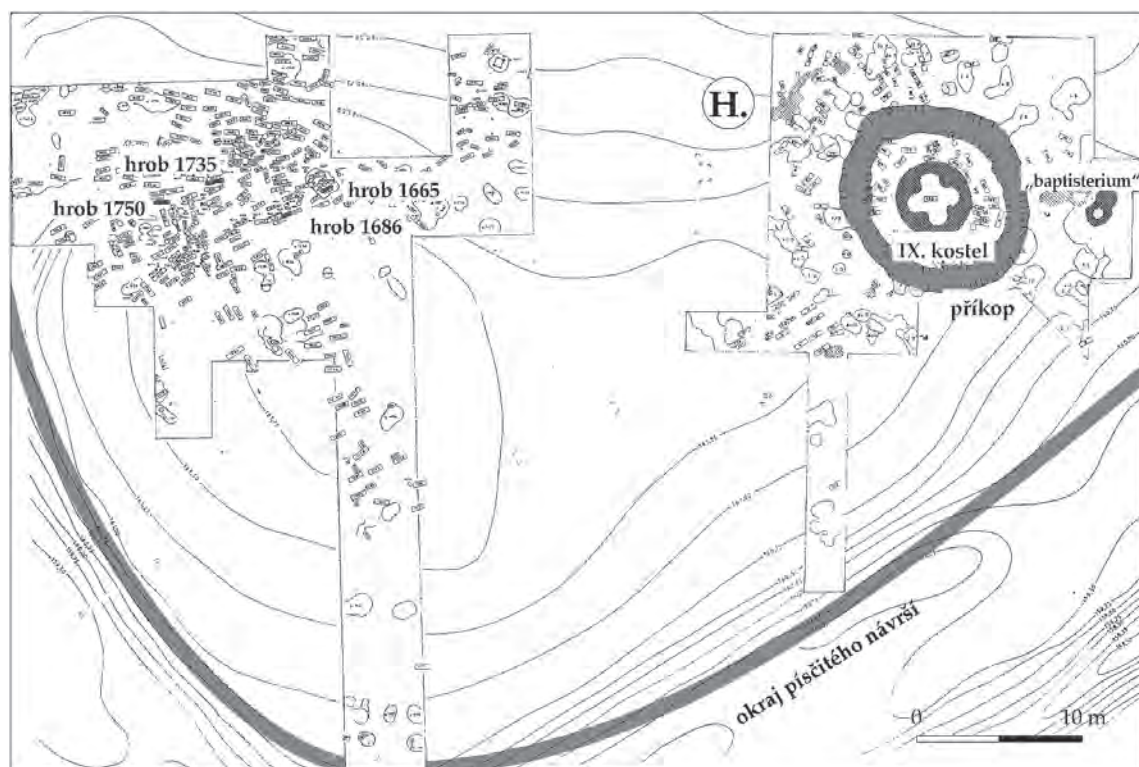


Fig 11. Mikulčice-„Kostelisko“. Kostelisko burial site (left) and the cemetery near the IXth church in the suburb of the centre. The IXth church, so-called baptisterium, the moat surrounding the church from the 14th/15th century, selected graves and the ridge of the sand dunes are all denoted. According to POLÁČEK 2006.

to a minimum, field works never stopped. It was still necessary to conduct salvage excavations within the area of the stronghold and its hinterland. Apart from this, early on, there arose a need for new field works in association with the verification of the contentious issues of the processing of old research. This is why a long-term program of “source processing and verification of old research” was launched in 2004. Up to now, the work within this program has focused especially on the study of the settling of the least studied and researched sections of the agglomeration, specifically the suburb and the nearest hinterland (POLÁČEK 1996, 2001b, 2005b).

Simultaneously with the “new phase” of research at Mikulčice, field works continue in the Slovak section of the agglomeration, i.e. on the territory of Kopčany east of the Morava River (district of Senica, Slovakia). Since 1994, the Institute for Monument Preservation in Bratislava has been conducting structural-historical and archaeological research of the chapel of St. Margaret of

Antioch as well as the archaeological survey of the Early Middle Age settlement on the whole cadastral territory of Kopčany (BAXA 2000; BAXA et al. 2004; BAXA et al. 2005). The discovery of Great Moravian graves in the close vicinity of the church in 2004 confirmed that this structure dates to the 9th century. This is thus the remotest sacral building of the Mikulčice agglomeration and at the same time the only Great Moravian church still standing (Fig. 15). The “Pri Kačenárni” sand dune, where in the 1960s M. Kraskovská excavated the settlement and burial site from the 9th century, is located near this chapel (KRASKOVSKÁ 1965, 1969).

3. The hinterland of Mikulčice stronghold

3.1 Demarcation of the hinterland

The economic hinterland is represented by a hypothetical perimeter with a radius of 10 km,

surrounding the fictional centre of the agglomeration (Fig. 16). This demarcation ensues from the estimation of the farmed land necessary to cover the consumption of cereals necessary to feed the assumed 1000-2000 inhabitants of the centre. As the flood plain apparently did not offer suitable conditions for the cultivation of cereals, the necessary arable land had to be replaced by the more distant positions outside the flood plain. Despite this, the perimeter of the agricultural hinterland could hardly exceed 10 km. This demarcation is merely a useful tool; a more reliable means of establishing the internal and external borders of the hinterland could ensue from future analysis of the structure of the settlement around the centre (POLÁČEK 2008b).

3.2 Natural conditions of the hinterland and the course of routes

The studied territory lies in the warmest region of the Czech Republic. The average annual temperature is 9.5° C, the average total rainfall is 585 mm, which in view of the temperature is an above average value and signals a warm region, relatively well supplied with rain. These are prerequisites for this territory to be very fertile. The relatively increased incidence of rainfall is given by the area's position in front of the windward slope of the Carpathian mountains (CULEK/IVAN/KIRCHNER 1999).

From the aspect of geology and geomorphology, the area of the economic hinterland is divided into three main sectors (POLÁČEK 2008b). The borders of these sectors are orientated in the NW-SE direction, i.e. the same as the Morava River, which forms the axis of the whole studied territory and at the same time the state boundary between the Czech and Slovak Republic. The middle sector represents the flood plain of the Morava River and the Kyjovka flowing in parallel at 156 to 167 m above sea level. The flood plain at the site of Mikulčice is less than 6 km wide.

A flat terrain rises on both sides of the flood plain, and this gradually changes to a hilly landscape with a maximum height of 260 m above sea level. On the north-western Czech-side, these are

