

HISTORY

USING THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT IN ZNOJMO-HRADIŠTĚ TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN MORAVIA

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Katedra historie Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity je jednou z „oprávněných organizací“ samostatně od r. 1993 provádějící archeologický výzkum. Ten je zahrnut i do rámce výukového procesu, do něhož se zapojují též studenti archeologie a zájemci o obor z jiných fakult a vysokých škol. Je realizován na velkomoravském výšinném hradišti sv. Hypolita ve Znojmě. Na základě konkrétních výsledků vědeckovýzkumné práce přibližuje příspěvek problematiku počátku křesťanství a směr jeho pronikání do oblasti jihozápadní Moravy.

Klíčová slova: Velká Morava; počátky křesťanství; Hradiště sv. Hypolita ve Znojmě; archeologický výzkum; církevní architektura; kostrové hroby centrálního pohřebiště; milodary v hrobech

In spite of hard work and continuous historical and archaeological research, the issue of early Christianity in Moravia is still shrouded in a certain cloak of mystery. The historians have rather limited primary sources, which are repeatedly discussed, evaluated and interpreted. We know that the old pagan religious ideas were maintained with the Slavs for relatively a long time until the Middle Ages, in any case until the 11th and 12th centuries (e.g. the Eastern Slavs, the Baltic Slavs)¹ and they also became the reason for the violent expansion of the Christian monarchs. We must include the Great Moravian ruler Svatopluk, as early as in the 9th century BC, with his conquests into Silesia and the Vistula river area. Unlike the named Eastern and Baltic Slavs, the Slavs of the West, settled in our country, came into direct contact with the Christian world and learning quite soon. And it occurred in our western and southern neighbourhoods. No doubt, it happened no later than at the end of the 8th century AD, when missionaries gradually began to penetrate into our area. It was the clergy who came to Moravia from the Bavarian bishoprics and monasteries, especially from Passau and Salzburg. The Frankish Church itself participated in the missions only to a limited extent. We could see the adoption of a certain element of the organizational structure and defining of the areas of interest and Christianity at the proceedings of the synod held sometime at the end of the summer in 796 by Pippin in a military camp near the Danube, in order, along with other church/clerical leaders, to set the process of Christianization in the middle area of the Danube (mainly the Avars)². There they could have also defined the influence of Passau (Moravia) and Salzburg (Slovakia). Moravia was increasingly experiencing the tendency of the effects particularly of the diocese of Passau. Before the end of the first third of the 9th century, we know about bishop Reginharius, who died in 838, and the history of the bishops of Passau and the

¹ VÁŇA, Z.: *Svět slovanských bohů a démonů*. (The Slavic world of gods and demons.) Praha 1990, p. 27.

² MĚŘÍNSKÝ, Z.: *České země od příchodu Slovanů po Velkou Moravu*. (The Czech lands since the arrival of the Slavs to Great Moravia) Praha 2006, p. 438.

Bavarian dukes is even called “the apostle of the Moravians”³. This fact eloquently shows us the efforts of the Frankish environment for making Moravia Christian, yet definitely partly pagan at that time and thus making our country closer to the sphere of influence of the Frankish Empire. In this context, we must particularly mention the monastery at St. Pölten in Lower Austria, whose origins go back to 760 AD. The monastery also spread Christianity throughout the region. This is evidenced by the dedication of the first Great Moravian church at the Stronghold in Znojmo (Pölsenberg) to St. Hippolytus.

