

Macháček, Jiří; Balcárková, Adéla; Dresler, Petr; Přichystalová, Renáta; Přišťáková, Michaela

**Břeclav – Pohansko X. Settlement area in the North-East Suburb : archaeological excavations between 2008 and 2016 : summary**

In: Macháček, Jiří; Balcárková, Adéla; Dresler, Petr; Přichystalová, Renáta; Přišťáková, Michaela. *Břeclav - Pohansko. X., Sídlní areál na Severovýchodním předhradí : archeologické výzkumy v letech 2008-2016*. Vydání první Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2021, pp. 809-817

ISBN 978-80-210-9892-3; ISBN 978-80-210-9893-0 (online ; pdf)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/144152>

Access Date: 17. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

### **Břeclav – Pohansko X. Settlement Area in the North-East Suburb Archaeological excavations between 2008 and 2016**

The principal aim of this book is to publish the archaeological records acquired by excavations of the North-East Suburb at Great Moravian (9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century AD) central place in Pohansko near Břeclav between 2008 and 2016. As information on graves from the Early Mediaeval church cemetery and remains of the rotunda discovered at the North-East Suburb in 2006 have been published earlier (*Macháček – Čáp – Balcárková et al. 2014; Macháček – Dresler – Přichystalová et al. 2016*), in this work we have concentrated on the remaining components – in particular the dwelling and production component – which started to be intensively investigated after 2012. The archaeological records are published in full in the second, catalogue section of the book. The initial chapters are dedicated to their partial evaluation. The results summarised in the conclusion are not the final evaluation of all discoveries recently made in the North-East Suburb, as the latest campaigns (2018–2020) could not have been fully incorporated in our assessment for capacity reasons and lack of time. However, we consider the existing conclusions to be highly relevant and worthy of publication, as they essentially extend our knowledge of the processes forming the social structures of the Early Middle Ages in East Central Europe.

The North-East Suburb with an overall area of c. 2.7 ha is situated on a gentle, oval elevation surrounded by filled channels of the Dyje and its floodplain. It is the northern tip of a sandy gravelly elevated area strongly impacted by the erosive action of the Dyje, the branches of which passed through nearly the whole of Pohansko from the south to the north. The suburb is separated from the central part by the remains of de-

stroyed ramparts. The space of the North-East Suburb has never been cultivated as arable land. As a result, the top layers are in a very good condition and contain a significant number of archaeological finds that have remained more or less *in situ*. A tarmac road running along the western edge of the North-East Suburb leads to the Liechtenstein chateau.

The scientific-research base of Masaryk University situated in the middle of the suburb has been investigating Pohansko without interruption since 1958, which is quite exceptional both within the Czech Republic and the whole of Europe. However, until recently the precinct of the so-called North-East Suburb tended to be rather neglected within the systematic investigation of Pohansko, although field research on a larger scale was carried out there as early as in the 1960s and 70s. But it was not until the most recent excavations that the crucial significance of this location in solving important issues related to the evolution of Central European society of the Early Middle Ages was confirmed (*Macháček – Wihoda 2019*). The North-East Suburb received well-deserved attention mainly after 2006, when a laboratory assistant and field technician of the Institute of Archaeology and Museology of Masaryk University, Pavel Čáp, pointed out for the first time an inconspicuous elevation within the area of the North-East Suburb. It was later shown to be a relic of the destroyed structure of an, as yet, unknown Great Moravian rotunda (*Macháček – Balcárková – Čáp et al. 2014*), surrounded by a vast, almost completely excavated cemetery with 154 registered individuals. The most important discovery was made in the interior of the rotunda where five graves were found. The two men and three children aged from 18 months to 12 ears were interred under the floor of the existing building (*Macháček – Balcárková – Čáp et al. 2014; Macháček – Wihoda 2019, 1–38*). The arrangement of the graves was determined by the longitudinal axis of the church

passing through the apse and the centre of the nave. The graves were situated either directly on the longitudinal axis (H153) or in parallel alongside it. The presence of graves in the church's interior is a phenomenon of great significance. In the environment of Great Moravia, it indicates either that the deceased belonged to the elite of the land, or a gradual change of the social structure of the local society.

