

Jiří Macháček, Brno: *The Slave Trade in Great Moravia: Reality or Fiction?*

The slave trade in Great Moravia and the early Přemyslid Bohemia has recently become a major issue in the research of Czech archaeologists and historians. Most of them attach great importance to it and consider it one of the principal sources of the economic boom in Eastern Central Europe of the early Middle Ages. However, there are also critics of the existing approach who question the significance of this phenomenon and take the assumed extent of the slave trade in Great Moravia to be exaggerated. In my contribution I would like to present a brief overview of the whole debate and put forward some arguments which testify for the hypothesis of trading in people in Great Moravia mainly from the point of view of archaeology.

The most recent chapter concerning research into the slave market in Great Moravia was begun in 2000 by the Czech historian Dušan Třeštík in his study of early medieval Prague. No less important a contribution to the discussion was an influential monograph by Michael McCormick from 2001 and his text from 2002, published in the proceedings "Europa im 10. Jahrhundert". The above studies are frequently cited in Czech publications together with a text by Joachim Henning from 1992 about finds of iron shackles. It was above all Třeštík who formulated his conviction that the income from the slave trade constituted the economic basis of the early medieval polities, including Bohemia in the 10th century and Great Moravia in the 9th century.

However, awareness of the early medieval trade in Slav slaves had latently been present in Czech research for a much longer period, at least from the 1920s, when it was drawn attention to by a Charles University professor Lubor Niederle in his monumental work *Slovanské starožitnosti*/"Slavic

Antiquities" (1923). He studied primarily written sources of Arabic provenance in particular, which he combined with linguistic analysis. He analysed in detail the etymology of the word "slave" in various European languages (German – Sklave, Dutch – slaef, French – esclave, Spanish – esclavo, Portuguese - escravo, Italian - schiavo), whereby he pointed out that "the national name Slav did not originate, as some used to hold, from the designation of a slave, but quite on the contrary". In Slav languages a slave was named in a different way, either as a "rab", from the verb "robit, rabit", that is to work, or as an "otrok". This is a term which was used both for designating slaves of foreign descent, who could not speak an understandable language, and also for infants. Nevertheless, Niederle did not connect the trade slave with the existence of Great Moravia.

In the second half of the 20th century, at a time when research into the Great Moravian heritage received massive support on the part of the state and the interpretation of archaeological finds was strongly influenced by the nationalist or communist ideology, the issue of the slave trade in Great Moravia was played down. An image of the **Moravian** dukes as slave hunters did not quite fit the official concept of Great Moravia as the first western-Slav early feudal state with a sophisticated culture, the ethos of which was based on the eastern spiritual tradition, Slav literature and (*quote*) "the struggle of the Slav church against the Franco-Bavarian church hierarchy" (Pouлік 1975, 5-7).

An essential shift in approaching this problem was brought about by the above mentioned study by D. Třeštík from 2000. This eminent Czech historian arrived at the opinion that "the slave trade was the driving force of the secular process of the making of Central Europe". With its assistance, an early medieval state received the finances which were to be the principal and decisive precondition of its origin. This money was invested by the state primarily into its professional military. It was impossible to collect the required amount in any other way, such as levying a **tributum pacis** paid by

all freemen. Sufficient resources could have been secured at that time only through the slave trade, for which the Prague Přemyslid Boleslav I gained, as estimated by D. Třeštík, an amount corresponding to 3.5 to 7.5 tonnes of silver. With this it was possible to maintain an army of 3,000 horsemen. The slave trade was also behind the unprecedented rise of the Přemyslid Prague of the second half of the 10th century which for foreign merchants became something of a gateway to the Slav world. However, according to Třeštík, Prague was not the first generally known and frequently visited market with Slav slaves in Central Europe. It was preceded by the market of the Moravians which "played ... in the 9th century the same or similar role as Prague in the 10th century". We are informed of its existence from the [Raffelstetten Customs Regulations](#) as well as some Arabic sources, in particular the so-called Anonymous Relation, which has been lost, but was excerpted in works by later authors, for example Ibn Rusta. The location of that market is vague, Třeštík connected it with the archaeological site of Mikulčice, albeit without clear evidence. Old Slavic sources, such as The Life of Constantine, The Life of St Clement or The Life of Naum, are also often cited in relation with the export of slaves from Eastern Central Europe in the 9th century.