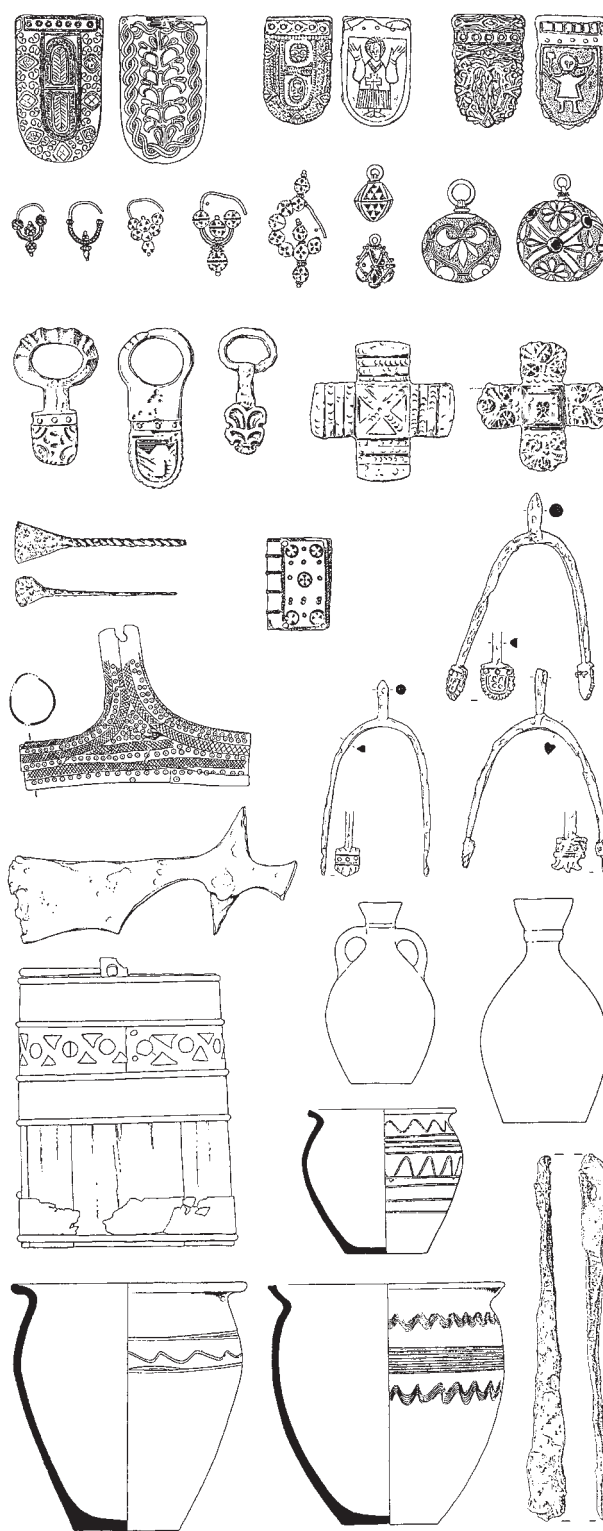


Fig. 12. Mikulčice-Valy. A selection of characteristic findings from the Middle 'Hilfort' (Great Moravian) period. According to POLÁČEK 2006.

the Prušánky hills, broken up by shallow valley of the Kyjovka stream and its Prušánka tributary. On the south-eastern Slovak-side, the flat terrain of



Fig. 13. Mikulčice-Valy, acropolis. Excavation of basilica in the year 1957. Photo Archive of AI ASCR Brno.



Fig. 14. Mikulčice-Valy. Excavation of the extinct river-bed in front of north-west gate of bailey. Photo Archive of AI ASCR Brno.

the Borská lowlands gradually rises in the south-eastern direction into the Chvojnice hills.

The course of old routes played a fundamental role in the formation of settlement structures. The main route, passing on a west-east course through the stronghold, has been documented archaeologically in the form of a triad of gates and bridges within the area of the fortified centre. It is at most probable that this communication

axis of the stronghold linked up with the long-distance road connecting the district of Brno with Váh River region, as we know it in the form of the so-called Czech road of later historical sources. It is presumed that somewhere in the territory of Mikulčice, this road intersected a communication of a north-south course, following the flow of the Morava River and known as one of the so-called routes of the Amber Road (Květ 1999). In this

connection, it is necessary to stress the significance of the river, which in the Early Middle Ages represented an important transportation junction (POLÁČEK 2007).

3.3 The residential network and the structure of the settlement in the hinterland

The 9th century residential network on the Czech side of the hinterland, especially its internal section, is relatively well known thanks to the intense field works as well as surface survey. Three sectors of settlements are involved, each linked to three significant, and from the aspect of natural environment suitability for settlement predestined, lines (Fig. 16, 17). All three lines are similarly oriented to the Morava River. The localities of the first sector at a distance of around 1 km from the centre of the agglomeration are linked to the line of the “Virgásky“, “Trapíkov“ and “Kněží“ sand dunes. The second sector, at a distance of 3.5 km represents the line to the south-eastern slope of the flood plane. The third sector at a distance of 7.5 km corresponds to both sides of the shallow valley dent of the Prušánka stream (POLÁČEK 2008b).

The situation on the Slovak side of the Mikulčice agglomeration is relatively well known in the Kopčany and Holíč cadastre, while the findings in the more distant sections of the hinterland are less reliable. In the flood plain, as on the Czech side, settlement is linked to the sand dunes. These form a belt that runs parallel to the edge of the flood plain, at a distance of approx. 2 km from the stronghold and approx. 700 m from the south-eastern edge of the flood plain (1st sector). All the dunes of this line were settled in the 9th century. Moreover, this line was connected by a transverse belt of elevated and in the 9th century settled terrain with the edge of the flood plain (2nd sector). The second line of settlement on the Slovak side at a distance of 2.5 km from the stronghold is bound to the terrain of the river terraces, bordering the flood plain. It is represented by several settlements and burial sites in the territory of Kopčany and Holíč (Kátov), known especially from surface collections or



Fig. 15. The chapel of St. Margita in Kopčany on the Slovak side of the Mikulčice Early Middle Age agglomeration – the only Great Moravian church that remains standing today. Photo Archive of AI ASCR Brno.

isolated findings (BAXA et al. 2006; POLÁČEK 2008b).

Accessibility of the dunes of the first Slovak sector of the hinterland “on dry feet” from the edge of the flood plain was of fundamental importance in the settling of this territory. This is the main difference compared to the Czech side, where the settled positions on the river islands were separated from the elevated edge of the flood plain by a 1.5 km wide belt of non-settled and apparently waterlogged terrain (POLÁČEK 2008b).

The structure of the hinterland settlement reflects to a great extent the geographical possibilities of the nearest surroundings of Mikulčice stronghold. It is probable that within the wider territory of the centre, there existed since prehistoric times an important crossing across the river, later used in the Middle Ages by the “Czech” road and indirectly documented as late as the 17th century. A number of the settlements were situated at the crossing of the river valley, as well

