

FINDS FROM THE TURN OF THE 8TH AND 9TH CENTURIES FROM BOJNÁ (SLOVAKIA) AND ITS AGGLOMERATION

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Abstract: The paper presents a collection of finds dated to the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, coming from excavations and field prospections at three hillforts located at Bojná. Although the main and largest site, Bojná I (Valy), is related mainly to the second half of the 9th century, the beginning of the Slavic settlement at Bojná agglomeration is dated to the 7th century or to the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries. The oldest finds come from the Bojná III (Žihl'avník) site. In the 8th century, Žihl'avník was a small hillfort or a fortified settlement, which makes it one of the earliest Slavic hillforts in Central Europe. The number of unique finds as well as the fortifications prove that it had been an important place in the life of that community, maybe a tribal center. Žihl'avník was abandoned presumably at the beginning or in the first half of the 9th century, when the settlement moved to Valy hill. However, the significance of the site is confirmed by two burial mounds dated to the second half of the 9th century.

Keywords: Early Middle Ages, Slavs, pre-Great Moravian period, strongholds, militaries

INTRODUCTION

The paper presents a collection of finds dated to the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, coming from excavations and field prospections at three hillforts located at Bojná, namely Bojná I-Valy, Bojná II-Hradisko, and Bojná III-Žihl'avník.¹ The settlement at the best-known site in Bojná, the Valy stronghold, is mainly related to the second half of the 9th century and the beginning of the 10th.² The origin of the early medieval agglomeration in Bojná is, however, somewhat older and

is probably associated with the presence of iron ore prospectors and miners in the 7th–8th century. The earliest finds, similar to the earliest traces of the early medieval settlement, are concentrated at the neighbouring hill, the Žihl'avník, located opposite to the Železná Dolina (Iron Valley) at the entrance to the ravine leading to the Valy settlement and towards Ducové and Pobedim, further west of the mountain range Považský Inovec (Fig. 1).³

THE SETTLEMENT AT THE ŽIHĽAVNÍK HILL

The flat hill of Žihl'avník is separated from the northwest by low double ramparts, the middle part of which resembles a horseshoe and, at the narrowest point of the plateau, it is expanded between scarps sloping toward water streams

(Fig. 2. 1). The ramparts prevented easy access to the protected part of the hill and especially free communication along the plateau in the NW–SE direction. However, there are no traces of any soil fortifications on the southeast side; the fortifica-

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¹ The research carried out under Project APVV-0553-10 is entitled “Early medieval centres of power (Central Danubian region).”

² PIETA 2013, 433.

³ PIETA 2013, 430–431.

tions themselves are not impressive and, since they are not closed, poorly protect the inner area.⁴ The survey of the ramparts provided no results (finds or layers), therefore we do not know whether the ramparts are early medieval, related to the Slav-ic settlement, or older fortifications, probably only used by the Slavs.

Traces of the early medieval settlement have been detected in the southeast part of Žihl'avník hill, within the area encircled by the horseshoe-shaped ramparts, and to the southeast of it, towards the river valley, over about eight hectares. Most of these are ceramics and small metal objects found in the humus layer, mainly knives and hooks but also awls, single weaponry elements (axe, arrowheads) which could have been used also for farming and hunting purposes. The only feature documented so far at Žihl'avník which could be ascribed to the settlement phase (?) is a small cluster of burnout stones surrounding broken fragments of undecorated early medieval pots (hearth? furnace? grave?). A feature also associated with the settlement was a small pit found in a windthrow, the traces of which had been documented before the research started there.⁵ Since the low ramparts do not close any clearly separated area, it is not clear whether we are dealing here with a stronghold indeed, or maybe a fortified settlement, or some other kind of feature.

In addition to the settlement, there are also two burial mounds at the Žihl'avník. The assumption that these are chronologically younger than the settlement is confirmed (at least partially) by objects found in the embankments: pottery and a large amount of metal items (knives, hooks, nails) of exactly the same character as those found in the humus layer within the settlement.

The 9th-century dating of the burial mound 2 with a skeletal burial of a young woman is mainly based on the dating of the pottery found in the grave and the usage of the skeletal rite with wooden coffin or wooden chamber. In mound 1 (or the

“grand” mound) no traces of burial were found, only a layer of burnt wood (without clear pattern) and animal bones. At the edge of the mound, just above natural subsoil, a spear was found (*Fig. 3. 10*); however, it is not necessarily associated with the grave furniture and could have been placed there earlier, before the mound was raised. It should be noted, however, that the mound could not be examined completely (approximately one-third of it remains unexamined) owing to the oak trees overgrowing it; therefore, further research may provide new information. Radiocarbon dating of both mounds suggests that they go back to the second half of the 8th or the 9th century. Presumably burial mound 1 can be dated to the 9th century.

FINDS FROM THE ŽIHĽAVNÍK HILL

Finds of weaponry and clothing that may be ascribed to the settlement horizon include an iron hooked spur (*Fig. 3. 1*), a Byzantine-type bronze buckle (*Fig. 3. 3*), and a U-shaped iron strap-end fitting of the Carolingian type (*Fig. 3. 2*). The fragment of a bronze pendant or strap fitting (*Fig. 3. 4*) could be of Avar provenance; it is, however, difficult to reconstruct. In fact, stylistically it may resemble the openwork fittings characteristic to the older phases of the Late Avar period.⁶ The fragment of a bronze bracelet with flattened, broadening corrugated end may also be related to the nomadic culture *Fig. 3. 5*).⁷

The hooked spur probably goes back to the second half of the 8th or the very beginning of the 9th century. It represents a variant of hooked spurs with short yoke (type IA–IB according to D. Bialeková, variant B of technotype III according to J. Žak and L. Mačkowiak-Kotkowska, variant B-C according to K. Wachowski)⁸ which are known in large amounts from the entire territory of the Western Slavs.⁹ It shows the closest for-

⁴ This is not a typical horseshoe-shaped stronghold; ramparts do not separate an area naturally protected from other sides. There are no traces of an enclosing ring. It is currently assumed that the ramparts constitute part of the linear fortifications discovered on several hills around Bojná (sites Bojná I–IV) and running across the entire Považský Inovec.

⁵ PIETA 2007, 180–181.

⁶ ČILINSKA 1966, Taf. XXV. 74. 2, Taf. LVII. 369. 6; ZÁBOJNÍK 2009, Fig. 11. 5: 31.

⁷ AULICH 1972, Tabl. XIII.

⁸ BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 120; ŽAK ET AL. 1988, 31–32; WACHOWSKI 1991, 86–87.