Based on these discoveries we formulated a hypothesis on the social structure of the community buried there and the social status of those people. The most important burial from the whole group was apparently the remains of an older man from grave No. 153, which was found in a prestigious position on the main axis of the church (Macháček 2016). With inevitable uncertainty we identify him as the founder or owner of the church. This is suggested mainly by the position of the grave on the central axis of the building. In an early medieval environment this was considered to be highly prestigious. However, the position of church founders within Great Moravian society remains to be clarified. Setting aside the ruler, in early medieval Bavaria church builders were recruited both from free and hereditary owners of allodial land and important beneficiaries – officials, members of entourage and other highly positioned persons who held various offices or *beneficia* in service to princes or kings. Both alternatives could be theoretically taken into consideration in our case as well. If the man from grave No. 153 was a beneficiary of the Great Moravian duke, then in the context of Pohansko he would have most likely held the office of castle governor or *castellanus* as was the name adopted for it in 12<sup>th</sup> century Central Europe. We are working with the hypothesis that the man buried in the proprietary church in the North-East Suburb was its founder, probably the castle governor, and the graves in the surrounding cemetery were those of his *familia*, which we take to be a household at the centre of which was the head of the family (“*pater familias*”) and his closest family relatives, but apart from these the *familia* was made up of servants, domestics and other dependent people, such as more distant relatives.

The next step in investigating the North-East Suburb at Pohansko was research carried out outside the cemetery with the aim of testing the hypothesis proposed above. During testing we formulated a prognosis derived from our hypothesis that if the man buried in a place of honour inside the church was indeed its founder and owner, he must have had sufficient assets available to ensure the operation of the church. At the same time, he would have owned a splendid residence – *curtis* – matching his social position. A place similar to that mentioned by Kosmas of Prague (+ 1125) in The Chronicle of the Czechs (*Chronica Boemorum*) when he was describing how the castle governor Mstíš of Břilina feasted with the bishop “in his court in front of the castle” (Macháček – Wihoda 2019, 188–189). Such

a residence should 1) be located near a church, 2) be enclosed, 3) contain remains of material culture connected with a higher social stratum, 4) be made up of a specific type of building different from standard village structures (above-ground or stone and mortar buildings, artisan workshops, etc.). The prognosis and ensuing results are subsequently compared against our empirical data and if they agree we deem the hypothesis corroborate, while if not it is false.

In testing the initial hypothesis, we concentrated on the dwelling and production component of the settlement area at Pohansko. As we discovered earlier, some settlement activities may have preceded the origin of the church cemetery and settlement features were found even underneath the church cemetery or in its immediacy, but the main bulk of settlement relics lay outside the cemetery area and were more or less contemporary with the church. Intensive research in this precinct did not begin until 2013. The excavation in the North-East Suburb at Pohansko between 2008 and 2020 yielded 203 settlement features of various categories, including the rotunda, and 175 burials (including those in settlement features and additive burials in a single grave pit), of which 154 belong to the previously published church cemetery and 21 are dispersed throughout the settlement in the form of isolated graves or in small groups. In addition, we examined 65 post or column holes and various trenches. Remains from the Early Middle Ages were accompanied by infrequent finds from prehistory and recent structures mainly from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In every campaign the excavation area was repeatedly divided up into a regular grid oriented in the N–S direction and made of squares with sides of 5 × 5 m. All of the captured archaeological features were located within this basic grid. The square grid is the basis for a detailed metre grid which serves as the guiding lattice during the following removal of the top layer. This was done manually, in artificial layers and in the metre grid system. The topsoil layer was removed gradually and from a greater part sifted using mechanical motor sieves procured for the purposes of research. This method enabled us to capture a great number of well localized finds immediately in the topsoil layer, which proved helpful later in assessing their spatial distribution. After removal of the topsoil layer the surface of the subsoil layer in which the half-sunken features were identified was cleaned. Depending on their size, settlement features were divided into a half or a quarter and then exploited. The sediment they contained was also completely sieved. The field contexts were documented in the standard way, photographically and geodetically, with maximum application of up-to-date technology and digitising.

In the North-East Suburb excavations from the years 2008–2016 captured all types of settlement feature

that had been identified at Pohansko in the past and in addition some as yet unknown.

We examined six sunken-floored dwellings (Grubenhaus) in total. They were square-shaped structures sunk at different depths into the bottom layer with a stone oven or remains thereof generally situated in the corner on the floor. Five sunken-featured dwellings were dated based on ceramic inventory and the radiocarbon method to the Great Moravian period, one (O186) was classified as being from the Early Hillfort Period. The Great Moravian sunken featured dwelling – feature O194 – containing a deposit of iron objects is by far the most interesting. A total of 95 artefacts – including handle mounts, handles and hoops from three buckets, two axe-shaped bars, a key, various metal fittings, four belt-ends, three shackles and two buckles, two spurs, and coulters, two ploughshares, sockets from a scythe, three sickles, scissors, a saw, a cutter, an axe of unusual shape, a drill, a hammer and a unique drawplate for the production of wire were arranged on the floor or at the wall. A similar spectrum of finds and their quantitative representation is mentioned in the *Brevium Exempla* as tools/utensils (*utensilia*) from royal and bishopric estates in the Frankish Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The enumeration includes various types of axes, drills, different carving tools (*scrotisan*, *bursa*), a small and a large plane (*noil* and *scabo*), scythes, sickles, shovels and various wooden *utensilia*. Apart from the above, it also cites *ferramenta*, or military equipment, where we could certainly include spurs. In addition, the deposit of iron objects contained parts of belt fittings, which belonged to the garments of individuals with an expected higher social status, among whom we may incorporate horsemen and warriors in general.