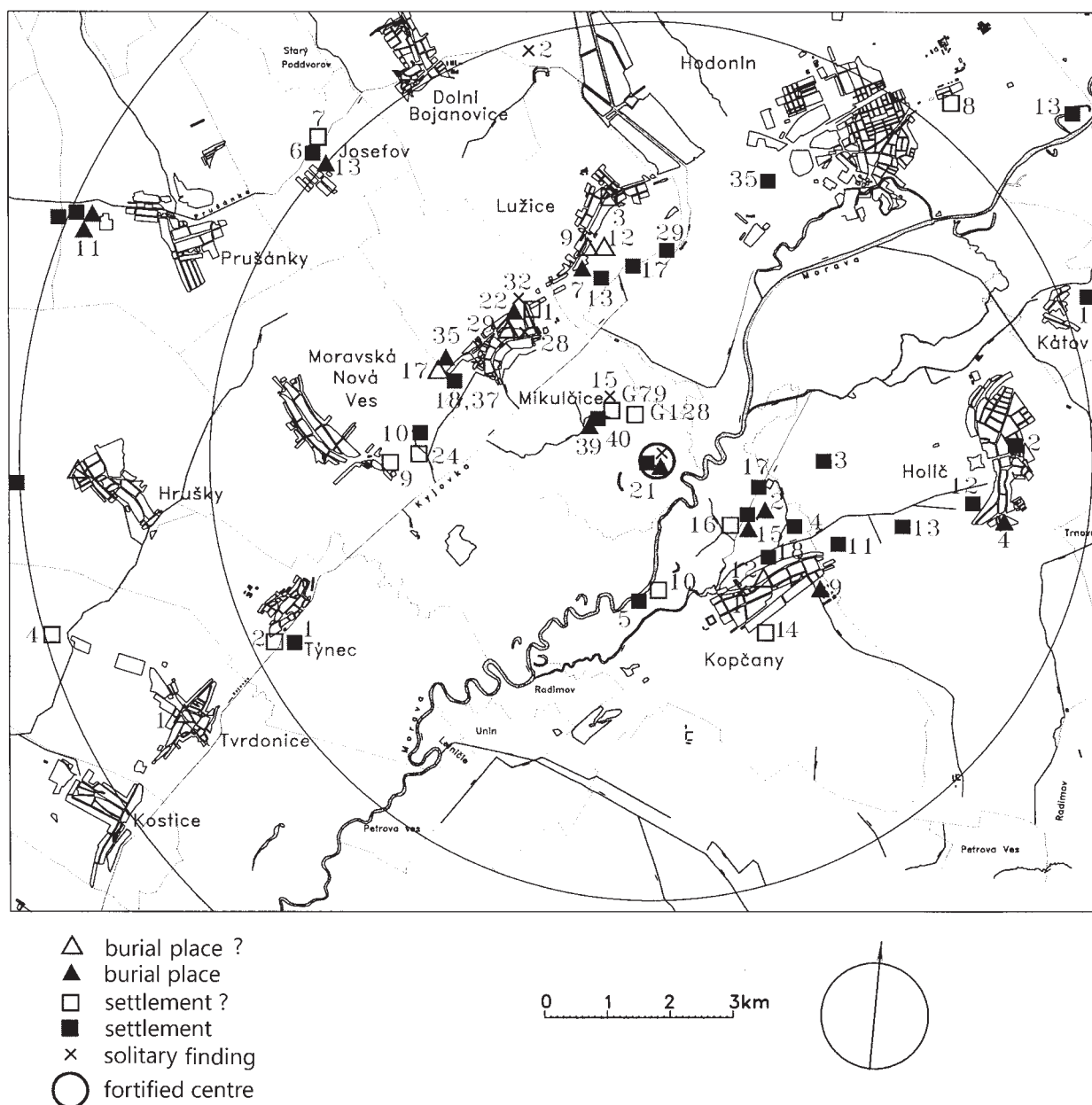


Fig. 16. Middle 'Hilfort' period („Great Moravian“) settlement of the hinterland of Mikulčice stronghold with a denoted perimeter of 7 and 10 km around the centre of the agglomeration. The fortified centre of Mikulčice „Valy“ (21). The localities are numbered according to the single cadastres; this corresponds to the archaeological topography in the hinterland of Mikulčice stronghold (ŠKOJEC 1997, 1998, 2000, 2005; KLANICOVÁ 2000; BAXA et al. 2006) and the mapping of the settlement of the sand dunes in the flood plain of the Morava River (POLÁČEK/ŠKOJEC/HAVLÍČEK 2003). According to POLÁČEK 2008b.

as along the routes headed inland on the Czech and Slovak side of the border (POULÍK 1975; KVĚT 1999; POLÁČEK 2008b).

3.4 The issue of the socio-economic structure of the hinterland

The state of knowledge regarding the socio-economic structure of the hinterland of Mikulčice

centre is today imperfect and one-sided. On the one hand, we lack published or otherwise accessible results of field works, and on the other the current image is mainly based on the burial sites. The weakest aspect of current knowledge is the insufficient research of the settlements.

The view of the social structures of the Mikulčice centre hinterland has undergone much