⁹ PIETA–ROBAK 2015.

mal similarity to items coming from Zauschwitz near Leipzig, Bruszczewo in Greater Poland, and Mellingen near Erfurt and to a spur from Frös-lunda in Sweden with similar yoke decoration.¹⁰ Due to geographical distance, however, these similarities should be considered as accidental. In order to avoid distant analogies, it should be noted that bronze and iron items of similar shape and form are typical finds in Bohemian and Moravian strongholds dated to the 8th or the beginning of the 9th century, the so-called pre-Great Moravian phase of Mikulčice and Uherské Hradiště-Ostrov Sv. Jíří (St. George Island) as well as Kersko near Sadská, Brno-Líšeň and Rubín-Dolánky.¹¹ A spur with massive pyramidal bolt coming from Grave 116 at Devínska Nová Ves dated to the Late Avar period can be mentioned as an analogy.¹² The hooks of this spur are unfortunately broken. Although spurs with inward hooks are not precise daters and the period of their use by Slavs may be specified as beginning in the late 7th and terminating at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries,¹³ it seems possible to narrow down the dating of this spur type to which the specimen from Žihlávnik belongs. The identification of the pre-Great Moravian horizon in Mikulčice including ca. fifty hooked spurs is particularly helpful. The spur found at Bojná can be compared to some of them. Chronology of this horizon can be closed between the end of 7th and the late 8th – early 9th century.¹⁴ The Rubín-Dolánky site is likewise dated to the 7th–9th centuries where, in addition to hooked spurs (thirteen items), late Avar relics and early Carolingian beads are also present. However, no finds can be dated only to the 9th century, particularly no plate spurs.¹⁵ The settlement at Ostrov Sv. Jíří in Uherské Hradiště where late Avar bronzes were found should be associated with the pre-

Great Moravian horizon too.¹⁶ D. Bialeková dates the spurs of the IB type to the second half of the 8th century, while K. Wachowski places variants B-C within the time frame of about 725 to 800 AD.¹⁷ Hooked spurs had been widely used in the latter half of the 8th century in the Middle Danube region; from the early 9th century, they came to be superseded by Carolingian looped spurs and most of all by various types of plate spurs typical to the Great Moravian horizon in Moravia, Bohemia, and Slovakia. One of youngest items comes from Grave 16 at Söjtör-Petőfi utca. The burial ground in Söjtör is considered as part of the so-called skeletal graveyard horizon in Western Hungary linked to the end phase of the Avar culture (or rather, the Avar–Slavic culture) after the fall of the Khaganate, which was the result of Charlemagne's wars against the Avars. This may confirm that the type of spurs described here was still in use in the beginning or, presumably, even in the first third of the 9th century.¹⁸

A Byzantine-type bronze buckle is a find that may be dated to a somewhat earlier period, presumably to the 7th century. It was found accidentally between the roots of a fallen tree, about 100 m west of the graveyard. It is made of bronze, length: 4.8 cm, height: 3.1 cm. On its upper side, the open-work plate is decorated with a double grooving and a transverse rib with two grooves too. The buckle frame is oval with the front side decorated with three notches in the middle; below, there is an eyelet for fastening the buckle. There is no pin. The buckle tip is decorated with a knob. However, no analogous type has been found so far; it may be classified as animal head-shaped buckles (*Tierkopfschnallen*) identified by Éva Garam together with various fitting variants.¹⁹ Byzantine-type buckles closest in form are known from

¹⁰ ŽAK ET AL. 1988, Tab. VI. 3, 6, 7, 8, Tab. VII. 2.

¹¹ KAVÁNOVÁ 1976, 11–12, 104, Tab. I. 8, 11; PROFANTOVÁ 1994, 60–69; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2002, 266; GALUŠKA 2013, 15–16, 43–48.

¹² EISNER 1952, 38–39, Fig. 17. 10; ZÁBOJNÍK 2009, 43–45.

¹³ PARCZEWSKI 1988, 100; POLESKI 1992, 20–24; POLESKI 2013, 126.

¹⁴ KLANICA 1968, 639; KLANICA 1984, 141–149; KLANICA 1986, 95–102; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2002, 406–407.

¹⁵ BUBENÍK 1996; BUBENÍK 1997; PROFANTOVÁ–STOLZ 2006.

¹⁶ GALUŠKA 2001; GALUŠKA 2013, 64–70; MĚŘÍNSKÝ 2002, 264–266.

¹⁷ BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 120; WACHOWSKI 1991, 91.

¹⁸ SZÓKE 1994, 182; SZÓKE 2004; BREIBERT 2005, 427. Several studies date these graveyards to the second half of the 8th century (SZAMEIT 1991; see UNGERMAN 2005 for arguments and literature supporting “the second option”). Although the controversy regarding the chronology of the so-called pre-Köttlach horizon or Keszthely culture is of no particular significance for the dating of the spur coming from Žihlávnik, the issue is still regarded as important and being discussed.

¹⁹ GARAM 2001, 104–105, Taf. 72.

Hungary and Slovakia (the so-called Pannonian group) and dated to the 7th century; they could have been produced in Pannonia.²⁰

Slovak finds of Byzantine-type belt elements are concentrated in the south of the country. Most of these finds come from Avar or Avar–Slavic mixed graveyards of the Avar Khaganate period.²¹ The buckle found at Žihl'avník would be therefore the northernmost such find coming from Slovakia, not too distant from areas of common presence and within an area under the direct influence of the Avar Khaganate, yet certainly beyond its borders. Another item of the Korinth-type²² is also dated to the 7th century and comes from the neighbouring Radošina²³ (Fig. 4. 8). However, the way and the time these buckles got there remain a mystery. In this case, it seems more important to compare the find to other finds coming from Moravia and Bohemia. Although much less Byzantine-type belt elements come from this region,²⁴ all of them were unearthed in pre-Great Moravian tribal political and military centres (Mikulčice, Mutěnice,

Praha, Rubín) where, similar to Bojná and its vicinity, Avar bronzes, single early Carolingian artefacts, and hooked spurs have been found. This may therefore prove that the Bojná area had been of some significance even before the Valy stronghold was built.

In typological terms, the youngest find from Žihl'avník is a U-shaped iron strap-end fitting decorated with a vertical rib. Such fittings are typical to the Carolingian milieu, mainly of the first half of the 9th century;²⁵ however, they could also appear in the second half of the 9th century. The find, therefore, may be associated both with the settlement phase at Žihl'avník and the period when this area was used as a mound burial ground. Unfortunately, its simple form does not allow for precise dating, and, even worse, it was found in the plant litter layer. The dating of the Bojná fitting to the first half of the 9th century does not contradict the general dating of the Žihl'avník site; however, the object may as well be younger and come from the Great Moravian period.

THE VALY HILL

While the settlement horizon (stronghold, fortified settlement?) at Žihl'avník, dated to the 8th – beginning of the 9th century (and thus describable as pre-Great Moravian), can be quite clearly distinguished both directly, by military finds, and indirectly, by the stratigraphic dating of mounds (wherever a cultural layer of the settlement is present), at the Valy stronghold it is hardly perceptible. Among several hundreds of warrior attire elements, spurs, and weaponry found there, only four items could be dated to the second half of the 8th or the beginning of the 9th century.

Two of them are typical Avar strap fittings²⁶ (Fig. 3. 6–7) which can be dated to the Late Avar period or even its decline (NS III–IV).²⁷ A fragment of a complex fitting is also of Avar origin²⁸ (Fig. 4. 2) and is sometimes considered as an example of the combined impact of late Avar and Carolingian art.²⁹ A recent opinion about its ornamentation, consistent with the style of the entire series of late Avar fittings, have been put forward by András Csuthy;³⁰ there is no need to repeat his arguments here. To the items discussed by him,³¹ another fitting from Klempenow, Lkr. Demmin in

²⁰ VARSÍK 1992, 85–89, Taf. IV–V; GARAM 2001, 107, Taf. 56–58, Taf. 70–72.

²¹ GARAM 2001, 97–99; ZÁBOJNÍK 2007, 13, 22–25; ZÁBOJNÍK 2009, 69–70.

²² GARAM 2001, 99, Taf. 62. 3.

²³ PIETA 2013, Abb. 2. 2.

²⁴ PROFANTOVÁ 2007.

²⁵ WAMERS 2011, 71–72; ROBAK 2013, 68–69; ROBAK 2014, Tab. VII. 6.

²⁶ PIETA–RUTTKAY 2007, Fig. 1. 2.

²⁷ ZÁBOJNÍK 1991, 278, Taf. 41; ZÁBOJNÍK 2009, Fig. 12. 24.

²⁸ JANOŠÍK–PIETA 2007, obr. 14. 3.