The Christian ideology spread “from above” and its most ancient centres of power were in the centre of the Great Moravian Empire. The first missionaries headed for the environment of noblemen’s courts, and here, in the centres of the power elites, Christianity progressed early. From there, it was then gradually distributed to ordinary people in the rural environment, and the agricultural facilities of the fortifications. Based on the previous knowledge, we must consider the specific possible procedure of these groups of potential heralds of the new ideology in our countries, in the Great Moravian centres. The literature often mentions the traditional idea of the ancient route along the Danube to Děvín, and then along the Morava River upstream to the north in the direction to Pohansko, and then to Mikulčice, Old Town near Uherské Hradiště and

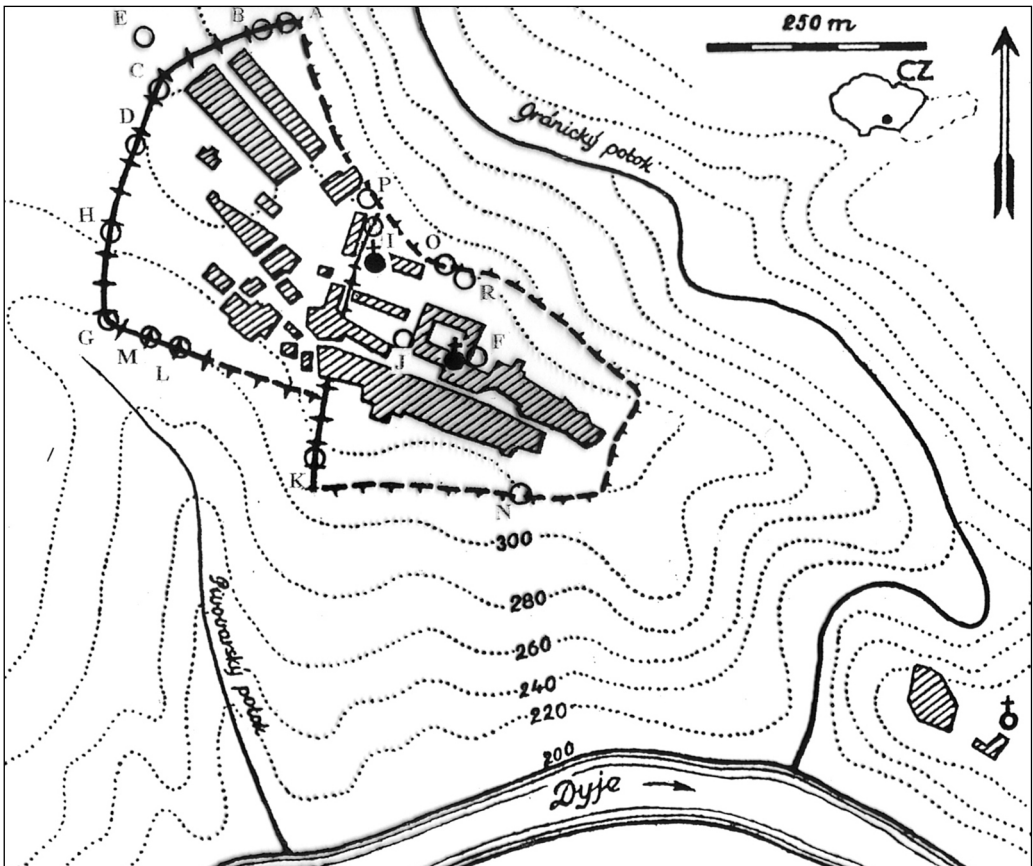


Fig. 1. Znojmo-Hradiště. A schematic contour map of the Great Moravian fortification of St. Hippolytus outlined with the lines of fortifications and places of the discovered churches.

Olomouc. The mentioned route leading to the Great Moravian centres along the Danube and the Morava River was definitely the easiest and almost perfect. Aside from this, there are considerations concerning some of the Great Moravian centres outside that central region. We mean especially Znojmo-Hradiště, which, as we have proved by our archaeological research, represented the main headquarters across south-western Moravia and Lower Austria from the 8th century AD. This argument can be documented quite significantly by typical findings of a fairly extensive collection of spurs with hooks (type I b by Mrs Bialeková), which represent the variants of the oldest type of the Slavic spurs of the pre Great Moravian period, appearing from the 7th to 8th centuries⁴, and coming from Znojmo from the settlement area as well as several internal buildings of the inner castle. Their users were the members of the military entourage of the noblemen. It is inconceivable for the missionaries to miss this place, the settlement of Znojmo, which actually represented the first centre in the “buffer zone” with Western neighbours. After all, the local fortification with an ancient patrocinio of the church, derived from St. Pölten, lay on the ancient and important trade route with salt and iron, which led from the Danube through Pokampí to Znojmo and was by far the shortest connection from the southwest towards Moravia⁵.