The market of the Moravians was frequented by the Jewish Radanites, as well as the merchants of Venice and Bavaria, who would take the slaves away from there in two different directions. The western route led over Regensburg, Verdun as far as the Caliphate of Córdoba in the Iberian peninsula and further on via the port in Almeria to the Maghreb. The southern, or south-eastern way was routed through Venice to the Near East. Slav slaves, called al-Sakaliba in Arabic, must have arrived in great numbers. Just in the court of one of the caliphs of Córdoba, Abd-ar-Rahman III, in the first half of the 10th century, they stood at 13 750 (Brantjes). They are mentioned for the first time as early as during the Spanish Umayyad ruler al-Hakim who was in power between 796-822.

Their influx culminated in the 10th century. In the Caliphate of Córdoba they served as military slaves or eunuchs. Slav women filled up Muslim harems.

Archaeological evidence of the slave trade is sparse. Finds which should provide evidence of the slave trade in Great Moravia include, in the first place, iron shackles. Their occurrence in the Roman and post-Roman Europe was described in several studies, the most recent one from 2008, by Joachim Henning. His analysis reveals an important finding that in the period from 250 BC to 1500 AD there were two peaks in the occurrence of iron shackles in archaeological finds. The first and more pronounced one is dated around 250 AD, that is in the era of the greatest culmination of the Roman villa whose economy was based on the work of the *coloni* and the still continuing work of the slaves. The second lower peak falls between the 8th to the 10th century and according to Joachim Henning reflects the importance of the slave trade for the Carolingian economy. A very interesting map of the geographical distribution of early medieval shackles indicates that they do not occur inside the Carolingian Empire, but rather on its periphery, where the pagan slaves used to be hunted, collected and sold to the **large-scale traders**. Their caravans only passed through the heart of the Carolingian Empire. Outstanding among the areas where the post-Roman shackles occur is the region controlled from the Great Moravian fortresses. There we notice one of the conspicuous concentrations of shackles in Europe of that time. It should be admitted though that the total number of finds is relatively low and the presented picture is strongly influenced by the present state of research.

That said, the distribution of shackles in Moravia and its nearest surroundings still deserves our attention. They appear both in the great Moravian centres, in the core of the Great Moravian

Empire – Staré Zámky near Brno and Staré Město, and in its periphery. A find of parts of shackles made at the Chotěbuz – Podobora stronghold in Silesia is of exceptional significance. It is interpreted by Pavel Kouřil as an important strategic base of the Great Moravians for launching an expansion against the Golensizi and the Vistulan Slav tribes. The presence of a Great Moravian garrison at this stronghold is clearly evidenced by typical material culture – weapons and jewellery (Kouřil – Gryc 2011, 236). It is one of the locations from where Moravian warriors could set off on slave-hunting raids among their pagan neighbours in today's Silesia and Lesser Poland.

Further indicators testifying to the slave trade have the nature of more or less indirect evidence.

According to M. McCormick one possible way of identifying potential sites of markets with slaves is by the characteristic layout of the settlements and their placement. Sites where the slaves were gathered and where they waited for the arrival of the merchant caravans should lie on long-distance communications, such as the Amber Road. Instead of numerous abodes for small families, they should rather be built-up with accommodation facilities for a greater number of people. NO artisan workshops and weapons should be found on these sites. Another feature that comes to mind is fencing which would divide the hunters of people from their catch. Another indicator of such a market is, in M. McCormick's opinion, a relatively high mortality among the transported people, especially young men, who were castrated. However, this argument cannot be applied in locating a market within the Moravian territory as the slaves were castrated at other sites, in particular Verdun (Brantjes 270) or as far as the Spanish territory. With reference to Arabian authors (Chakal, Mukaddési, Ar-Rakík), this is also supported by Lubor Niederle, according to whom the slaves leaving the Slav territory had not yet been castrated.