²⁹ PROFANTOVÁ 1997, 91; JAKUBČINOVA 2012, 301.

³⁰ CSUTHY 2014.

³¹ CSUTHY 2014, obr. 1.

Mecklenburg may be added (*Fig. 4. 1*),³² the ornamentation of which is presumably the closest to that of Bojná. From the typological point of view, this fitting has its analogies among the items of late Avar origin too³³ (*Fig. 4. 4*). There are, however, no Carolingian items or analogies among Great Moravian artefacts. The only analogy, a fitting of similar form coming from Grave 133 at Kanín II,³⁴ (*Fig. 4. 3*) repeatedly cited in connection with the Bojná fitting, is also an Avar artefact.³⁵ It is therefore highly doubtful that the fittings from Bojná and Kanín were parts of Carolingian-type sword sets as suggested by some.³⁶ Moreover, they differ structurally from such fittings, particularly in the form of the hinge, which is hidden under the fitting plate in the Carolingian-type sword sets.³⁷ Linking hinged fittings from Bojná and Kanín dated to the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries to sword sets of the Carolingian-type containing hinged fittings is also highly unlikely, owing to the chronology of the latter; their becoming popular had not taken place before the second half of the 9th century.³⁸ Such a fitting might have also served, however, as an element fastening another loosely hanging ornament, as is in the case of the fitting from Devínska Nová Ves.³⁹

An absolutely unique find in the entire Slovak-Bohemian-Moravian region is the strap-end fitting with a knob. “Small-format” fittings with a knob, both decorated and undecorated, are commonly found in the area of the Carolingian state as well as in Slovenia and Croatia where they served as typical decorations of spur straps or puttees popular in the second half of the 8th and the beginning of the 9th century.⁴⁰ From the area of Slovakia, Moravia, and Bohemia (similar to the Western Slavic areas) only a few specimens are known, and they have never been found together with spurs or other additional elements of clasp sets. Most of the fit-

tings (namely three) have been found in Mikulčice (including the only one from a skeletal grave 108/II), which is not surprising as we can easily perceive there the so called pre-Great Moravian period. It is indicated, among others, by the presence of hooked spurs and over a hundred of late Avar ornaments that are missing at the Valy site. The two other fittings were found at strongholds, Olomouc-Povel and Češov, which could also be dated to this period.⁴¹ Apart from (literally) single early Carolingian finds, there are no finds from the early Carolingian horizon in Moravia, Slovakia, and Bohemia. This cannot be a consequence of the cremation rite only (which may to some extent explain the lack of cluster finds) but were rather an outcome of aesthetic and cultural preference. Above all, there are no complete fitting sets (it is even impossible to combine single finds), nor early types of plate spurs, looped spurs (only their iron imitations and the so-called quasi-looped spurs with yoke ends curved into an “eyelet”), or, primarily, items decorated with the Tassilo Chalice style (often imprecisely called animal or insular style). This is clearly seen in case of the already mentioned phenomena of the pre-Köttlach horizon and burials in Western Hungary linked with the “pre-Pribina” period (first third of the 9th century). Except for single finds of Carolingian weaponry, male skeletal burials containing weaponry are equipped exclusively with Avar strap fittings.⁴²

The indeed disproportionately small number of finds of the early Carolingian type (and even the so-called transition phase ornamentation showing stylistic features typical to the early Carolingian period and the emerging plant style) as compared to finds of equipment and attire of the late Carolingian-type indicates the relatively low interest in adopting the Carolingian culture among the Slavs in pre-Christianization times. Otherwise, it would

³² SCHANZ 2007, Abb. 59. 4. Avar imports in this area are, however, not so exceptional (see EGER–BIERMANN 2009; SCHIRREN 2011).

³³ DEKAN 1976, Fig. 55.

³⁴ JUSTOVÁ 1977, Abb. 3. 9.

³⁵ CSUTHY 2014.

³⁶ PROFANTOVÁ 1997, 91; JAKUBČINOVÁ 2012, 301.

³⁷ UNGERMAN 2011, 585–586; ROBAK 2013, 121–122, 149–152; ROBAK 2014, Tab. LV. 19, Tab. LXXIX. 4.

³⁸ ROBAK 2013, 149–152.

³⁹ DEKAN 1976, Fig. 55.

⁴⁰ GIESLER 1974; KARO 2012, 448–451.

⁴¹ BLÁHA 1988, 155–170; PROFANTOVÁ 1999.

⁴² SZÓKE 2004.

be difficult to explain the inability to import such artefacts produced after all in neighbouring Bavaria. This is, however, a general tendency among the Slavs since a similarly small number of early Carolingian objects come from Poland, Eastern Germany, and Lower Austria. The only exception is the older phase of the so-called Biskupija–Crkvina horizon characteristic for Croatia and marked in Slovenia, where finds are in fact sets (and not single imports) of artefacts in the early Carolingian style (looped spurs, plate spurs with side rivets, fittings with knobs, and the so-called “bird-shaped fittings,” a series of swords with fitting sets, items decorated with the so-called Tassilo Chalice style, and the like). These can be dated to approximately 790–820/830 AD and linked with the physical presence of Carolingian troops around the year 790.

It seems that the actual “implementation” of the Carolingian culture took place when the Tassilo Chalice style and related ornamentation had already become outdated (also the types of artefacts had changed) and a plant style typical for the late Carolingian period emerged. Therefore, it is difficult to indicate the very beginning of the 9th century as its date. Contrary to popular opinions that the animal style ended and the plant style associated with the Carolingian Renaissance emerged around 800, the items characteristic for the early Carolingian period must have been in use at least in the first quarter or, presumably, even in the first third of the 9th century.⁴³ Initially, the Carolingian Renaissance was a high culture available for kings and courts, while small-scale crafts still applied earlier known patterns, probably also because of the preference of customers. Moreover, it should not be expected that an abrupt transition from early to late Carolingian style took place. This is particularly clear from the quite large series of items that may

be described as transitional, i.e. typologically still related to early Carolingian style (knobs, elongated strap-end fittings) but with non-animal, geometric motifs or highly simplified geometric and plant ornaments clearly providing basis for the development of later plant motifs. The real development of Carolingian Renaissance aesthetics (not only as an elite style sponsored by the supreme authority and elites but also small-scale artistic craftwork) took place under Louis de Pious. The “implementation” of the Carolingian culture among Moravian or Slovak Slavs coincides with the period when official diplomatic contacts between Moravians and the Frankish Empire were established during the reign of Louis de Pious and preparations for the adoption of Christianity began. Thus, the correspondence probably is not accidental.

A clearer weaponry horizon at Valy includes finds of products modelled on late Carolingian items that may go back to the first half of the 9th century or its very beginning, and this is a tendency observable in most “central places” linked with the later Great Moravian culture.⁴⁴ It is typical to the early phase of the Great Moravian culture which, based on the way the pre-Great Moravian period was formed (from pre-Köttlach), should be described as proto-Great Moravian (using the ‘pre’ prefix to suggest that we can observe a gradual quantitative increase in the number of sets, not single items, and particularly the presence of clusters).

This horizon comprises several items⁴⁵ decorated with simple plant motifs made with the chip-carving technique. Symmetric volutes and spirals are typical motifs. Furthermore, there are also buckle spurs characteristic mainly for the first half of the 9th century as well as various types of plate spurs. The majority of the items from Bojná-Valy are, however, products typical to the latter half of the 9th century.

THE HRADISKO HILL (BOJNÁ II)

Still it is unclear how the Bojná II stronghold communicated with other strongholds. It is located north of Žihl'avník, on the north side of Železná

Dolina, in a rather strategic place on a promontory over a narrowing of the river valley. The slope with the plateau is separated by a rampart and divided

⁴³ ROBAK 2013, 98, 155–156.