We come to the fortification of Stronghold of St. Hippolytus itself, where we have been performing the archaeological excavations, in particular of a rescue nature, since 1986. First, under the direction of the Archaeological Institute of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic in Brno, and then, from 1993, under the auspices of the Department of History of the Faculty of Education Masaryk University. For the past 24 seasons of the research, we have managed to collect a large amount of knowledge and information presenting the site as an important centre and equal to the above mentioned Moravian centres⁶. They also provided some important knowledge about the origins of Christianity. Among such very important discoveries, which in general have moved our knowledge of Great Moravia forward, is the excavation of modest foundations of the ancient stone church architecture – the first two local Moravian churches (Fig. 1). They are both badly damaged. The first one (the church I), situated on the highest point of the inner castle, shows the remains of buildings of single-nave church with a rectangular presbytery. According to its building design, it may rank among the oldest Great Moravian churches in our country, built perhaps by the end of the first third of the 9th century and the influence of the Bavarian missionaries. It showed a rectangular nave with the internal size of 7.75 by 5.90 metres, approximately a squared presbytery measuring 3.9 by 3.4 metres and maximum masonry thickness of 85 cm. A greater part of a brick wall between the nave and the presbytery has been preserved, which could reveal the presence of a triumphal arch. The interior finish of the church was linked with two larger pits on stilts with the diameter of 30 cm, symmetrically cut in a parallel line with the western wall of the church, which was 140 cm distant.

³ HAVLÍK, E.: *Kronika o Velké Moravě*. (A Chronicle of Great Moravia) Brno 1987, p. 68.

⁴ BIALEKOVÁ, D.: *Sporen von slawischen Fundplätzen in Povedim (Typologie und Datierung)*. Slovenská archeológia XXV-1. Bratislava 1977, s. 120–121, Abb. 2.

⁵ KLÍMA, B.: *Přínos nových výzkumů velkomoravských center pro poznání nejstarších národních dějin*. (Benefits of new research Greatmoravian centers for knowledge of the oldest national history) In: PODBORSKÝ, V. (ed.): *Sborník z konference o pravěké a raně středověké stibologii*. Brno 2006, pp. 93–96; KLÍMA, B. – KVĚT, R.: *Komunikační spojení Znojma-Hradiště*. (Communication link of Znojmo-Hradiště) In: *Staré stezky v geografii a archeologii*. Brno 2008.

⁶ KLÍMA, B.: *Nová etapa archeologických výzkumů Znojma-Hradiště*. (A new phase of archaeological excavations of Znojmo-Hradiště) In: *Jižní Morava* 25, sv. 28. Brno 1989, s. 125–144; Idem: *Hradiště sv. Hypolita ve Znojmě. Deset let výzkumů velkomoravského centra*. (Stronghold of St. Hippolytus in Znojmo. Ten years of research of the Great Moravian centre) In: *Sborník prací PdF MU, řada společenských věd č. 17*, 1999, pp. 3–66.