Large sunken-floored features (O207 and O255), which B. Dostál earlier defined as pits 6–15 m long, 2–3 m wide, sometimes rather shallow (0.5–0.6 m), at other times quite deep (1–1.6 m), are classified as having special functions. Most likely, their function in living culture was connected with production, but its nature continues to be the subject of discussion. Some researchers see them as related to cloth making, others write in more general terms about artisan workshops.

During the campaign in 2018 in the North-East Suburb we investigated feature O226, interpreted as a well. We documented and lifted up wooden structural elements from its bottom. They were subsequently subjected to dendrochronological analysis which provided key data for the settlement dating.

During excavation we examined a number of heating devices and fireplaces. They are classified in four groups: 1) heating devices in sunken featured dwellings, 2) heating devices in above-ground houses, 3) pyrotechnological devices for metal working, 4) bread ovens / bakeries. Special attention was paid mainly to the pyrotechnological devices concentrated on the

edge of the settlement area beyond the tarmac road, although some of them may belong to the Early Slav or Early Hillfort period (6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century AD). The large-capacity bread oven (O203), which is exceptional in the Pohansko context, had been rebuilt several times. In the early phase of the oven's existence its heated copula, which was 1.1 m in diameter, was dug out into the wall of the sunken feature.

A set of two features (O178 and O328), which form a large irregular complex sized 7.7 × 5 m (27.85 m<sup>2</sup>), is also remarkable. The function of pit O178 is probably identical with that of extensive feature 6 from Forest Nursery site in Pohansko (sized 15 × 10 m), which according to B. Dostál was a clay pit for exploiting clay for the production of ceramics, daubing of house walls, etc. Feature O328 was interpreted as the remains of a stratigraphically earlier oven.

A new and so far, unknown type of feature at Pohansko is a deposit of stones and quernstones (O164). It is a pit with an oval plan (2.3 × 1.5 m and 1.06 m deep) filled with a layer of densely dumped stones, quernstones and fragments of other artefacts. In terms of interpretation feature O164 is considered a warehouse of stone material. However, we cannot rule out another, perhaps symbolic, meaning of this extreme deposit.

The majority of examined features in the North-East Suburb were pits of various nature and probably different function. By their size and shape we classified them as rectangular, circular, oval, tub-shaped and trough-shaped. The trough-shaped features are the most interesting. They are often found in close proximity to surface heating devices, and hence reconstructed above-ground houses. It can be expected that the trough-shaped pits were dug out during the construction of above-ground houses to obtain building material, or alternatively as part of their structure (drainage, etc.).

In a few cases we managed to identify the remains of above-ground houses (ND). The safest indicator of the presence of an above-ground building is a heating device or its remains. It can be an oven, hearth, furnace or an accumulation of stones and daub, captured by excavation at the level of the original Great-Moravian surface. There are eight buildings of this type, but we cannot rule out there being more in the settlement, as is suggested by post-excitation evaluation of the dispersion of finds in the topsoil layer. Some less conspicuous remains of above-ground houses could have escaped attention during excavation. Our assumptions concerning the building construction of above-ground houses are purely hypothetical, nevertheless we expect they were log houses as indicated by finds of daub with a triangular cross-section, which are known from other locations at Pohansko. They will likely not differ too much from buildings in other Great Moravian centres. However, so far, we have not captured with certainty

special treatment of floors in the form of sand or clay fills as known, for example, from nearby Valy near Mikulčice.

Clearly the most interesting among the above-ground houses (ND 224) was investigated in 2015 on the south-eastern edge of the excavated area. It is an above-ground house with a stone and mortar underpinning. After turf removal and subsequent lowering of the topsoil layer on the location we managed to first extract a spatially delimited debris of stones and mortar sized  $7.2 \times 4.5$  m oriented with its longer axis in the NW–SE direction. On the north-eastern edge of the debris, after removal and extraction of the first top layer, we identified a rectangular corner from stones joined by mortar with maximum dimensions of  $1.93 \times 1.93$  m and wall thickness of 0.6 m. The reconstruction of above-ground house ND224, the inseparable part of which is stone corner O224, is based on the observation of the stone and mortar debris, studying the spatial relationships between the house debris and the surrounding sunken-featured buildings and from analogies in the Magnate Court at Pohansko. Judging from the above-mentioned analogies and our field observations we assume that the stone structure delimited the edge of a house, the inner space of which extended towards the north-east (house width) and south-east (house length) from the corner. Its width is estimated at 4.7 m and length at 6–8 m. It was a residential house with a log construction, in which the stone corner could have fulfilled the function of a heat accumulator, or it protected the wooden walls from catching fire in the case the broken-up daub block in the corner is the remains of a hearth. A similar architectural solution can be found, for example, in the royal pfalz in Paderborn or in the bailey of the pfalz in Tilleda.