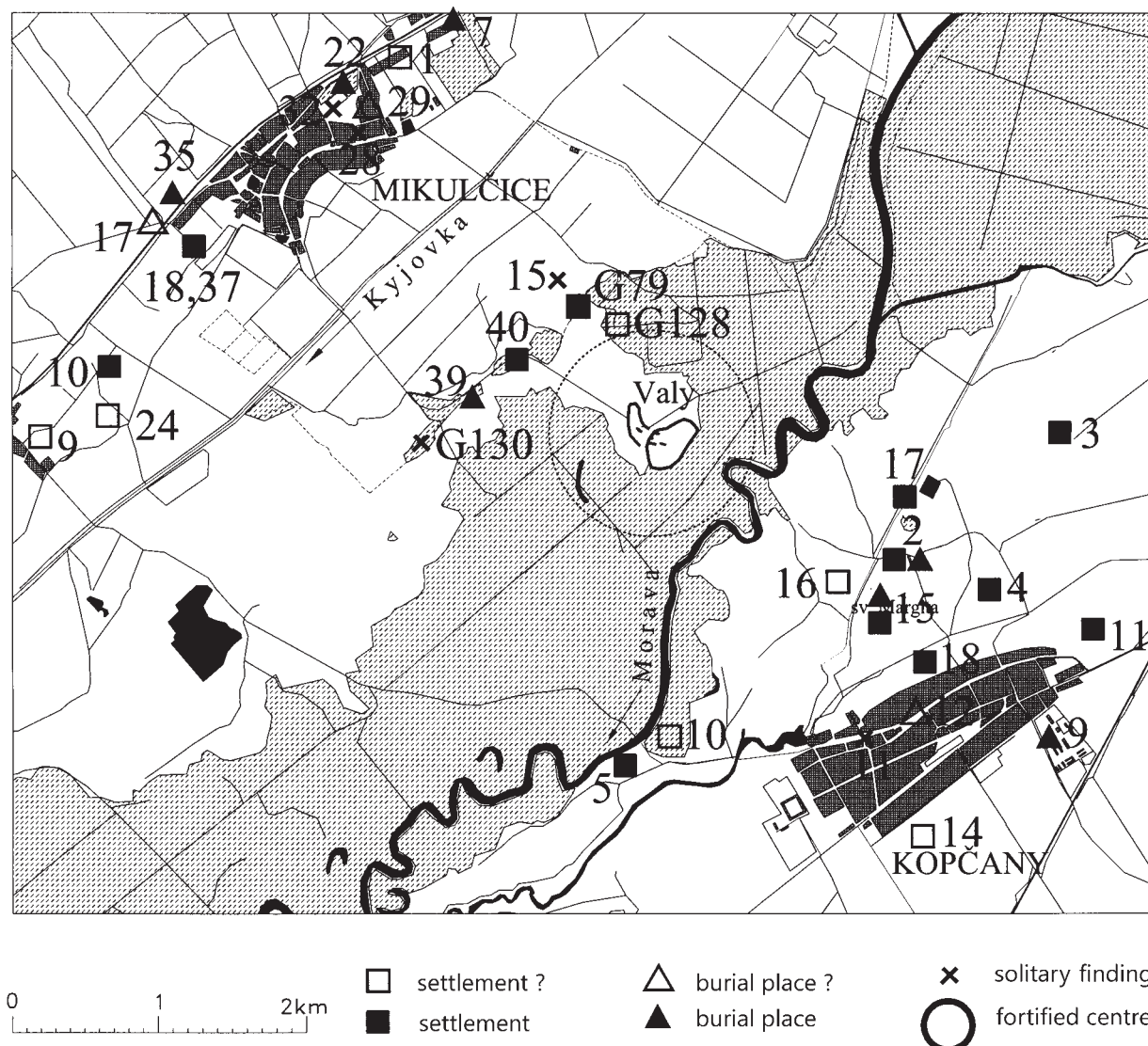


Fig. 17. Middle 'Hilfort' period („Great Moravian“) settlement of the closest hinterland of the stronghold. Denoted external border of the suburb (circle with a radius of 700 m). The first sector of hinterland settlement on the Czech side (from the left): G130, 39 – Mikulčice-„Virgásky“, 40 – Mikulčice-„Trapíkov“, 15 – Mikulčice-„Kúty“ („Kněží“?), G79 – Mikulčice-„Kněží“, G128 – Mikulčice-„Za Mysliveckou chatou“. The second sector of hinterland settlement on the Czech side (from the left): 9 – Moravská Nová Ves-football field, 10, 24 – Moravská Nová Ves-„Padělky od vody“, 17 – Mikulčice-„Padělky“ („Panské“?), 18, 37 – Mikulčice-„Podbřežníky“, 35 – Mikulčice-„Panské“, 28 – Mikulčice-house No. 166, 29 – Mikulčice-house No. 559, 1 – Mikulčice-house No. 11, 22 – Mikulčice-„V Břízkách“, 32 – Mikulčice-athletics field. The first sector of hinterland settlement on the Slovak side (from the left): 5 – Kopčany-„Mliečna“, 10 – Kopčany-„Seget“, 16 – Kopčany-„Za novou Struhou“, 15 – Kopčany-the chapel of St. Margita, 2 – Kopčany-„Pri Kačenárni“, 17 – Kopčany-„Za Rybníkom“, 3 – Holíč-„Hrúdy“. The first to second sector of settlement on the Slovak side: 4 – Kopčany-„Medzi Kanálmi“. The second sector of hinterland settlement on the Slovak side (from the left): 11 – Kopčany-old school, 14 – Kopčany-„Zadné pole“, 12 – Kopčany-Štefánik Square 594, 18 – Kopčany-„Za Záhradami“, 9 – Kopčany-farming cooperative, 11 – Holíč „Za Rúžičku“. The localities are numbered according to the individual cadastres; this corresponds to the archaeological topography in the hinterland of Mikulčice stronghold (ŠKOJEC 1997, 2005; BAXA et al. 2006) and the mapping of the settlement of the sand dunes in the flood plain of the Morava River (POLÁČEK/ŠKOJEC/HAVLÍČEK 2003).

development in the past years. The initial concept of Z. Klanica regarding the socially poorer closer sector of the hinterland and the “complete” social

structure of the hinterland farther out has been shown to be problematic (cf. KLANICA 1987a). New research at the site of the Mikulčice-“Panské”

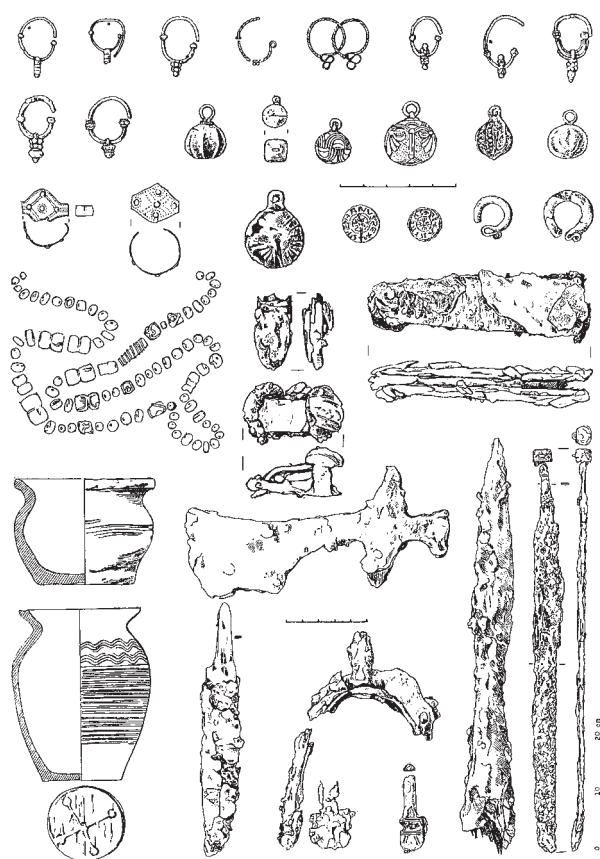


Fig. 18. Mikulčice-„Panské“, burial site from the 9th-11th century. Representative selection of grave findings. According to POLÁČEK 2008b.

burial site (Fig. 18) and in Kopčany near the chapel of St. Margita, i.e. within the “closer” hinterland, show the presence of relatively “rich” burial sites and graves comparable in their basic characteristics with e.g. the necropolis at Prušánky II (Fig. 19) in the more distant hinterland or with the power centre itself. A drawback of this new research is the incompleteness of the uncovered parts of the burial sites, which does not allow for any deeper conclusions (POLÁČEK 2008b).

So far, the nearest sector in the immediate vicinity of the suburb, the settlement in the “Trapíkov” position and the probably associated burial site at Mikulčice-“Virgásky” (originally also termed “Trapíkov”) appear to represent the “poorest” parts of the hinterland on the Czech side. On the Slovak side, the corresponding sector is that of the burial site and settlement at Kopčany-“Pri Kačenárni”. Yet even here, we may

have a case of distortion or misrepresentation due to the small extent of excavation and the fragmentation of sources. The possible interpretation of both aforementioned settlements as agricultural hamlets runs against a dearth of reliable sources. For example, there is no evidence of silo-pits, although this may be due to the unfavourable hydrological conditions or rather the proximity of underground water levels. Unfortunately, we lack findings of organic origin especially botanical macro-remains, pollens and animal bones that would enable us to study the economic conditions of these settlements. These categories of findings are usually badly preserved in view of the soil conditions on the low dunes. Similarly, the anthropological material from the burial sites on the drift-sands in the centre’s hinterland is characterised by a poor state of preservation, which significantly reduces its predicative properties (POLÁČEK 2008b).

Also, the main criterion used to distinguish the hinterland from the centre – the type of housing structures (earth-houses in the hinterland, surface constructions in the fortified centre and suburb) – may have limitations. Moreover, in the case of the Slovak Kopčany complications arise because of the immediate proximity of earth-houses (“Pri Kačenárni”) and the elite milieu (the chapel of St. Margita with the graves of the elite) (POLÁČEK 2001b, 2008b).

According to the results of the latest research, it seems that there is no fundamental difference between the sectors of the Mikulčice hinterland from the aspect of social structure. “Poorer” and “richer” necropolises co-existed, as apparently did similarly differentiated settlements. Naturally, this need not have involved only differences in proprietary conditions, but also e.g. manifestations of various origins and different occupations of the population. One cannot even rule out a reflection of the different age of the localities within the Middle ‘Hilfort’ period (POLÁČEK 2008b).

The presence of warrior graves in the “rural” burial grounds near the principal centres as well as in the more distant countryside represents a characteristic phenomenon of Old Moravian society

in the 9th century. The most probable explanation of this phenomenon is the deployment of the state army in the countryside. Comparison of the relative representation of warrior graves in the necropolises of Prušánky (II) and especially at Mikulčice-“Panské” demonstrates higher proportions than in the case of other Moravian localities (Table 1; see DRESLER/MACHÁČEK/PŘICHYSTALOVÁ 2008).