In respect of the total destruction of the find situation and bedrock in the places of the northern part of the nave of the church (building covered by a modern farmhouse), we were unable to confirm the presence of another two pits, but we definitely assume them there. It seems that the erected poles in these pits supported the church stand in the later period of the existence of the church, which was accessible from the adjacent hallway/narthex. Based on the find circumstances, the Church had two construction phases. The earlier, in which the nave and the presbytery were built, probably comes from the end of the first third of the 9th century, and it is connected to the Christianization efforts of the Passau Episcopate. In this area we can also see the analogous forms of the church with a rectangular presbytery reflecting more ancient influences of Irish-Scottish constructional art⁷. Around the middle of the 9th century, grave No. 150 with a canister in the left foot buried with a child was placed next to the western wall. The second, later construction phase, which could have been more distant in time from the first one, was probably built sometime at the end of the 9th century, and on the west side of the Great Moravian Church, the widening represented a spacious hall. The time lag of both phases of the construction is clearly documented by the link in the walls of the southern wall with the interruption of the bond, which confirms the extension to the standing church. From the hall stairs, there was a staircase leading to the stand on the western side of the nave. This period is probably linked with the second child's grave No. 112 in the southeast corner of the extension. The archaeological research was very challenging and complicated due to very poor soil conditions (a shallow soil cover of the rock mass) and also due



Fig. 2. Preservation of the child's grave near the remains of the foundation masonry of the western wall of the church I. (Photo by R. Michálek).

⁷ KOTRBA, V.: *Čirkevní stavby Velké Moravy*. (Ecclesiastical buildings of Great Moravia) In: *Umění* XII/4, 1964, s. 325–361.

to constant interruptions of the find situation in the modern history of Hradiště. Even today, some scholars do not accept our interpretation, because the collected evidence is less conclusive for them. But they could not explain and refute our basic argument, based on one of the skeletal graves being in an unusual orientation from north to south, which in a very close proximity to six inches along the west wall of the nave of the church strictly respected the corner and the build of the church. It was cut 22 cm into the underlying hard rock and it was covered only by a thin layer of clay, reaching a thickness up to 17 cm. The grave was equipped with a bowl, which clearly confirmed the age of Great Moravia. Also other children's graves, discovered near the building, contained a typical inventory of Great Moravia – a necklace of glass beads, an earring with a double drop and a whorl⁸. We have always based our clear and only possible conclusion and interpretation on these findings. The Great Moravian graves respect the remains of the stone building foundations and therefore this structure must be older than the graves and must have originated only from the time of Great Moravia.

We do not have any marked finding support for the general appearance of one nave church I with a rectangular sanctuary in Znojmo-Hradiště, but we may consider that analogous to the identical buildings of the Great Moravian period, which were successfully introduced in the



Fig. 3. The preservation of the second child's grave was watched by the film makers and working procedure is filmed directly from the place of the recognized remainder of the western wall of the church I. A tiny earth profile wall of the bedrock cover (behind the working student) is perfectly captured in the photograph. (Photo by the author).

⁸ KLÍMA, B.: *Archeologický výzkum MU na velkomoravském výšinném hradišti sv. Hypolita ve Znojme – Grossmährische Kirchenarchitektur auf dem St. Hippolyt-Burgwall in Znaim*. In: GALUŠKA, L. – KOUŘIL, P. – MĚŘÍNSKÝ, Z. (eds.): *Velká Morava mezi východem a západem*. (Great Moravia between the East and the West) Spisy AÚ AV ČR Brno č. 17, 2001, pp. 229–240.

reconstruction by J. Pošmourný.⁹ The two leading architects from Brno ing. M. Říčný and ing. V. Čuhel (Fig. 3, 4) performed our probable reconstruction on the basis of mutual consultations and their extensive experience. In terms of proportions, the church I of Znojmo is nearest to the churches II, V, and VIII in Mikulčice¹⁰ according to the size of the building and the shape of the presbytery, then it is very close to the oldest church building of Sadská complex¹¹, the church in Modrá near Velehrad¹² and the church in Staré Město „Na Valách“¹³. The last mentioned, however, has the conclusion of its presbytery slightly rounded inside.