Within the excavated area of the settlement, we identified a system of shallow palisade trenches oriented in various directions. They are 0.3 to 0.5 m wide trenches, the depth of which varies from 0.1 to 0.3 m from the level of the cleaned-up subbase. The most conspicuous assemblage of trenches consists of six linear structures denominated Z04 to Z09, which delimited several adjoining rectangular surfaces. In case of palisade trenches Z04, Z05 and Z06 we managed to capture one, specifically the northern corner of the delimited area, while in trench Z06 we are aware of both the northern and a second – western – corner. The remaining corners are situated either outside the excavated area or could not be identified. The three particular palisade trenches (Z04, Z05 and Z06) formed a multiple corner and with their longer sides ran in parallel from the southwest to the northeast at a distance of 6 to 8 m. The greatest length of an enclosed area's side clearly confirmed by excavation must have exceeded 35 m (Z05). The shortest proven length is defined by the distance between two corner trenches Z06, being 33 m.

If all of the above-mentioned trenches belonged to the same complex, which is expected as they are parallel, or perpendicular, then the width of the enclosed area varied between 19 and 44 m. From a stratigraphic perspective we notice that the palisade trenches disturb earlier features dating from the Early Slav or Early Hillfort periods (6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century AD). Regarding the relationship between the palisade trenches and Great Moravian features it can be stated that in the excavated area we did not register any occasion when the trenches interfered with features which belong to this period based on ceramic inventory or radiocarbon dating. On the contrary, in all the other detected superpositions the trench was always interrupted by digging a later sunken feature or was not interrupted at all, as in the case of an outer trench with corner Z04, which can (but need not) be the latest. Early medieval palisade trenches excavated in the 2008–2019 period do not differ by their depth and width from those that we know from Pohansko excavations in the North-East Suburb, the so-called Forest Nursery area or the Cremation Cemetery. However, they are different from the trenches of the massive palisade fortification in the location of the Magnate Court with completely dissimilar parameters. In the context of Pohansko, the narrow and shallow trenches in the North-East Suburb are related to the fencing of plots identified with the aid of a combination of archaeological and geophysical research. The average size of these square or rectangular plots was around 1400 m<sup>2</sup>, which generally corresponds to the estimated area of the newly excavated enclosure in the North-East Suburb. What distinguishes the previously known enclosures of farmsteads in Pohansko from the situation in the North-East Suburb, is the ground plan with several parallel corners, which are suggestive of either a more complicated inner structure of the newly exposed complex, or its gradual rebuilding, and/or enlargement. Some features, such as sunken-featured building O194 with a hoard of iron objects situated in the corner of central trench (Z05), respected the enclosure, while others, probably later, such as above-ground house ND168, probably overlaid some trenches.

During the 2013–2016 campaigns in the North-East Suburb of Pohansko we investigated 14 graves (H203 – H216), classified in the category of the so-called dispersed settlement cemeteries. Within the settlement structure they form small-sized funerary precincts, clusters of graves or are found as solitary graves. They have untypical demographic composition with complete absence of older children in the age of Infants II–III and juvenile individuals. The graves contained 10 adult individuals, four very small children in the age category of Infants I (bones from two individuals were distinguished in grave H204). In grave H216,

identified in the profile of a test dig, it is impossible to determine the age or sex of the deceased. Four female and six male skeletons were distinguished among the adult individuals. All the adults were over 30 years of age. Grave goods were found only in older woman's grave H208. The corpse was decorated with a necklace, of which two glass beads survived (one in small fragments only) and a pendant in the form of a drilled fossil shell. A small iron knife was placed under the right shoulder blade and the upper part of the humerus. Of the 14 graves under observation, 10 were in a relationship with another archaeological features. The most frequently occurring situation was when the grave clearly interfered with the settlement feature, which was seven times in total. The stratigraphic condition when a grave was disturbed by a later settlement pit was recorded in only one case. The last, but very important example of a superposition of archaeological units, was the stratigraphic relationship between the grave of a man with flexed limbs H 206, and the corner of palisade trench Z04, where the grave was situated. Corner Z04 cut through the grave in the location of the legs. The stratigraphic relationship between the grave and the palisade is not clear. The fills in both contexts could not be distinguished. There are three possible alternatives in play: earlier grave, later enclosure; both contexts were contemporary; earlier enclosure and later grave. All of the alternatives are under further examination. The buried individual was interred in a position on the left side with tightly flexed limbs. If the extremely flexed position of the body is taken as proof of special treatment and the grave is contemporary with the corner of the enclosure, we can think in this case of a foundation sacrifice which was to have ensured the safety and robustness of the enclosure, thus protecting what was inside. Naturally, if grave H206 is earlier or later than trench Z04, the find context is the work of chance and interpretation of the context will take a different direction. In the Early Middle Ages, the standard position of the body in a grave was being laid on the back with the upper limbs alongside the body or bent to varying degrees either at an obtuse angle towards the abdominal area or at a sharp angle to the thorax. This regular position was found in the majority of the examined graves, nine individuals in total. The dispersed settlement graves in the North-East Suburb can be classified as belonging to the high to late phase of Great Moravian or even post-Great Moravian development.