Many unanswered questions that should be the subject of further research remain. For example, an explanation of the incidence of pairs of burial sites that existed at none too great distances from each other, which at least partially temporally overlapped and which demonstrated significant differences in grave equipment. A typical example of this are two near completely explored burial sites at Prušánky (Fig. 26) that are analogical to those e.g. at Nechvalín in the Kyjov district or Rajhrad (Rajhradice) in the Brno district (KLANICA 2006; STAŇA 2006). It is also important to study in detail the relationship between the burial sites and the corresponding settlements. Unfortunately, this is strongly stigmatised by the unsatisfactory state of settlement research.

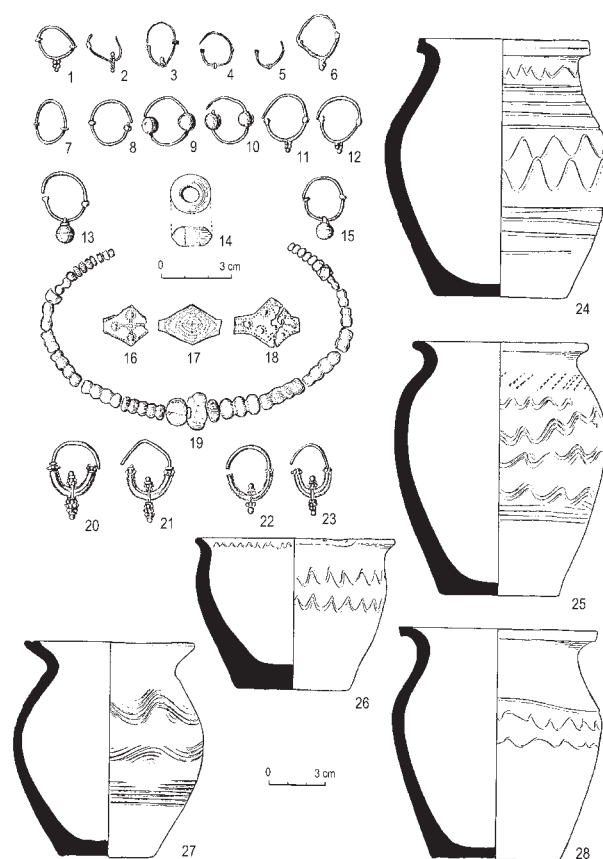


Fig. 19. Prušánky-„Podsedky“, burial sites I and II from the 9th-11th century. Representative selection of grave findings. According to ŠKOJEC 2000.

Tab. 1. Comparison of selected Middle ‘Hilfort’ period necropolises in southern and central Moravia on the basis of the number of so-called warrior graves. The numbers in parentheses after the marked site indicate: the total number of graves/the number of men/the number of graves with warrior equipment or riding tackle. According to DRESLER/MACHÁČEK/PŘICHYSTALOVÁ 2008; the lines in bold have been added (the data are only approximative and in some cases problematic from the aspect of statistical enumeration).

Site (number of graves/number of men/ number of warriors)	Number of graves/number of graves with warrior equipment or riding tackle (%)	Number of male graves/number of graves with warrior equipment (%)
Pohansko - south bailey (205/28/6)	2.9	21.4
Mikulčice-Klášteřisko (315/76/13)	4.1	17.1
Nechvalín 1 (89/?/7)	7.9	?
Nechvalín 2 (62/?/7)	11.3	?
Prušánky 1 (313/53/7)	2.2	13.2
Prušánky 2 (363/87/25)	6.9	28.7
Nemilany (53/15/10)	18.9	66.7
Velké Bílovice (73/24/10)	13.7	41.7
Rajhrad (564/110/10)	1.8	9.1
Rajhradice (239/44/20)	8.4	45.5
Dolní Věstonice (1296/?/47)	3.6	?
Mikulčice-Panské (113?/30?/15)	13.3	50.0
Josefov-Záhumenica (178/29/10)	5.6	34.5



Fig. 20. Josefov-"Záhumenica", burial site from the 9th-11th century. Representative selection of grave findings. According to ŠKOJEC 2000 (partly according to ŠRÁČKOVÁ 1958).

The differences in the demography and state of health of the population that buried its dead at Josefov (Fig. 20; HANÁKOVÁ/STLOUKAL 1966) compared to that of Mikulčice stronghold was previously associated with the distinct differences in the living conditions of both groups of inhabitants (POULÍK 1985). Current research, though, does not allow such an unequivocal interpretation, as this observation is not repeated at the other burial sites in such a distinctive way. This involved a relatively high percentage of non-adult individuals and a noticeably higher proportion of women among the adult and older individuals. These demographic indicators show that in the case of Josefov, this was not the case of a burial site of a "common" population group.

Closer understanding of the social structure of the hinterland mainly depends on the results of the current detailed archaeological and anthropological evaluation of all the burial sites and settlements cited above. Only then will it be possible to proceed with the overall analysis and summation of all new findings.

4. Burial on the territory of the power centre at Mikulčice and its hinterland

4.1 Moravian burial sites of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century

Burial sites from the Middle 'Hilfort' period largely represent flat or burial-mound skeleton graves. A special group of burial sites with flat graves is represented by church cemeteries. The change of the burial rites from cremation to burial of the body in Moravia dates to around the year 800. Attempts to associate this phenomenon with the expansion of Christianity are mostly rejected by archaeologists. The cause is sought in the whole complex of social changes. Birituality then occurs almost exclusively in the case of burial-mound necropolises. The horizon of the oldest skeletal graves in Moravia is dated, on the basis of comparisons with the Old Croatian grave findings from Biskupija-Crkvina, to the turn of the 8th and 9th century (KLANICA 1990; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2006; UNGERMAN 2006). The Great Moravian graves are organised within the burial sites in irregular groups; irregular rows appear in cemeteries near churches. The set-up of grave pits is diverse (common wooden, less stone tiling, steps, niches etc). A smaller group of burials of important individuals within the circle of power centres was laid in coffins fitted with wrought iron straps. A significant percentage of graves contain gifts and other tokens documenting the lingering influence of pagan traditions. Apart from "urban" burial sites within strongholds and in their vicinity with rich findings of jewellery (of a Byzantine-Oriental character), weapons and evidence of distinctive proprietary differentiation, we find "rural" burial