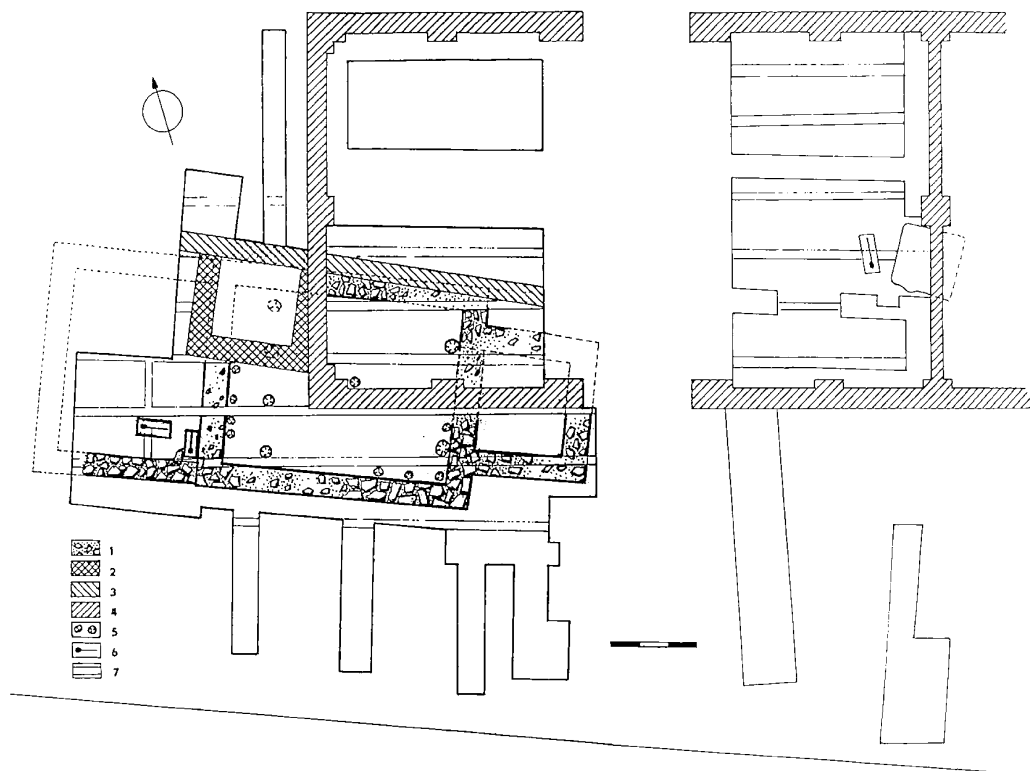


Fig. 4. The field situation on the research of the Great Moravian Church I. Legend: 1 – stones and mortar of the walls; 2 – remains of the early modern buildings; 3 – remains of a modern wall; 4 – standing building of a barn; 5 – pole holes; 6 – graves; 7 – the furrows of the medieval age from the bedrock surface.

⁹ POŠMOURNÝ, J.: *Církevní architektura Velkomoravské říše*. (Religious architecture of the Great Moravian Empire) Umění XII, 1964, pp. 157–202.

¹⁰ POULÍK, J.: *Výsledky výzkumu na velkomoravském hradišti „Valy“ u Mikulčic*. (The Results of research on the Great Moravian fortified settlement “Valy” near Mikulčice) PA XLVIII, 1957, pp. 241–288; Idem: *Mikulčice. Sídlo a pevnost knížat velkomoravských*. (Mikulčice. A Seat and fortress of the Greatmoravian princes). Praha 1975, pp. 49–60, 71–72, 95–96, 11–112.

¹¹ HRUBÝ, V.: *Uherské Hradiště-Sady. Velkomoravský vlastnický dvorec s chrámem*. (Uherské Hradiště-Sady. A Great Moravian ownership farm with the church). Uherské Hradiště-Brno 1963; Ibid: *Metropolitní výšina*. (Metropolitan height). In: *Uherské Hradiště-Sady. Středisko velkomoravské kultury a moci*. Brno 1975, pp. 1–17; GALUŠKA, L.: *Uherské Hradiště-Sady. Křesťanské centrum Říše velkomoravské*. (Uherské Hradiště-Sady. The Great Moravian Empire Christian Center). Brno 1996.