Regarding movable archaeological finds, the most frequent ones are settlement ceramics and animal bones. In the campaigns from 2008 to 2016 the 154 settlement features and other stratigraphic units yielded 25,804 ceramic fragments with a total weight of 324,701 g. Even more finds originated from the topsoil cultural

layer. Between 2008 and 2016 it was 89,089 fragments with a total weight of 801,461 g. The evaluation of the sets of finds serves mainly for the dating of the settlement in the North-East Suburb and research into the spatial distribution of archaeological finds.

Up to the present day remains of animals (excluding fish) from 173 features totalling 8,900 finds with determined species weighing 196 kg have been processed within new research in the North-East Suburb. The spectrum of the species of the animals found is quite varied. Apart from eight species of domestic fauna there is an abundance of hunted animals. This is made even more interesting by the fact that hunted animals represent a considerable share in the preserved bones (18 %), both in number and the weight of the finds.

Among domestic animals the prevalent finds are domesticated pigs. Cattle are represented in a lower number while sheep-goat take third position in terms of frequency. However, the inhabitants of the settlement gained the largest volume of nutrition from cattle, which is related to its size and hence the body weight, and subsequently in the preserved bones. The situation in the hunted animal category is significantly different from comparable sites in this period. The high intensity of hunting is shown by the presence of finds of wild boar and surprisingly, the European beaver.

Small and non-ceramic finds are comprised of artefacts which occur in the settlement in significantly smaller numbers than common fragments of ceramic vessels or animal bones and daub. From their spectrum we can recognise the specific purpose of the investigated settlement. The North-East Suburb at Pohansko differs from the other parts of the settlement agglomeration in having a markedly higher number of small and non-ceramic finds. During the 2008–2016 and 2018 campaigns we extracted 1050 artefacts, or their fragments, in the category of small and non-ceramic finds from the sunken settlement features and further 1689 items from the topsoil layer. In our opinion, the clearly visible difference might have two causes. The first is a different methodology of research. The second possible reason is the fact that the cultural sediment in this location was saturated with artefacts to an extraordinary extent. This phenomenon is probably related to the specific purpose of the investigated area that we consider to be the residence of the local elite, and also possibly with the fact that settlement survived there a little longer than in the other parts of Pohansko and could have been terminated by an extraordinary event which led to the speedy abandoning of the settlement, due to which the artefacts stayed in place and nobody handled them any longer. The most frequent finds from the 2008–2016 and 2018 campaigns are items of everyday life and objects connected with the furnishing of a household or

personal hygiene. They include the frequently occurring metal parts of buckets, knives, whetstones and firesteels. Another prominent and richly represented category is connected with subsistence. Surprisingly high numbers are reached in terms of the finds of quernstones serving for manual grinding of cereals. In the North-East Suburb they occur in complete pieces and in frequent fragments. With some reservation it is possible to connect with food provision iron bowls of the Silesian type used in the Moravian environment, most likely for meal preparation. The finds of agricultural tools are quite extensive, and a large group of finds is connected with the construction of houses. These most often include iron nails, cramps and various metal fittings. Keys and rare torch holders are less usual. Numerous and highly varied objects are connected with artisan production. In the North-East Suburb the most remarkable evidence confirming the metal working is represented by eleven crucibles, although admittedly some of them might have originated from the pre-Great Moravian period, various metal decorating tips, punches and cutters. We even discovered a hammer and chisels which could have served a different purpose – such as working wood or stone. A completely exceptional find is a drawplate for the production of wire from feature No. 194, which has only a very few early medieval analogues in Europe. Rotary grindstones, represented in the North-East Suburb by eight fragments, served specific purposes, such as sharpening the long blades of swords. Work with non-ferrous metals is confirmed by finds of lead. Another group of tools is related to woodworking. Common production activity was clothmaking, which is connected with numerous whorls, clay loom weights, needles and needle cases, spring scissors, hackles. Tools applied in cloth as well as leather and fur processing included bone sharpened tools and awls, and the so-called bone “skates”.