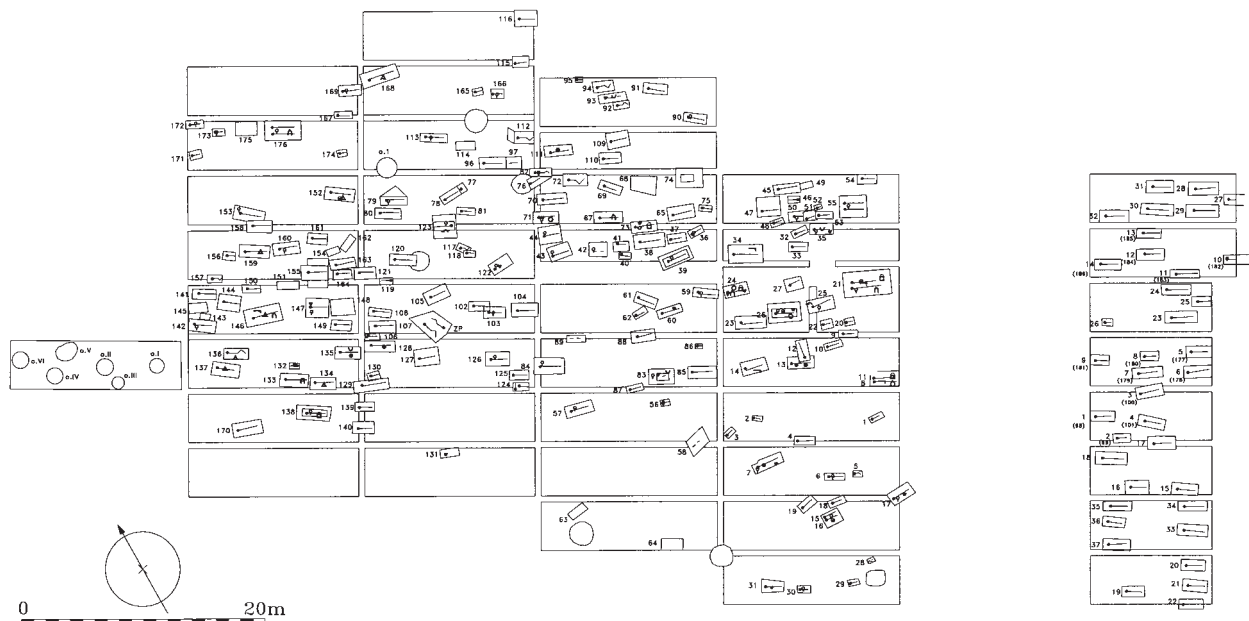


Fig. 22. Josefov-„Záhumenica“, burial site from the 9th-11th century. According to KLÍMA 2007.

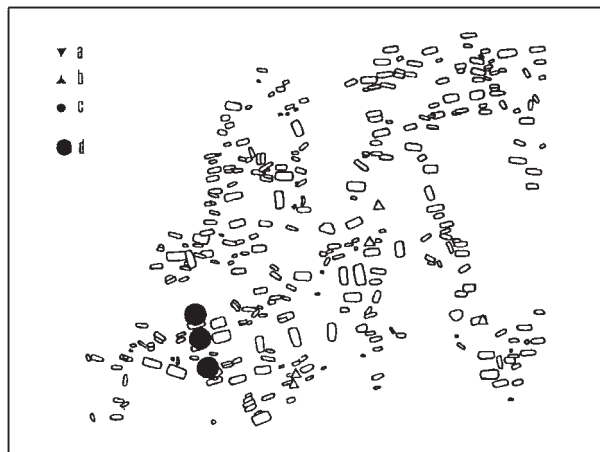


Fig. 23. Prušánky-„Podsedky“, burial site I (9th century). Caption: a – Přemyslid denars, b – Magyar denars, c – temporal rings, d – spurs from the 9th century. According to KLANICA 1997.

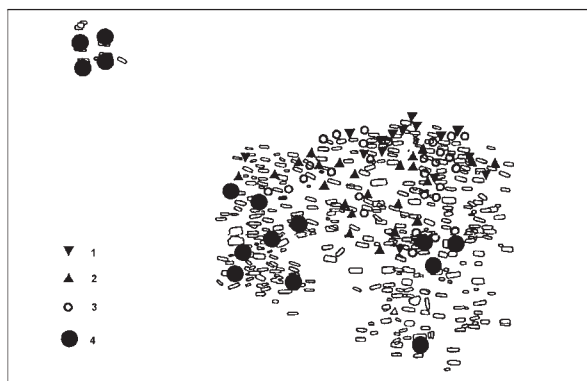


Fig. 24. Prušánky-„Podsedky“, burial site II (9th-11th century). Caption: a – Přemyslid denars, b – Magyar denars, c – temporal rings, d – spurs from the 9th century. According to KLANICA 1997.

graves or graves located on the fortifications. The largest and richest necropolises are located near the basilica in the *acropolis* and in the “Kostelisko” position of the suburb. Both burial sites are characterised by a high intensity of burials, which manifests as the deposition of graves in several layers above each other. Alternation of burial and settlement activities is typical for the areas on the sand dunes (“Těšický les”, “Kostelisko”, “Žabník”; HLADÍK/MAZUCH/POLÁČEK 2008).

Burial sites and graves represent a valuable source of material and information for the complex archaeological and historical understanding of the centre. They indicate the presence of habitation and represent an important stratigraphic element and a valuable chronological base. They attest to the cultural influences on material culture, inform about the social division of the population; they are a source of information regarding the clothing, accoutrements and equipment of the inhabitants of the agglomeration. They provide a unique anthropological material, including all significant historical information.

The wealth and evident attractiveness of grave findings and equipment, though, are in sharp contrast with their current limited testimony. The exploitation of over two and a half thousand graves uncovered thus far in Mikulčice mainly

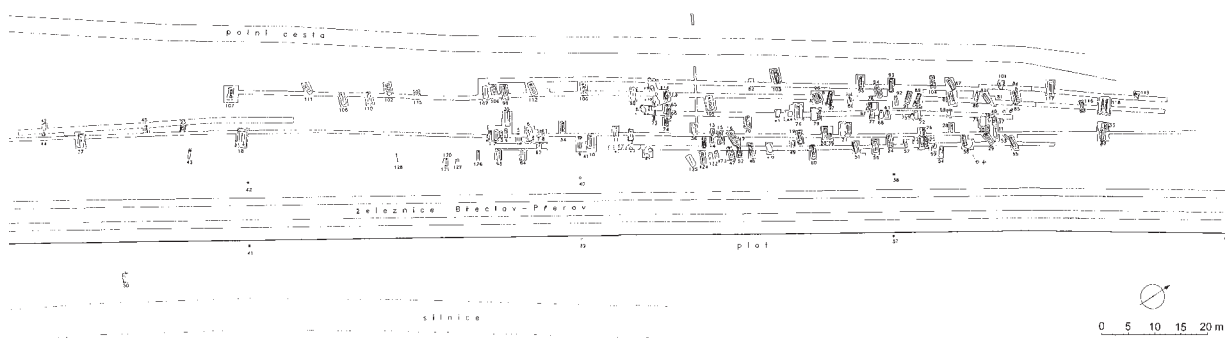


Fig. 25. Mikulčice-„Panské“, burial sites from the 9th-11th century. According to POLÁČEK 2006.

runs against the unsatisfactory state of their archaeological processing. So far, the burial sites at the IInd, VIth, VIIth, VIIIth church and XIIth church, as well as the burial site on the “Kostelec” position (“Klášteřiško”) have been published (see Table 2). Furthermore, certain groups of findings from individual graves or groups of graves have also been made public – e.g. those from the hypothetical XIth church, from the IIIrd church or from the “Žabník” position in the suburb as well as other important grave complexes, e.g. tomb XVI with grave 580 in the IIIrd church or grave 821 near the “XIth church”. Yet a larger part of the graves lacks critical source processing and publication so far.¹⁵

Compared to the state of archaeological evaluation, the anthropological processing of the burial sites today is quite further advanced: most of the main Mikulčice burial sites have already been subjected to basic anthropological analysis (see Table 2).

4.3 Burial in the hinterland

For greater clarity, we present a brief archaeological characterisation of the most important burial sites of the 9th-10th century in the economic hinterland of Mikulčice hilfort:

- Mikulčice-„Virgásky“ (originally “Trapíkov”). The Czech side of the agglomeration. Distance from the centre 1.3 km. Salvage research 1957-1958. 29 Great Moravian skeletal graves. Exploration of a closely unspecified section of

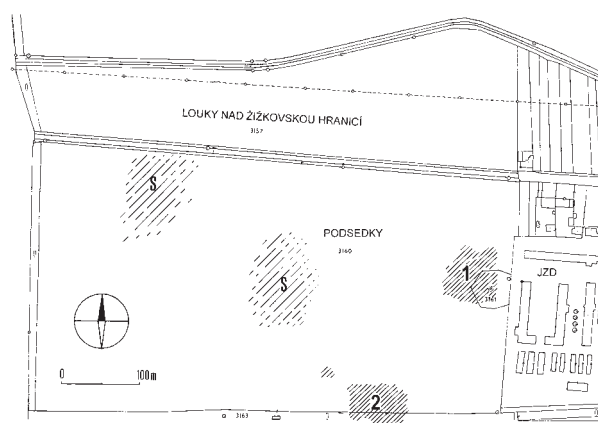


Fig. 26. Prušánky-„Podsedy“, burial site and settlement. Two almost completely explored burial sites (I, II) and two settlements uncovered by surface survey and partially explored archaeologically (S). According to ŠKOJEC 2000.