¹² CIBULKA, J.: *Velkomoravský kostel v Modré u Velehradu a začátky křesťanství na Moravě*. (The Great Moravian Church in Modra near Velehrad and the beginnings of Christianity in Moravia). Praha 1952.

¹³ HRUBÝ, V.: *Nález kostela na staroslovanském pohřebišti ve Starém Městě „Na Valách“*. (The Finding of the Church on the Slavonic burial site in Staré Město „Na Valách“.) Památky archeologické XLVI, 1955, pp. 26–306.

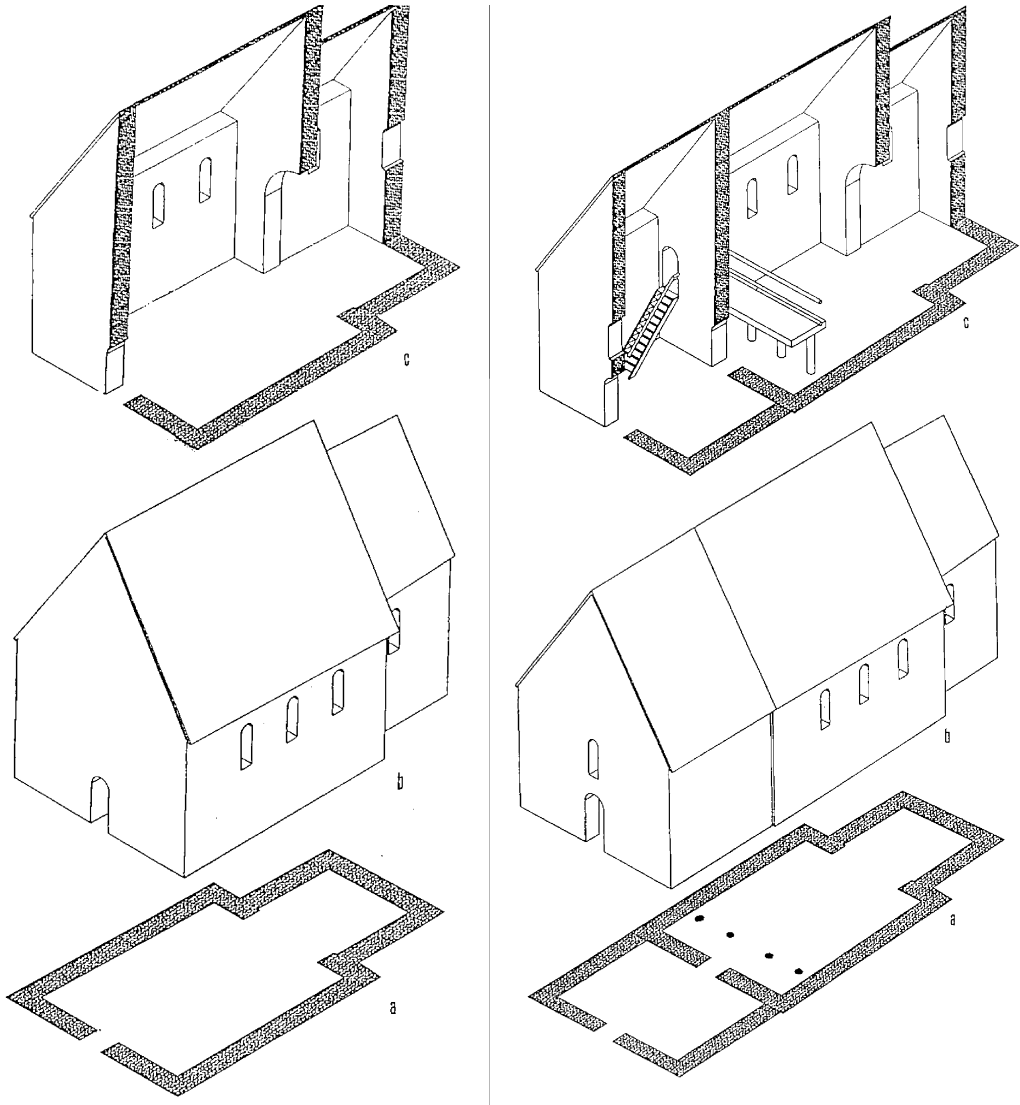


Fig. 5. The layout, the mass reconstruction, the transaction cut older (left) and the younger stages of the church building I Znojmo-Hradiště. Carried out by: ing. Arch. M. Řičný and ing. arch. V. Čuhel.

A very complex find situation was also found in the place of the second Great Moravian Church, and therefore it is not entirely convincing to some archaeologists. The church building here was a rotunda, gradually covered with two younger churches. The archaeological research managed to excavate only a part of the stone walls face of the apse and the nave. The whole space in the middle of the inner castle near the Baroque church, the sacristy and the adjoining monastery buildings quadrature was almost completely destroyed by later buildings, and also here by six other horizons of graves of the church cemetery, which was used from the 9th century until 1782. The captured masonry of the oldest church phase (the first one of three) as a rotunda

from the Great Moravian period clearly demonstrates the slice of the peripheral part of perhaps a larger cemetery with 29 captured skeletal graves that respect the building and are also equipped with a typical early medieval inventory. There are also arms in the men's graves – axes, knives, spurs with the sets of forging as well as jewellery and ornamental objects in women's and children's graves – bronze, silver and gilded bronze earrings, glass beads necklaces, rings, and gilded bronze buttons (gombíky)¹⁴.

Both discoveries of the first sacred buildings in Znojmo-Hradiště have already been published in the basic form. However, under the limited conditions of the site, we have been looking for other options to complement the research and to support our arguments and to convince some archaeologists, mainly from Brno, of the correctness of our conclusions. In particular we considered the detailed geophysical survey under the floor of the existing church and together with it other targeted probes in the field.