Objects connected with the presence of the elite and warriors or horse riders are of particularly high value. It is a varied and quite numerous categories of artefacts. The elite of women is identified by jewellery and decorations. However, in the North-East Suburb they do not represent the most magnificent examples being rather decorations of a simpler type, such as glass gombiks (globular buttons), glass and stone beads, bronze earrings and bronze rings. A remaining fragment of a more valuable object, probably a piece of jewellery, is a small silver strip with hammered decoration. A unique find in the Moravian environment is a large polyhedral bead from rock crystal which has analogues in the Middle East and the elite milieu of the Scandinavian Vikings and the Baltic Slavs. It may originate from the Mediterranean, India, Iran, or the Caucasus and the Black Sea region. Fragments of glass smoothers thought to have been used to iron rare textiles, and/or to crush salt

and spices, are also quite frequent. Other objects from glass, in particular fragments of glass vessels, have high social relevance. The same significance is attributed to the find of a game stone from glassy material – probably volcanic rock or glass.

The material culture of the male elite is exemplified mainly by weapons, warrior and equestrian equipment and metal belt fittings. Our excavations in the settlement features or in topsoil yielded 14 spurs and their parts; eight horse bits and multiple iron rings, the majority of which come from chain mail armour. The presence of members of the highest social strata is confirmed by parts of swords – a unique pommel from a Petersen type W sword and a cross-guard. We can also add the metal fitting of a sword scabbard to these extraordinary finds. The gilded top section of the phalera from a horse’s harness is equally unique. Weapons undoubtedly included some axes and numerous arrowheads. The equipment of horsemen and warriors incorporated metal fittings, both from belts and spurs or garter belts. From the settlement contexts in the North-East Suburb, we are aware of iron belt ends, buckles and shackles, some of which are adorned with rich moulded decoration and non-ferrous metals parts.

Exercising some caution, trading activities can be linked to three lead weights of a rectangular shape with a hole. A special category is comprised of 54 fragments of iron axe-shaped bars, the purpose of which continues to be a subject of debate.

The religious sphere is represented by two artefacts – a lead cross of the Velké Bílovice type and possibly a small iron handbell with a suspension eye found near the church.

The spectrum of finds uncovered by the latest excavations in the North-East Suburb parallels well with the material culture of the early medieval elite, as we know it, for example from the magnate courts in the environment of the Danish Vikings (*Jørgensen 2010a*, 284).

As on the other archaeological sites, at Pohansko near Břeclav some remains of human activity have survived only in the topsoil layer. During the analytical evaluation of the topsoil, we worked with two types of data. The first was the finds proper from the top layers (ceramics, animal bones, daub and small or non-ceramic finds), in particular data concerning their number and weight within a quadrant of 1 × 1 m. The second type of data was the size categories of the ceramic fragments. In the excavated areas during the 2008–2018 campaigns we discovered more than 180,000 items in the topsoil layer and over 69,000 items of finds of various kinds in the fill of sunken features. The spatial analysis of the dispersion of finds from the top layer and from the fill of sunken features helps us recognise early medieval activities in the investigated settlement

and in the attempt to structure exposed areas. However, unambiguous interpretation of the acquired data is complicated by the fact that settlement in the North-East Suburb did not emerge all at once, but gradually evolved and changed. Even with the aid of spatial analysis we are not able to capture all the nuances.

In the distribution of finds in the topsoil the most prominent feature was mainly above-ground buildings in the surroundings of which we find concentrations of daub, ceramics and animal bones, as well as various surface waste areas. The activities taking place in the different sections of the excavated area in the North-East Suburb are best indicated by the concentrations of different kinds of small and non-ceramic finds. An interesting accumulation is found in the area beyond the tarmac road with concentrations of crucibles, waste from metal working and bone tips – although they might be connected with pre-Great Moravian settlement there. As a result, we can take into consideration production activities connected with metal working, which were restricted to the very edge of the settlement area, although the dating of these activities is uncertain.

An exceptional situation is registered in the environs of a building with a stone and mortar corner. It is the location with the highest concentration of finds connected with the construction of houses, but most importantly artefacts associated with the elites, parts of belt fittings, tools, glass vessels, evidence of metal working, iron bars and arrowheads. With a single exception, analogous buildings with a stone and mortar corner are found only on the site of the Magnate Court, where they are related to the residence of the ruler or another member of the highest social stratum in Great Moravia. The concentration of the above-mentioned finds in the surroundings of the building with a stone and mortar corner in the North-East Suburb suggests that this space might have served the similar purpose.

The spatial distribution of finds also points out locations through which the early medieval roads might have passed. The main road running from the hypothetical northern gate of the stronghold in the NE direction connects the as yet unexamined northern gate and the geophysically identified main road passing through the central section of the agglomeration and heading towards Mikulčice – a nearby centre of Great Moravia. Apart from the main road we also find lesser roads in the settlements, connecting the side parts of the settlement with the main road. In addition to the hypothetical roads passing through the North-East Suburb we record a decrease in the number of finds in the centre of the area delimited by the trenches. A similar distribution of finds was observed inside a plot in the Forest Dune and in the *palatium* in the Magnate Court. Consequently, we may preliminarily think of the empty centre of a manor.