⁴⁴ ROBAK 2013, 193–196.

⁴⁵ PIETA–RUTTKAY 2007, Fig. 1. 4; BAČA–TURČAN 2007, Fig. 2.

by an additional embankment impeding communication with the rampart foreground. In contrast to Žihľavník, it has a clearly defensive character. Its construction, however, can be linked with the Roman or the Great Migrations period, since most of the items found here come from those periods.⁴⁶ Use (or re-use?) of the stronghold in the 9th century, or, very likely, even in the 10th, has been recently confirmed by radiocarbon dating of burnt wood fragments found at the bottom of the moat.⁴⁷

A small collection of early medieval objects comes from the settlement⁴⁸ and confirms some Slavic activity in this area (watchtower, refuge?). Among the early medieval finds, an iron looped spur is the most interesting (*Fig. 5. 5*). Bronze and iron looped spurs are present in significant amounts in Western European graveyards dating back to the second half of the 8th century and are sometimes decorated in the Tassilo Chalice style or co-occur with such objects in clusters.⁴⁹ Their general dating to the 8th century seems indisputable. They occasionally occur in an older phase of the Biskupija–Crkvina horizon too. In Western Europe and Dalmatia, spurs of this type disappear at the beginning of the 9th century. This chronology is confirmed by a recent spur find, the arms of which are decorated with early plant ornament,⁵⁰ as well as graves at Schortens and Borne dated by coins of Charlemagne to the end of the 8th century.⁵¹ So far, no specimens of spurs have come to light with the characteristic massive loops imported from the West.

Slavic looped spurs (in most cases quasi-looped owing to the loop construction being simply an arm tip bent and joined more or less accurately with a yoke, or flattened and punctured) were

undoubtedly modelled on Merovingian and early Carolingian looped spurs and, similar to hooked spurs, produced as a result of western influences. Spurs of this type are known from Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Germany,⁵² where they probably appeared already in the first half of the 8th century.⁵³ Most of them, however, is dated to the second half of the 8th century.⁵⁴

The only set of spurs with high yoke and strap-end fittings was found in Grave 788 in the early medieval graveyard at Čakajovce near Nitra.⁵⁵ Based on these spurs, the grave has been described as the oldest skeletal burial in the graveyard,⁵⁶ dated to the end of the 8th century. This complex is in any case interesting and inspires some reflections. It includes the burial of an about seventy-year-old man and thus we should consider the possibility that he could use and possess the items he was buried with for a long time. Such dating, however, corresponded well to a series of graves (particularly Graves 189 and 190) ascribed to the so-called Blatnica–Mikulčice horizon traditionally dated to about 800–830 AD⁵⁷ Grave 788, therefore, must be older.⁵⁸ Graves No. 189 and 190 contained plate spurs with transverse rivets considered as typologically younger. Another reason for determining such an early chronology for this grave was its location at the eastern edge of the graveyard, next to cremation burials. This raises the suspicion that it belongs to the oldest phase of skeletal burials. However, the fact that plate spurs cannot be dated to such an early period⁵⁹ compels us to extend the chronology of the grave to at least the entire first half of the 9th century; by no means, however, to the 8th century. The fact that the fashion of strap fitting sets was

⁴⁶ TURČAN 2003; PIETA 2007.

⁴⁷ Analyses provided by Prof. Marek Krąpiec from AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow.

⁴⁸ PIETA 2007, Fig. 5.

⁴⁹ STEIN 1967.

⁵⁰ MILOŠEVIĆ 2006.

⁵¹ RÖTTING 1999, 244; SCHULCZE-DÖRRLLAMM 2010, 346.

⁵² KAVÁNOVÁ 1976, 16–17; POELSKI 2004, 15; STRZYŻ 2006, obr. 27. 12.

⁵³ KOTOWICZ–MICHALAK 2008, 362–364.

⁵⁴ KOTOWICZ–MICHALAK 2008, 362–364; BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 122–123; TURČAN 1995, 79–80.

⁵⁵ The poor publication of the spur from this complex does not mention the actual shape of the arm end. In the drawing (REJHOLCOVÁ 1995a, Tab. CXXVI) it is wrapped inside, while in the X-ray photo it consists of an approximately rectangular loop with a wrapped yoke's end joined to the outer surface of the arm.

⁵⁶ REJHOLCOVÁ 1995a, 52–53.

⁵⁷ REJHOLCOVÁ 1995a, 53–54, 78.

⁵⁸ REJHOLCOVÁ 1999, 9.

⁵⁹ KOŠTA 2008, 287; ROBAK 2013, 34–35.

taken over by the Slavs from the Carolingian culture, which definitely had not taken place before the beginning of the 9th century, is another reason for such a dating.

Generally, it is not known how long looped spurs had been used by the Slavs. The case of hooked spurs, no longer used in Western Europe in the 8th century (they had been replaced by looped spurs as genetic successors) but produced simultaneously with other types even until the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries in the Slavic territories,⁶⁰ shows how difficult it is to interpolate the chronology of Western European artefacts or imitations directly into their Slavic context without careful analysis, particularly of the complexes where they occurred.

With the present state of knowledge of looped and quasi-looped spurs, there is no ground for limiting the chronology of their disappearance from the Slavic context, similar to Carolingian looped spurs, to the beginning of the 9th century.⁶¹

Though they were obviously no longer popular in the Great Moravian period, it should be considered that they could be produced and used throughout the entire 9th century.⁶² The same applies to other Slavic territories.⁶³ Typical to these spurs, particularly those with high yoke, is that they are poorly made, which may indicate that they were a kind of a substitute when there was no possibility (financial or technical) to obtain other, better products. The item from Bojná II is an exceptionally well-made specimen, which may, however, date from the 8th century or from the beginning of the 9th. Due to its strong similarity to the specimen from Smolenice-Molpír⁶⁴ (*Fig. 5. 6*) where other looped and hooked spurs as well as a series of late Avar bronzes come from,⁶⁵ I would rather be inclined to date it to the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries. This, however, does not help much in dating the Bojná II stronghold (especially not in relation to radiocarbon dating), nor placing it within the chronological context of the two remaining strongholds.

CONCLUSIONS

By way of conclusion based on the above considerations, it is possible to outline the early chronology of the Bojná agglomeration. It should be noted, however, that these conclusions are not so much the results of research in Bojná (2005–2013), but rather a research hypothesis orienting further studies aimed at its verification.

The oldest settlement within the Bojná agglomeration was probably founded in the 7th century or at the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries on a southern slope of the Žihľavník. It was separated by ramparts from the northwest, although it remains uncertain whether the foundation of the settlement was a consequence of the remnants of older fortifications found there. Owing to the fact

that the settlement is located near the middle of an ore-bearing area, it is linked with a community of iron ore diggers. Even then, however, it must have been an important site in the local community's life, as it is evidenced by the finds. It must have been linked with the residential area of some kind of an elite,⁶⁶ and certainly a group of warriors, which is in turn testified by weaponry finds. Its defensive properties might have mattered less than marking the spot with ramparts. M. Dulnicz called such early Slavic strongholds "places generating power."⁶⁷ The characteristic features of similar places in Poland and the Eastern Slavic territories (Szeligi, Zimne, etc.) dated to 6th–7th century may be easily applied to Žihľavník

⁶⁰ PARCZEWSKI 1988, 100; POLESKI 1992, 20–24.

⁶¹ KIND 2007, 554.