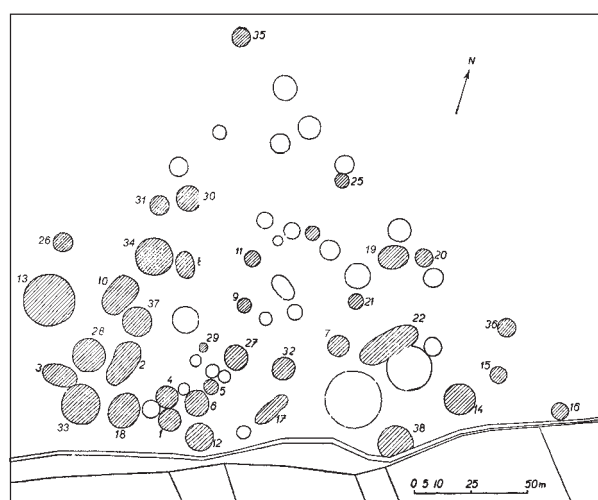


Fig. 27. Skalica-„Háj“ (Slovakia), burial-mound necropolis from the 9th century. According to BUDINSKÝ-KRIČKA 1959.

¹⁵ Summary of burial sites and graves at Mikulčice see POLÁČEK/MAREK 2005.

the burial site. Relatively low number of graves with findings and equipment (41%; may be affected by the character of the excavation); no weapons. "Poor" Great Moravian rural burial site. Corresponding settlement explored at a distance of 250-500 m on the "Trapíkov" position (earth-houses with stone oven in the corner) (KOSTELNÍKOVÁ 1958; POLÁČEK/RUTAR 2004).

- Mikulčice-"Panské" (Fig. 25). The Czech side of the agglomeration. Distance from the centre 3.5 km. Research 1999-2000. Of the 128 skeletal graves, a majority of Great Moravian origin, and approximately 13 of Late 'Hilfort' period origin (11th century). Exploration of a closely unspecified part of the burial site from the 9th-11th century. Majority of Great Moravian graves with findings and equipment (84%); significant representation of warrior graves with arms and spurs (13%; see Table 1); short sword - sax in grave No.103. "Richer" Great Moravian rural burial site with connections to Late 'Hilfort' period burial (on the southern and south-western side). Corresponding settlement known from new excavations of the "Podbřežníky" position, at a distance of approx. 300 m (POLÁČEK et al. 2000, 2001).
- Josefov-"Záhumenica" (Fig. 22). The Czech side of the agglomeration. Distance from the centre 7 km. Excavation 1957-1962. 171 Great Moravian skeletal graves (with the remains of 178 individuals) and 38 Late 'Hilfort' period graves. Exploration of practically the whole older section of the burial site from the 9th-10th century, while its Late 'Hilfort' period section from the 11th century represents only a smaller part. The greater majority of the graves contained findings and equipment (74%); graves with ceramic vessels are characteristic. On the other hand, a minority of warrior graves (with axes or spurs; 6%; see Table 1). "Poorer" rural Great Moravian burial site with connections to Late 'Hilfort' burial (on the south-eastern side). Another two settlements known from the surface survey, at a distance of

400 to 900 m (KLÍMA 2007 with lit.; ŠKOJEC 2000, 2005).

- Prušánky-"Podsedy", burial site I at a distance of 150 m from the Prušánky II burial site (Fig. 23, 26). The Czech side of the agglomeration. Distance from the centre 9.5 km. Excavation 1975, 1978-1980, 1983. 313 Great Moravian, predominantly skeletal graves (traces of cremation pit graves in the southern section of the burial site). Most of the necropolis has been explored. Approximately 70% of the graves have findings and equipment with a high proportion of ceramic vessels; in contrast, spurs and arms found only in 7 graves (2.2%). "Poorer" rural Great Moravian burial site. Two Great Moravian settlements with earth-houses at a distance of 200 and 400 m (KLANICA 2006).
- Prušánky-"Podsedy", burial site II at a distance of 150 m from the Prušánky I burial site (Fig. 24, 26). The Czech side of the agglomeration. Excavation 1979-1983, 1985, 1988. Approx. 363 Great Moravian and Late 'Hilfort' period skeletal graves (minimal number of Late 'Hilfort' period graves 70); one cremation grave mentioned. Exploration of practically the whole burial site from the 9th-11th century with an isolated group of 12 "rich" Great Moravian graves. Proportion of graves with findings and equipment smaller in comparison with the first Prušánky burial site (50% on estimate); representation of graves with spurs and arms higher on the other hand (at least 11%); a sword in grave 229. "Richer" rural Great Moravian with connections to the Late 'Hilfort' period burial (on the northern side). Known and partially explored two Great Moravian settlements with earth-houses and other objects in the vicinity of the burial site (100-350 m) (KLANICA 2006).
- Kopčany-"Pri Kačenárni". The Slovak side of the agglomeration. Distance from the centre 1.9 km, distance from the chapel of St. Margita 300 m. Excavation 1960-1964. 61 Great Moravian skeletal graves. Exploration of the more closely undefined section of the burial site. Remarkable low proportion of graves

Table 2. Overview of the main burial sites and larger groups of graves in the Mikulčice stronghold with reference to their archaeological and anthropological processing.

Burial site	No. of graves	Position	Archaeology	Anthropology
II nd church	236	acropolis	Poulík 1957	Stloukal 1963
III rd church	564	acropolis		Stloukal 1967
IV th church	106	acropolis		Stloukal 1969
VI th church	205	acropolis	Poulík 1963, Profantová 2003	Stloukal 1964
VII th church	16	suburb		
VIII th church	26	suburb	Kouřil 2008	Velemínský/Brůžek 2008 (preliminarily)
IX th church	150	suburb	Měřínský 2005 (preliminarily)	
X th church	11	suburb		
hypothetical XI th church	81	acropolis		Stloukal 1981
hypothetical XII th church	85	acropolis	Kavánová 2003	Stloukal/Vyhnánek 1998
Group NW from the palace	17	acropolis		
Group E of the palace	25	acropolis		
Kostelisko	415	suburb		Velemínský et al. 2005
Žabník	85	suburb	Bartošková in print	Bartošková/Stloukal 1985
Kostelec (Klášteřísko)	317	suburb	Klanica 1985b	Stloukal/Hanáková 1985
Total	2339			

with findings and equipment (26% – may be affected by the character of the research); relatively high proportion of warrior graves with arms and spurs (6.6%). “Poorer“ Great Moravian burial site, apparently affected by the proximity of the centre of power. Corresponding settlement with earth-houses and other objects in the immediate vicinity; here, other “settlement“ graves (KRASKOVSKÁ 1965, 1969).