Special attention and utmost care were paid to the dating of the settlement in the North-East Suburb. We wanted to both describe the relative chronological development of the local settlement and to synchronise this part of the agglomeration with the other inhabited locations in Pohansko. We combined multivariate statistical analysis of settlement ceramics, evaluation of the stratigraphic relationships on the site, dendrochronological and radiocarbon dating. We found out that the settlement area in the North-East Suburb forms an inseparable part of the later phase of Great Moravian Pohansko. Evaluation of the ceramics indicates that group VM\_2 in which characterises the earlier Great Moravian phase of settlement has minimal representation in the North-East Suburb. The beginnings of more intensive settlement activities in the suburb are associated with ceramic groups VM\_3 and VM\_4, which also dominate the central part of Pohansko, where they together reach a peak in the evolution of Great Moravian ceramics. Based on dendrochronological dating of the well (0266, VM\_3), these groups can be assigned to a period after 883 AD. This is in line with the radiocarbon dating of animal bones and cereal grains from the sunken features which contained ceramics of group VM\_3 and VM\_4. The subsequent development is associated with ceramic group VM\_5, expansion of graves outside the cemetery enclosure, a change in the orientation of graves, recycling of schist quernstones in heating devices and probably even a change in the subsistence strategy of the population. Graves from the surroundings of the rotunda, situated on the northern side of the church cemetery, are also assigned to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Radiocarbon dating of graves on the edge showed we have to take into account that people continued to be buried in these locations throughout the whole of the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and maybe even later.

More significant Great Moravian settlement activities in the North-East Suburb probably started after or during the construction of the earth and timber fortification with a stone apron wall and were contemporary with the second phase of Great Moravian settlement. The whole settlement area, including the rotunda and the church cemetery, was built in the suburb along the road leading from the northern gate to Mikulčice in the 80s or 90s of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, probably simultaneously with the great rebuilding of Pohansko, which is characterised by dividing the area up into plots. The settlement area in the North-East Suburb itself went through certain development the contours of which are rather vague though. It seems that some sunken dwellings were replaced by above-ground buildings with a heating device, but they more or less respected the original urban planning concept. The fencing around plot was gradually extended or shifted, whereby older palisade trenches were overlain by later



settlement features. The church cemetery expanded beyond the original cemetery enclosure and burials took place even within the settlement, as shown by superpositions of dispersed graves above sunken features of Great Moravian age. Some Great Moravian above-ground houses and sunken featured buildings may have vanished suddenly, as their inventory remained in situ. In the end, settlement in the suburb continued until the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century when it was only surviving in the final development phase (VM\_5), to definitively disappear still during the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Based on the results of the new phase of archaeological research into the settlement area in the North-East suburb which, after 2012, concentrated primarily on the dwelling and production component, we can state that our original hypothesis proved its worth and we can consider it corroborated or valid for the time being. We tested whether the presence of early medieval elites would be manifested in the settlement even outside the church cemetery. A prediction concerning the existence of a residence of a high-ranking member of the Great Moravian stratum showed itself to be correct. An early medieval road separated the sacred and funerary precinct of the settlement area from the residential and production complex, which emerged there concurrently with the rotunda and the adjacent church cemetery sometime in the 80s or 90s of the 9th century in connection with the great re-building of Pohansko.

The supposed centre of this area was the building with a stone and mortar underpinning, designated as above-ground house ND224, with the nearby features (ND225, ND226, O205, etc.). It could have been the residence of the man buried in the rotunda and his family. It is open to debate whether the adjoining space delimited by palisade trenches and other features and reconstructed buildings belonged to his residence. It is, however, evident that this precinct underwent certain development and that it was reorganised within a short time.

The surroundings of the building with a stone and mortar underpinning with direct analogues in the “princely” *palatium* in the Magnate Court yielded accumulations of artefacts reflecting the habitus and lifestyle of early medieval elite. These comprised of mainly the equipment and weaponry of the horseman/warrior including parts of elite weapons, such as the pommel of the Petersen type W sword, probably made in the Baltic region and unparalleled in the Czech lands. Imports also covered glass table vessels and exotic decorations, such as a rock crystal polyhedral bead. Trophy hunting and falconry are indicated by bones of a hawk and trophy animals, including a bear. If we admit that the residential building could be associated with the nearby enclosed plot which incorporated sunken-featured building O194 with a de-