Besides the remains of the oldest ecclesiastical architecture, the skeletal graves show the strengthening position of Christianity in Great Moravia quite obviously. Originally a pyrogenic rite, still quite prevalent in the 8th century, due to the growing Christian ideology, was abandoned. Especially in the fortification centres and their nearest surroundings, the skeletal rite began gradually to dominate. At the very settlement in Znojmo, we have found and searched a number of isolated graves, and small groups of graves and parts of two larger cemeteries during the past 24 seasons. We discussed one above when talking about the church II (rotunda) inside the castle. But we were still looking for the central burial ground, which we managed to find accidentally in the foreground of the fortification as late as the autumn of 2007 during the construction of one of the houses. In the next two seasons, we continued the rescue and leading research there, which was very successful and very rich in findings. We believe that we have been working on one of the largest Great Moravian cemeteries, where we can expect more than 1,700 graves, often with unique inventory. So far, we have searched a relatively small area of approximately 620 m² and fully researched and documented 246 skeletal graves (Fig. 6, 7). In collaboration with experts from various scientific disciplines, we are gaining maximum knowledge and continuing the research, we can greatly enrich our knowledge of Great Moravia, a chronology of material culture, the production procedures of making a series of articles (metallography), the appearances, lives, injuries, illnesses and deaths of our ancestors (anthropology, DNA research), environment (palaeobotany), fauna (palaeozoologie) and others. We cannot completely exclude any other ecclesiastical building of the cemetery church, which we would really welcome. We can say that we are trying to get the most general knowledge about the life of the Old Moravians in this context, also about the beginnings of Christianity in the 9th–10th centuries in the whole of south-western Moravia.