⁶² PROFANTOVÁ 1994, 71. The new dating of the rampart in Pobedim to the end of the 9th century (HENNING–RUTTKAY 2011, 283–284) also extends the possible chronology of the looped spur found beneath its ruins (BIALEKOVÁ 1927, 124; BIALEKOVÁ 1977, Abb. 10. 2).

⁶³ KOTOWICZ 2005, 68; KOTOWICZ–MICHALAK 2008, 362.

⁶⁴ RUTTKAY 1975, Abb. 12. 9.

⁶⁵ TURČAN 1995.

⁶⁶ Higher social status was usually emphasised by ostentatious appeal to non-local elements, e.g. by the application of foreign stylistic patterns, distinct funeral rites, or exaggerated local tradition (URBAŃCZYK 2012, 142–143).

⁶⁷ DULNICZ 2000.

too. Therefore, what we deal with here is a fortified site with rather symbolic fortifications indicating that protection of the people and property was not the primary reason for their foundation. Similar to those mentioned by Dulnicz, it is located on a promontory, cut through by a transverse rampart but not surrounded with it. Even if the whole area had been surrounded with a palisade, its protective function would have been negligible. There are also other features, e.g., the unique location (in case of Žihľavník this means the intersection of roads leading to Železná Dolina and to the Valy valley), concentration of traces of household activity, weaponry finds including imported products, marks of funeral rites, usually absent in settlements (owing to the traditional delineation between residential and sacrum areas).⁶⁸ The establishment of such sites in areas newly colonised by the Slavs was associated with the taking under control of lands previously not belonging to their settlement area. This fits ideally in the situation where a group of Slavic seekers-explorers arrived at the foot of Marhat in the 7th or the 8th century. They needed to create some kind of anchorage in a particular geographical structure, not necessarily defensive, which they could build their “social order” on, some kind of a local “focal point” linked with authority and tribal identity.

The hypothesis is interesting, since the group of strongholds in Poland and in the Eastern Slavic territories are the only analogy comparable to the stronghold (?) at Žihľavník and, what is more important, they are similarly dated. In terms of location and quality, the ramparts at Žihľavník also show some convergences with a group of early strongholds dated to the 7th–8th century in Bohemia,⁶⁹ especially the stronghold in Doubravičice near Kolín, for which authors mention the same analogies from Poland and the Eastern Slavic territories.⁷⁰ These strongholds, as well, were not very impressive in terms of ramparts. The stronghold of Doubravičice, with its dimensions and geographical location similar to that of Žihľavník, served rather as a fortified settlement than a for-

tress, and part of the area was only protected by a palisade. Nearby strongholds, quite precisely dated to the pre-Great Moravian period such as Klátova Nová Ves⁷¹ or Smolenice-Molpír⁷² and others (e.g. Sv. Jur) are, however, completely different. They contain series of late Avar objects and spurs dated to the 8th or beginning of the 9th century in abundance, but have clearly defensive constructions of ramparts used secondarily by the Slavs. If the assumption that Žihľavník should be dated as early as the first half of the 8th century is confirmed, it will imply that it is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, early medieval stronghold in Slovakia.⁷³

We do not know either the reasons for the abandonment of the settlement at Žihľavník or the time when it exactly happened. As an estimate, it might have taken place at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, and this period was, as we know, a time of dynamic political changes (fall of the Avar Khaganate which previously dominated the Carpathian Basin; emancipation of local Slavic elites; emergence of the first over-tribal leadership organisations; beginning of the Christianisation process) which had a major impact on the social organisation. The settlement might have been abandoned because of strategic reasons, although the defensive advantages of Žihľavník as a hill were just as good as those of the hill where the new stronghold was built. Perhaps this was a deliberate action on the part of the new elites aiming at isolating the community from “old” focal points and binding it to places already linked with the newly established social order (Mojmir’s dynasty, Christianity, opening up to the Western and Byzantine cultures, replacing the previously prevalent Khaganate).

On the site of the abandoned (?) settlement at Žihľavník, a small, exclusive burial ground was founded with no more than two, though quite large, mounds, dated generally to the 9th century, although it cannot be ruled out that at least the “great grave” could have been erected during the existence of the settlement. Erecting mounds at Žihľavník after the place had been

⁶⁸ ZOLL–ADAMIKOWA 2000, 213; SIKORA 2011, 376–377, 381.

⁶⁹ BUBENÍK 1999; LUTOVSKÝ 2009, 5–9; BERANOVÁ–LUTOVSKÝ 2009, 65–76.

⁷⁰ BERANOVÁ–LUTOVSKÝ 2009, 60, 65–69.

⁷¹ PIETA–ROBAK 2015; ROBAK–PIETA 2016.

⁷² TURČAN 1995.

⁷³ Cf. ŠALKOVSKÝ 2012, 54.

abandoned was perhaps aimed at emphasising the importance of the location for the local community (e.g., through the tradition of an earlier place of power). The mounds may also have been the graves of representatives of pre-Great Moravian, officially downgraded elites, patrimonially linked with this place. Due to its distance and small size, it is unlikely that the burial ground was associated with the Valy stronghold. Someone, however, did erect those mounds and chose the site for some reason, but no further graves were to be located here.

Nor do we know how the beginnings of the settlement and the Valy stronghold looked like and how they can be dated. Dendrochronology of the preserved ramparts allowed for specifying their construction date as after 893 AD⁷⁴. Based on stratigraphic considerations, however, it may be assumed that it was not the first fortification of the stronghold but at least the second one. Research is further complicated by the fact that the ramparts include nearly all cultural layers from the hill, which renders the analysis of any stratigraphic context within the ramparts extremely difficult.

SUMMARY

The lack of a clear horizon of finds dated to the 8th and the beginning of the 9th century at the Valy stronghold and in its vicinity on the slopes of the hill seems to confirm the presumption that it was established in the 9th century;⁷⁵ not at its very beginning, however, and there had been no earlier medieval settlement activity on the site. It is worth emphasising the observation that even the few items found so far at Valy and going back to 8th century or the beginning of the 9th are all damaged or detached from larger items, which may prove that these objects did not get underground at the time of their use but later as scrap, presumably coming from the nearby Žihľavník. Foundation of the stronghold (or possibly an open settlement first) at Valy is presumably related to the emer-

gence of the later Great Moravian state and therefore, at best, should be dated to the second quarter of 9th century or perhaps even later. At this point, it is difficult to determine whether this was related to changes in the social structure among local Slavs after the downfall of the Avar Khaganate or to actions taken by the Mojmir dynasty. It can be assumed, however, that in case of the first hypothesis the settlement would not have moved to the adjacent hill (unless some factors occurred that we are not aware of). In any case, considering the issue as a whole, it can be stated with certainty that the Bojná agglomeration remained an important focal point throughout the Early Middle Ages, first tribal, then Great Moravian, until the fall of this organisation at the beginning of the 10th century.

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⁷⁴ HENNING–RUTTKAY 2011, 280; PIETA 2013.

⁷⁵ PIETA 2013.