If we compare the situations uncovered by excavations in the important centres of Great Moravia, McCormick's ideal type of a slave gathering site comes closest to the so-called bailey in Mikulčice – **one of the most important Great Moravian central places**. Excavation campaigns took place there most importantly in the 60's. In connection with extending the building with the museum exhibition the latest stage of excavating the Mikulčice bailey was conducted between 2013-2014. Josef Poulík, the discoverer of the Great Moravian Mikulčice and for many years the head of the site excavations, describes the bailey as follows: "After removing ... the humous layer ... about seventy **floors** from clay and yellow sand – rammed floors of former log houses - emerged. The houses built in irregular rows ... were separated from one another by narrow lanes, they had square or rectangular plans and a living area of 16-70 m²". This area is **up to** four times larger than in an average half-sunken dwelling of a standard Slav family. The investigated surface did not exhibit any traces of production activities or workshops. According to Poulík, the accommodation facility in the Mikulčice bailey was lived in by the **members of the ducal retinue**. It would have been the site of its barracks. Poulík supports his argument by the occurrence of spurs and belt **fittings**, as well as a high number of animal bones in this location, but does not quantify the finds and his claims cannot be verified. The supervisors of the ongoing excavations in the Mikulčice bailey state that during the last two campaigns no spurs or belt **fittings** were uncovered. Personally, I tend to think that the densely built-up area with large-space houses in the specially demarcated and fenced off space of the bailey could have also served as a camp for captives from the military campaigns of the Moravian dukes, who offered these unfortunate victims for sale to people traders at the regular and generally well-known markets held in the Moravian centres.

Different characteristics are encountered with in another of the Great Moravian central places - Pohansko near Břeclav situated directly on the Amber Road. The dominating feature in its southern

suburb was exactly those half-sunken dwellings with an **stone** oven in the corner – a typical abode of the nuclear Slav family. Among the finds we register an increased share of parts of equestrian equipment, such as spurs, stirrups, and buckles from the harness - clearly this did not serve to accommodate slaves. However, the situation within the walls was significantly different. The dominant feature in the built-up area is the so-called Magnate Court with a church and a rich cemetery. This residential complex is interpreted as a simplified imitation of the palatium of a Carolingian pfalz and one of the possible residences of members of the ruling dynasty. Apart from the central Magnate Court the space within the fortifications was subdivided into many smaller homesteads or **plots** from where we have numerous pieces of evidence of artisan production. Some of the excavated features were interpreted as gynoecea, which served as textile workshops where the workforce comprised **enslaved** women. Interestingly, only very few typical Slav half-sunken dwellings occupied by nuclear families occur inside the walls. In contrast, we find there larger above-ground spherical structures which could have served to collectively accommodate the enslaved workforce. Among the settlement features we encounter a relatively high number of graves situated either individually or in small clusters. Given the poor grave goods and the various anomalies in the positions (e.g. crouched, prone **position**, tied bodies, etc.) it is thought they belonged to people from the lowest echelons of the social hierarchy – for example slaves. In this case the slaves would not have been predestined for sale to foreign merchants but had worked directly for the needs of the Great Moravian ruler.

Another indicator of the lucrative trading in people, securing the merchants a profit of hundreds to thousands of percent, is the distribution of coins or luxurious articles of goods and weapons alongside the trade routes taken by the merchant caravans. McCormick, for example, draws attention to the **spatial distribution** of individual Byzantine solids along the Amber Road leading

from the central Danubian region to Venice. However, the number of these coins pales almost into insignificance when compared to the huge quantities of the silver dirhems, flowing in from Central Asia to Russia, Gotland, to Sweden, Pomerania or central Poland. This discrepancy is explained by Marek Jankowiak as a result of the existence of two different trading systems, which were present in the west-Slavic countries in the early Middle Ages. Within the territory of today's Czech Republic, Slovakia, Malopolska (Lesser Poland) and Hungary, bar very rare exceptions, we do not find any large hoards of early medieval coins buried in the ground before 960. We also do not know any significant numbers of single finds of coin loss from that period. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in the territories situated farther to the north and the east. According to Jankowiak, Spanish merchants who travelled to Prague in the 10th century did not exchange slaves for coins, but for exotic and luxurious goods. The situation did not change dramatically until the 960s when the Bohemian Přemyslids started to mint coins – initially probably Bavarian imitations and later their own denars. The need for coins emerged at the moment when slave suppliers from more remote areas arrived at the market in Prague and the local Czech elites began to act as mere middlemen in the business transactions. In the earlier, coinless, period the Přemyslids exchanged their own “captives” directly for goods which they were interested in, and there was no need for **middleman** or coins. This also applies to Great Moravia where coins are also absent from archaeological finds. On the other hand, we do know from there a relatively high number of imports, such as glass vessels and beads, silk, weapons and non-monetary gold and silver transformed into the form of luxurious Great Moravian jewellery.