The archaeological research in Znojmo, which is progressing well each year, is closely connected with the teaching process. It is carried being out mainly by our students within their summer archaeological practice; they have an ideal opportunity to enrich their theoretical knowledge and experience. They will be able to spread the acquired information among their pupils in a much more gripping and erudite way and vividly describe the events of our oldest national history. And it is precisely in this area that we see tremendous benefits in addition to scientific positives, and which I believe we manage to achieve well.

¹⁴ KLÍMA, B.: *Objev části velkomoravského pohřebiště pod středověkým až novověkým hřbitovem u kostela sv. Hypolita ve Znojmě-Hradišti.* (The Discovery of the Great Moravian burial site beneath a medieval graveyard or modern burial site near the church of St. Hippolytus in Znojmo-Hradiště.) In: *Zborník na počest Dr. Dariny Bialekovej.* Nitra: AÚ SAV 2004, pp. 179–190.



Fig. 6. The west view of the searched area of the central Great Moravian cemetery with a dense covering of graves.

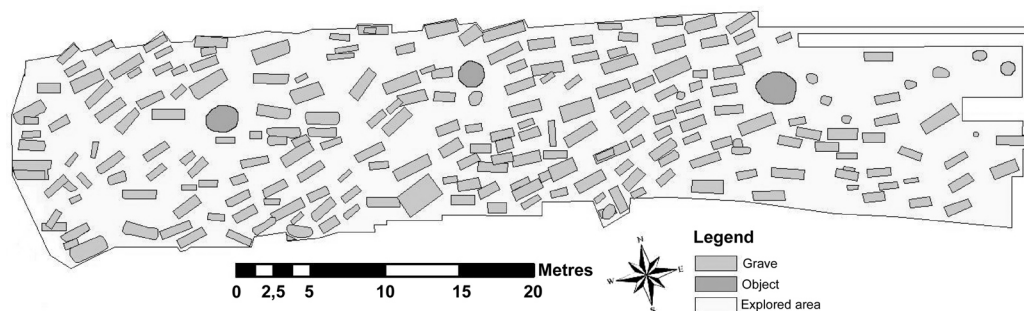


Fig. 7. The layout of the examined central part of the Great Moravian cemetery in Znojmo-Hradišče. The area of the researches in 2007 (under the house, in 2008 and 2009). (Digitization J. Kováčik).

Shrnutí

Využití výsledků archeologického výzkumu katedry ve Znojmě-Hradišti k poznání počátků křesťanství na Moravě

Článek vychází z poznatků získaných archeologickým výzkumem na velkomoravském výšinném hradišti sv. Hypolita ve Znojmě a přibližuje zcela logickou a nejpravděpodobnější představu o směru šíření křesťanství na jz. Moravu. Dokládá, že doložitelné počátky křesťanství jsou na Znojemsku rozhodně svázány s první polovinou 9. století a s pronikáním misionářů z prostředí pasovské diecéze. Tomuto západnímu vlivu odpovídají objevené nejstarší pozůstatky základů kamenné církevní architektury – jednolodního kostela s pravouhlým presbytářem (kostel č. I.). Upevňující se pozici křesťanství v této oblasti Moravy potvrzují rovněž stavební zbytky zdejšího druhého kostela – rotundy i typické prvky křesťanského ritu, sledované na nedávno objeveném centrálním pohřebišti. Na něm bylo dosud prozkoumáno téměř 400 z předpokládaných minimálně 1500 kostrových hrobů, vybavených bohatým inventářem. Výzkum velkomoravského mocenského centra celé jihozápadní Moravy ve Znojmě i jeho pohřebiště stále pokračuje a rozhodně přinese další pozoruhodné a jedinečné objevy, které dále doplní poznání nejen o počátcích křesťanství na Moravě, ale obecně o našich nejstarších národních dějinách.