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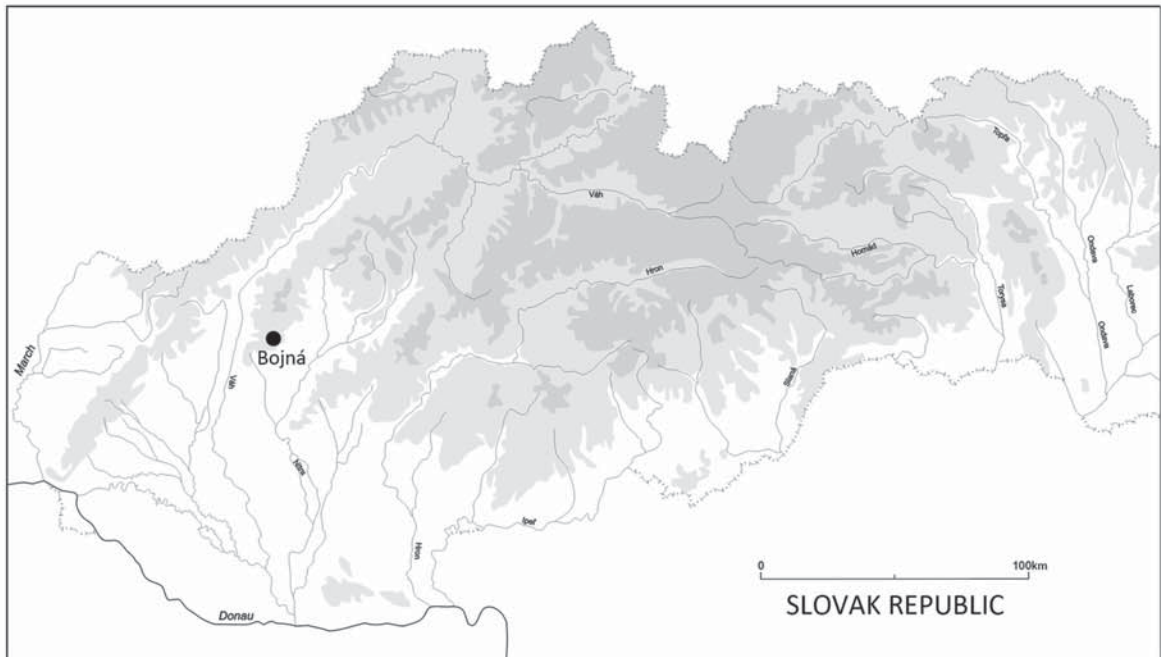
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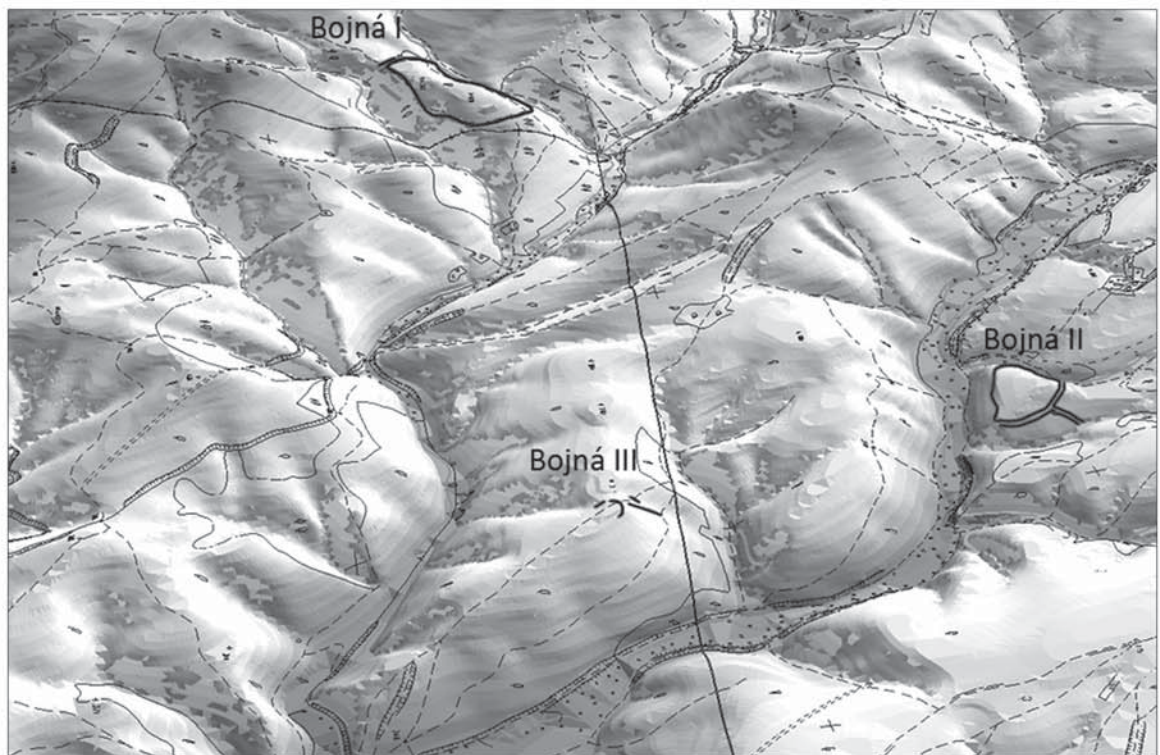
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НАХОДКИ РУБЕЖА VIII И IX ВЕКОВ ИЗ С. БОЙНА (СЛОВАКИЯ) И ЕГО ОКРЕСНОСТИ

В статье представлено коллекцию находок, датируемых рубежом VIII и IX века. Эти артефакты происходят из раскопок и полевых исследований, проведенных на трех городищах, расположенных в с. Бойна. Основной и крупнейший памятник – Бойна I (Валы) связан главным образом, с второй половиной IX века, но начало славянского населения в бойненской окрестности датируется VII или рубежом VII и VIII века. Самые древние находки происходят из памятника Бойна III (Жихлявник). Во VIII веке Жихлявник был небольшим городищем или укрепленном поселением, что делает его одним из самых ранних славянских городищ в Центральной Европе. Количество уникальных находок, а также укрепления доказывают, что это место являлось важным в жизни местного населения, а может быть, было племенным центром. Жихлявник был заброшен, вероятно в начале или в первой половине IX века, когда поселение было перенесено на холм Валы, однако значение этого памятника подтверждает также присутствие двух курганов, датируемых второй половиной IX века.



1



2

Fig. 1. 1: Location of Bojná; 2: Location of archaeological sites in the cadaster of Bojná
Рис. 1. 1: Местоположение с. Бойна; 2: Расположение археологических памятников в районе с. Бойна