posit of iron objects, dating from the same period (VM\_3), we can think of a very complex settlement unit. From the economic point of view, it would be similar to the manors in the Frankish Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. A chiefly farmstead like that would generally be a centre of a more extensive estate (*Gauert 1965*, 4) – one of the forms of an early medieval manor. The whole system, in German literature referred to as “*Grundherrschaft*”, developed in the Early Middle Ages as a synthesis of the late Antique colonate system with its economic and/or legal relationships with German customs. The manorial system spread from regions of strong Roman tradition and in Western Europe it came to the fore with the advancing “frankisation”. Apart from the ruler important owners of large estates were religious institutions and the nobility, which could have received them in turn for their service to the ruler during colonisation of new territories, etc. (*Schulze 2004*, 113–114, 126–140). What we have uncovered in the North-East Suburb of Pohansko could have been seen as an embryonic state of the manor of a landlord (*Fronhof, curtis*), which usually incorporated farms of dependent peasants (*mansi*). However, the early medieval manor failed to develop and become firmly established in Moravia as it did in the Frankish Empire, from where the idea was obviously imported. If such a manor did exist at Pohansko it lasted only two to three decades and then vanished together with Pohansko and the whole Great Moravian social system. Yet, we might see the owner of such an estate and his family as germination of the future landlords.

In the Czech lands the issue of the stratification of Slav society following the emergence of landlords and introduction of the “feudal” order was studied both by critical historiography of the 19th century and Marxist historiography of the 20th century (*Žemlička 1997*, 191–192). Despite their efforts a number of problems related to its genesis have not been resolved to this day. Ambiguity reigns over even in the basic terminology. The word “aristocracy” (*šlechta*) appears relatively late in old Czech, in the first half of the 14th century, as the designation of a social group, whose members have available an inherited set of exceptional qualities and abilities (noble descent), property and power (*Macek 1997*, 9–25).

In this context, Czech historiography uses the term “aristocracy” traditionally with those nobles, whose position was based on landed property (*Klápště 2005*, 27–28). Members of the uppermost classes of medieval society before the 13th century are therefore often designated by alternative names, like the recently popular “highborn” or “magnate”, or “nobility”. To make the most generalised designation of this social stratum it is possible to use the completely neutral word collocation “early medieval elite” (*Burzler 2000*, 168–170; *Klápště 2005*, 19–20; 2009, 538; *Kouřil 2005*; *Tomková 2005*,

151; *Wihoda 2010*, 256), often without explanation of the distinctive attributes of their status. Bearing in mind all of these terminological issues we still assume that if the power of the owner of the church and the estate in the North-East Suburb relied on land properties, as our research indicates, he could be termed an aristocrat.

The emergence of private landed property is the alpha and omega of the whole complicated discussion. The general understanding has it that landlords did not appear before the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century (*Klápště 2009*, 541). Present-day scientific authorities largely rule out that an early medieval manor and estate could appear as early as Great Moravia (*Klápště 2009*, 538; *Třeštík 1997*, 287; *Žemlička 1997*, 152–153). There are, however, contrasting opinions that individual private land ownership (and the related power and property) was quite common in the 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries (*Antonín 2012*, 98–99). Similar thoughts are harboured by some researchers concerning the 9<sup>th</sup> century when land ownership belonged to persons described as *gospod*, as it ensues from the analysis of the legal source called *Zákon sudnyj ljudem*, written in Old Slavonic possibly for the needs of the Byzantine mission in Great Moravia. Landed property should have included the chiefly farmsteads – residences of Slav nobility (*Havlík 1978*, 44–46). It is not completely impossible as in the neighbouring Eastern March extensive landed property owned by Slavs was nothing exceptional in the 9th century (*Mitterauer 1960*, 721). Latest research by Czech historians shows that the bonds of Great Moravia and its social elites with the Frankish and Bavarian environment were

much tighter than we previously imagined (*Macháček – Wihoda eds. 2016*).

The situation in Moravia is therefore not substantially different from the other peripheral zones of the Frankish Empire – e.g., from Viking Denmark. There, the changes in the political-power and economic sphere sometime during the 9th century were followed by changes in the behaviour of the local elites who in terms of providing for the necessary resources transferred from the tributary system to the manorial system. They built large estate and worked them with the help of their own personnel. In archaeological sources this development became manifested in the structure of the chiefly farmsteads (e.g. in Tissø), which from the 9th century combined prestigious buildings, artisan workshops, quarters for the labourers and farmhands and storage spaces (*Jørgensen 2010b*, 282–285), in a way similar to the North-East Suburb.

The recent discoveries made at Pohansko and presented in this book show that the hypothesis of the existence of service nobility (*Dienstadel*) and later landlords in Great Moravia might be viable and we have to take it into account. It becomes obvious that given the lack of written sources further progress in learning about the beginnings of medieval nobility will be made mainly thanks to archaeology (*Graus 1953*, 150), which continues to bring new discoveries, notwithstanding thanks to the broad comparative analysis within the whole of the European space, as was anticipated in his time by F. Graus (*Graus 1960*, 107).