- Skalica-“Háj“ (Fig. 27). The Slovak side of the agglomeration. Distance from the centre 12 km. Excavation 1922-1923 and 1943-1944. Seventy-three Great Moravian graves in 38 burial-mounds, predominantly of the skeletal type and only some of the cremation type, discovered during the second phase of research. Exploration of nearly one half of the burial site. A great proportion of graves with findings and equipment (approx. 80%); the addition of vessels into the graves, a great proportion of warrior graves with arms and spurs (18%; 1 grave with sword) is characteristic. “Richer“ rural burial-mound biritual burial site from the Great Moravian period (BUDINSKÝ-KRIČKA 1959).

The aforementioned burial sites represent an important source of material for understanding the social structure of the settlement of the Mikulčice centre hinterland. Of course, the state of basic source processing, analysis and publication of this material remains highly disproportionate. The burial complexes at Josefov, Mikulčice-“Panské“, Mikulčice-“Virgásky“ and Kopčany are currently well processed and analysed. The new publication regarding the burial sites at Prušánky from Z. KLANICA (2006) lacks both an analysis and a comparison of both necropolises from the aspect of the social structure. The basic precondition for further understanding is the critical study of source material from all the necropolises, its complex archaeological and anthropological analysis and a mutual comparison of these within the study of the settlement structure and settlement development of Mikulčice centre and its hinterland (POLÁČEK 2008b).

The common characteristic of the aforementioned “rural“ burial sites is the high proportion of graves with findings and equipment (often as much as 70-80%), with lower figures demonstrated in the burial sites near the stronghold,

probably due to the influence of the church institutions from the centre. A significant part of these findings consist of gifts, as a remnant of pre-Christian cult practices (MĚŘÍNSKÝ 1985).

Another characteristic phenomenon is the relatively frequent incidence of warrior graves equipped with axes (less frequently with spears or arrow tips), and sporadically swords (Table 1). Swords are thus far represented only in the “richest” rural necropolises, and always in only a single grave (Prušanky II, Mikulčice-“Panské“, Skalice-“Háj“). These warriors apparently represented part of the permanent military reserves, which were recruited from the free inhabitants of the village commons (see DRESLER/MACHÁČEK/PŘICHYSTALOVÁ 2008). The only burial site, where arms have as not yet been discovered, is that of Mikulčice-“Virgásky“, the burial site closest to the centre. This locality may be considered to be the “poorest” burial site in the centre’s hinterland, although this may only be the case of a phenomenon influenced by the small number of explored graves.

5. Conclusion and prospects

Understanding of the structures of the Old Moravian society is limited by the character of the archaeological sources themselves, the state of processing and analysis of old excavations from the second half of the 20th century, as well as the state of theoretical research. This relates to both burial sites and settlements. Both groups of sources reflect the social structure in different and specific ways. In this sense, cases where for the given uncovered burial site we have at our disposal the corresponding explored settlement are optimal for our work. This especially applies to rural settlements, where both components can be more easily and unequivocally demarcated in space. The situation in the case of settlement agglomerations, such as Mikulčice stronghold, that consist of mutually inter-mingled settlement and burial site complexes is significantly more complicated. Here, appreciation of the link between the population group inhabiting a certain settlement and its burial site is difficult.

A straight-forward interpretation, e.g. that the burial site in the *acropolis* served the inhabitants of the *acropolis* or that the burial site in the suburb served the inhabitants of the suburb, is hardly possible. Yet, this complicated temporal-spatial relationship conceals an important information potential and a source of deeper understanding. Application of this source is a question for the future, as this is subject to the archaeological and anthropological processing of all burial sites of the settlement complex, and their comparison and setting within the general settlement development of the given locality.

An important component of today’s socially-oriented archaeological study of the Moravian society in the 9th century is the search for and verification of criteria for the identification of individual social classes and groups. Graves and burial sites represent an important archaeological source for the understanding and identification of the social structure of the society. Their evidence, though, is not simple or unequivocal, as apart from the social structures themselves, they reflect a number of other influences – religious, cultural, customary, chronological etc.

In the case of Mikulčice, it is clear that among the 2500 graves explored thus far, graves belonging to the highest social elites of that time are also present. Their presence is already given by the mere existence of a power centre of paramount importance. Strong fortifications, the palatial construction, numerous churches and other walled structures, rich graves with findings of arms and luxurious objects – all this is a manifestation of a significant concentration of political power. It is probable that the graves within the churches or on the main church premises belonged to members of the ruling Mojmir dynasty.

The social interpretation of burial sites in the hinterland of the centre is easier due to the unequivocal spatial demarcation of the burial site complexes. The problem again is the general processing and analysis of the burial sites. Although several necropolises are currently processed or prepared for publication, comprehensive source materials are available for only three complexes

– two flat burial sites at Prušánky and the burial-mound site at Skalica (KLANICA 2006; BUDINSKÝ-KRIČKA 1959). Though the link between the burial site and the corresponding settlement is known or surmised in a number of cases, the state of research of the settlements is generally insufficient. Thus far, we have at our disposal only the non-processed and analysed uncovered smaller sections of two settlements at Prušánky-”Podsedky“ (corresponding to two burial sites on the position of the same name), and the results of new exploration of the settlement at Mikulčice-”Podbřežníky“ (corresponds most probably to the burial site on the “Panské” position). In such a situation, any conclusions regarding the social structure of the Mikulčice hinterland may only be working hypotheses.

Earlier evaluation of the social structure of the Mikulčice centre hinterland was based on the comparison of the “internal” and “external” sectors of the hinterland settlement. The internal sector was characterised as socially relatively poor. It was represented on the one hand by localities at the edge of the flood plain on the Czech side of the Morava River, and on the other by the settlement and burial site of “Při Kačenárni” in Kopčany on the Slovak side. In contrast, the external sector was designated as being richer, demonstrating a “complete social structure” (Prušánky II, Skalica). In contrast to the necropolises in the immediate vicinity of the centre, where burial ends coincidentally with the downfall of the power centre during the first half of the 10th century, some of the burial sites of the hinterland existed further into the 11th-12th century (see KLANICA 1987a).

Today, following the acquisition of new material from other settlements and burial sites, the situation outlined above changes: it is clear that in

all the sectors studied, approximately at a distance of 10 km from the centre, both “rich” and “poor” burial sites occur side by side. The original “internal” sector on the western edge of the flood plain is represented by the newly explored burial site at Mikulčice-”Panské”, with a significant proportion of graves with arms, the discovery of a sax, as well as of silver and gold-plated buttons with moulded decorations, all typical of the centre itself.

If one may still speak of a “poor” sector of the settlement, then this may today apply only to the nearest surroundings of the suburb, i.e. the settlements on the sand dunes in the flood plain of the Morava River. This would be supported by the very frugal equipment of the graves in the Mikulčice -”Virgásky” (“Trapíkov”) position or the burial site on the “Při Kačenárni” position near Kopčany. The discovery of earth-houses in both these positions would appear to support the thesis regarding the agricultural settlements situated in the closest sector, directly contingent with the suburb. Naturally, even this image is “complicated” by new facts. A Great Moravian church with burials that contain typical veligradian jewellery and even one simple gold earring has been identified in the immediate vicinity of the settlement with earth-houses at Kopčany. This is evidently a noble milieu similar to the “Valy” stronghold near Mikulčice itself. All this thus suggests that all the sectors of the hinterland had their own, relatively varied social structure. Moreover, its interpretation is complicated by the specific predicative properties of archaeological sources (POLÁČEK 2008b).

This research was supported by the projects GAČR 206/03/0725, GAČR 404/04/0013 and the research plan AV ČR AV0Z80020508.

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