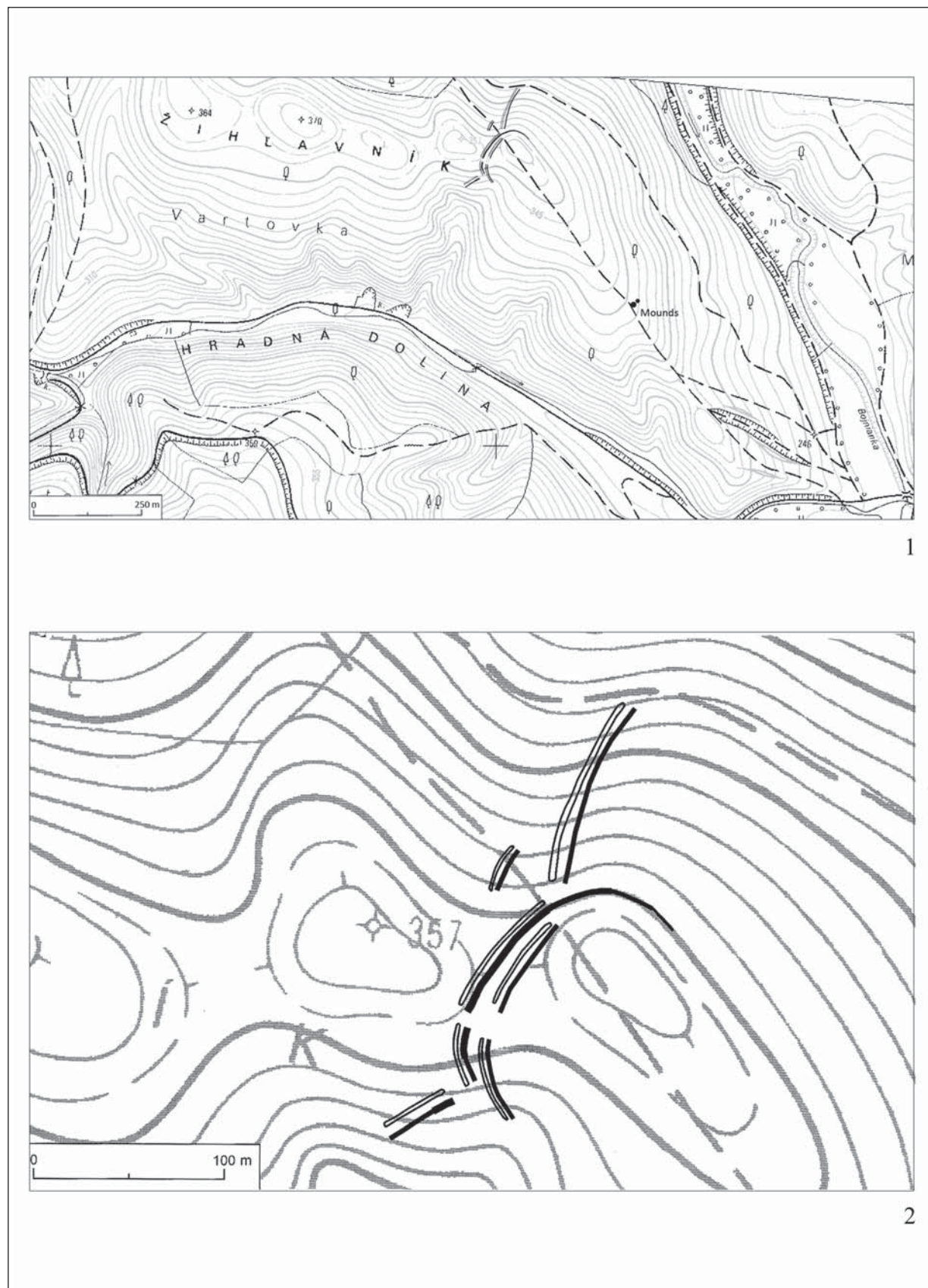


Fig. 2. 1: The Žihlavnik hill; 2: The ramparts at the Žihlavnik
 Рис. 2. 1: Возвышенность Жихлявник; 2: План валов городища Жихлявник

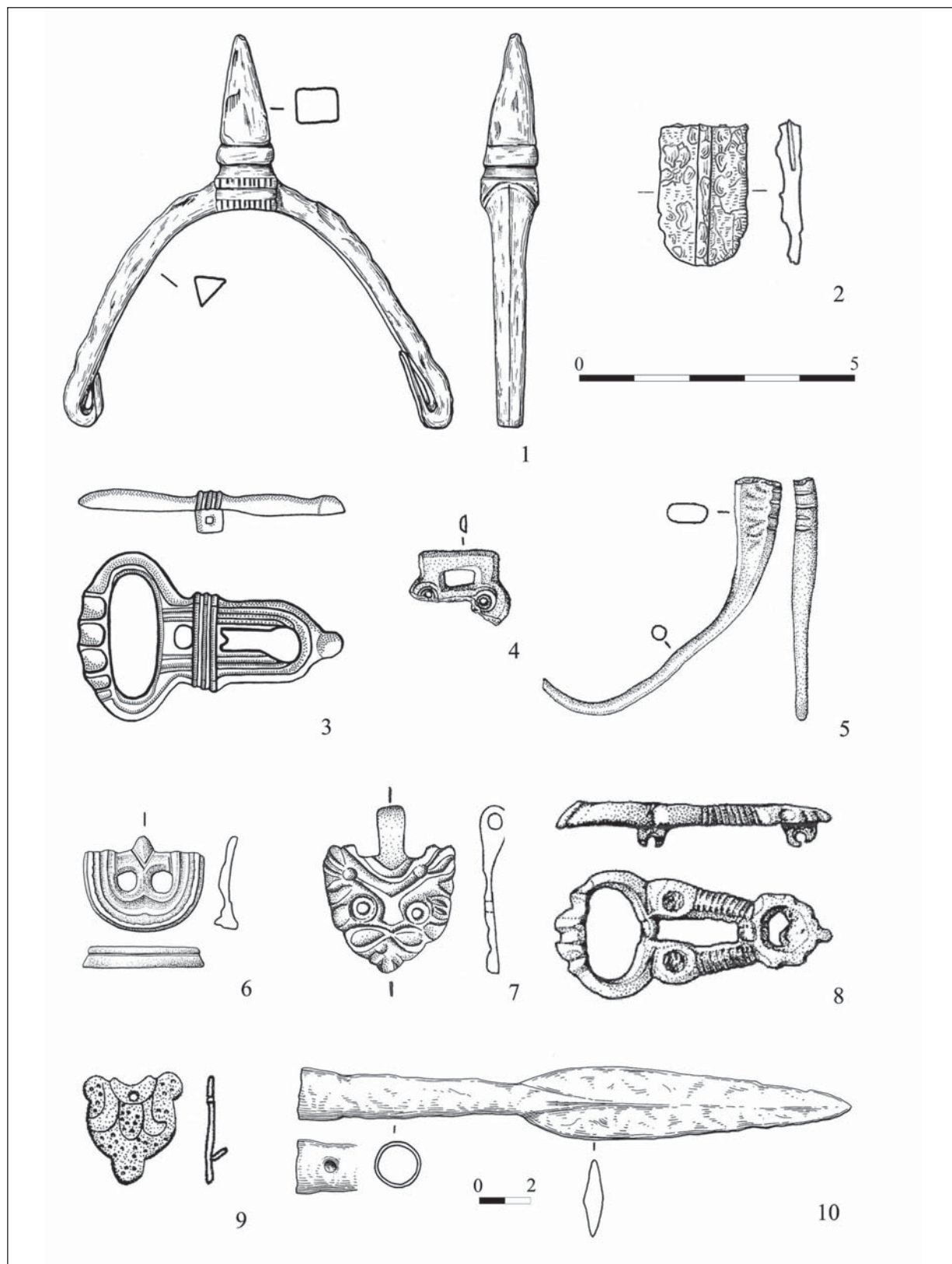


Fig. 3. Finds from the Bojná agglomeration; 1–5, 10: Bojná III-Žihľavník; 6–7: Bojná I-Valy; 8: Radošina; 9: Marhat hill area

Рис. 3. Находки из района с. Бойна; 1–5, 10: Бойна III Жихлявник; 6–7: Бойна I Валь; 8: Радошина; 9: Область возвышенности Мархат

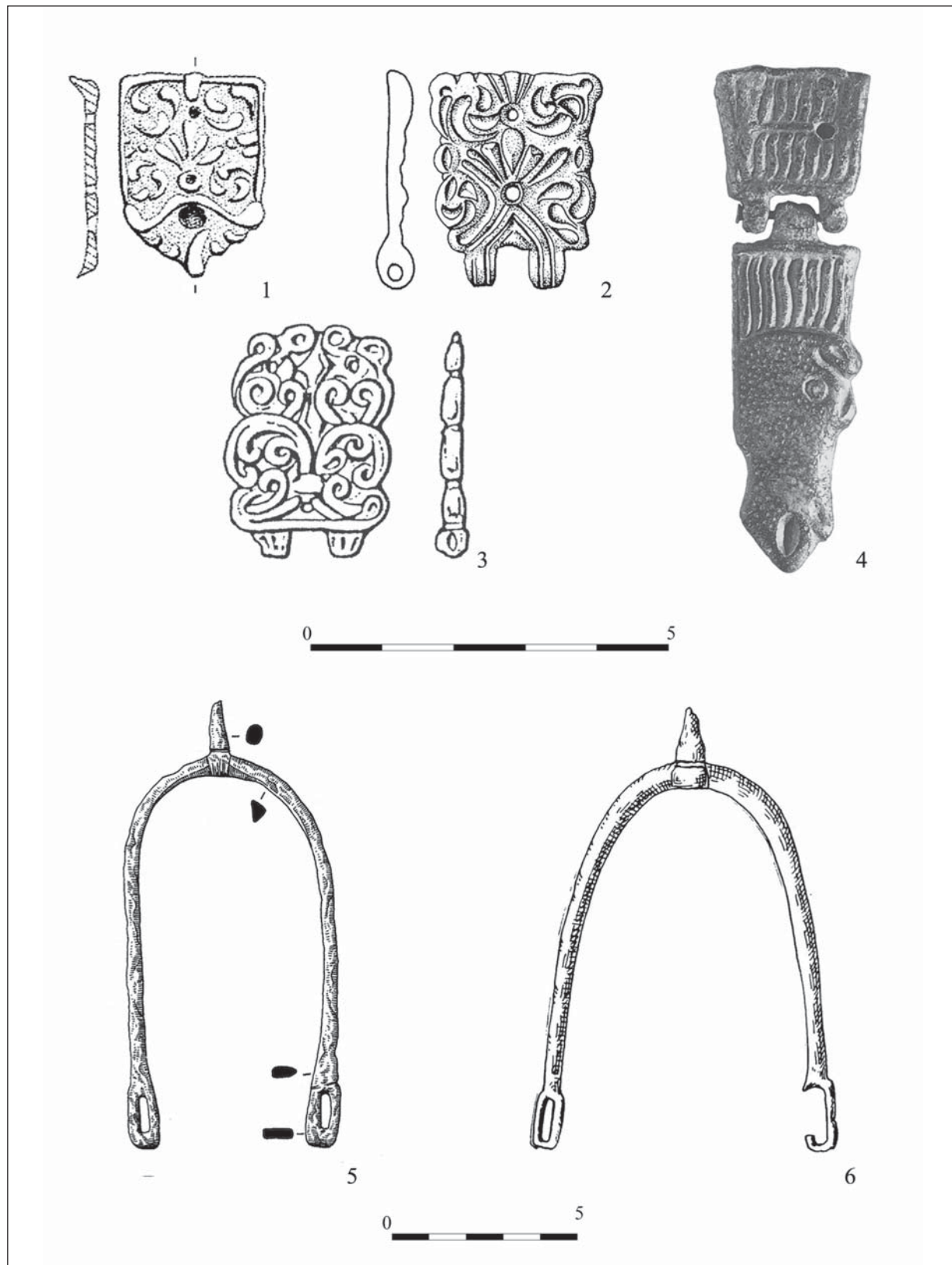


Fig. 4. 1: Klempenow; 2: Bojná I-Valy; 3: Kanín; 4: Devínska Nová Ves; 5–6: Quasi-looped spurs:

5: Bojná II-Hradisko; 6: Smolenice-Molpír

Рис. 4. 1: Клемпенув; 2: Бойна I Валь; 3: Канин; 4: Девинска Нова Вес; 5–6: Шпоры с лже-ушками:

5: Бойна II Храдиско; 6: Смоленице-Молпир

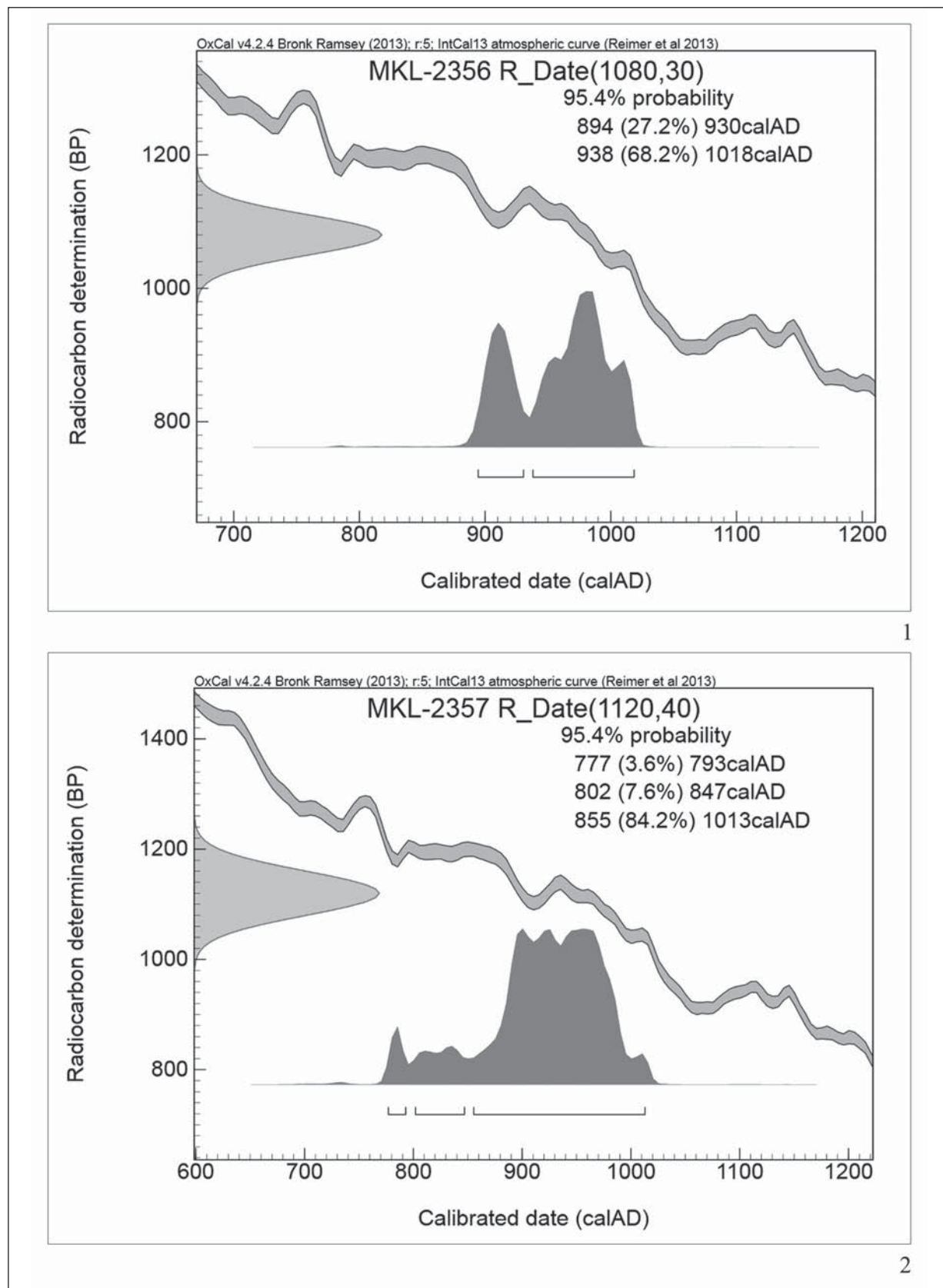


Fig. 5. Radiocarbon dating of burnt wood fragments from the moat at Bojná II-Hradisko stronghold
 Рис. 5. Радиоуглеродный анализ сгоревших фрагментов дерева из рва городища Бойна II Храдиско