The latest archaeological finds made in the environs of one of the Great Moravian centres at Pohansko near Břeclav indicate that the development in the core of the former Great Moravian Empire followed to a great extent the same path as the situation in the Přemyslid Bohemia

described by Marek Jankowiak. After the decline of Great Moravia some time at the beginning of the 10th century, the Moravians themselves did not engage in slave hunting. However, their territory was crossed by important trade communications leading from the Baltic to the Mediterranean or to Prague, which in the 10th century became the principal market for Slav slaves in Central Europe. At first the preferred way was the northern route which bypassed the devastated core of Great Moravia and linked Prague, Olomouc and Krakow. From the 970s when the Hungarians adopted Christianity through Géza and his son Stephen and the central Danubian region ceased to be a dangerous zone, the second way leading to Hungary, the Danubian region and farther south or south-east gradually gained in importance, especially when in the 11th century, according to written reports, Hungary became something of a standard slave market for the Bohemians. From that period we have clear evidence for a multitude of Muslim merchants in Hungary (Třeštík 2000, 59).

At that time the Great Moravian Pohansko had already been abandoned. Its position in the settlement hierarchy was partly taken over by the nearby settlement in Kostice – Zadní hrúd. Although this important site was discovered only recently we have already registered there what is, so far, the largest collection of early medieval coin loss within the territory of the Czech Republic and one of the largest in the whole of Central and West Europe. The whole collection totals at least 191 coins, of which almost a half is coin loss. The second half is constituted by hoards dispersed over the surface of fields. The coins are complemented by finds of bimetallic spherical weights, jewellery, **spurs**, fragments of silver, etc. Kostice has many of the characteristics of the so-called productive sites, as we know them from the Anglo-Saxon world.

Kostice was originally the site of a **common** village, which in the 9th century belonged to the agricultural hinterland of the Great Moravian centre at Pohansko. The beginnings of the new boom of this settlement are identified by finds of Bavarian coins and their imitations. Four coins dated before and around the year 976 form the oldest and at the same time one of the largest collections of coin loss from the second half of the 10th century in Moravia. Alongside original coins minted in Regensburg, Nabburg and Augsburg, we also come across their local imitations, which according to some theories might have even preceded the official coinage of the Bohemian dukes. Faults in the minting of the imitational coin from Kostice – Zadní hrúd suggest that it need **not** have been made in an official mint, but rather somewhere in the trade centres, perhaps by the merchants themselves. In this respect attention should be drawn to the "age-old **right of minting** ", mentioned in chronicle written some time around the 1120s by the Prague canon Cosmas. In it, he describes the castle Podivín, founded by the christened Jew Podiva in ancient times. Podivín Castle is only about 12 km away, as the crow flies, from the settlement in Kostice.

Long-distance trade in the Kostice – Zadní hrúd area reached its peak around the mid-11th century. The greatest number of coins so far known to us, mainly from Hungarian coinage of Stephen and Andrew, come from that period where we also date the finds of the spherical bimetallic merchant weights (Kugelzonen-Gewichte) made by a metal detector and a fragment of merchant weighing scales unearthed in a settlement pit from the 11th century.

The settlement in Kostice – Zadní hrúd probably fulfilled the function of a market village, "villa cum foro". It seems that at the end of the 10th century something of a "land gateway" **or port of trade** started to form at the lower Dyje, a meeting point of three early medieval states (Přemyslid Moravia, Hungary and the Eastern March). This **port of trade** was very likely not a single site only but

something like a 25 km long chamber, where merchants and craftsmen started to assemble, and over time a system of interconnected settlements of various functions may have also emerged there. And it was from there that the merchant caravans taking away the slaves might have set off towards the west or the south.

However, at that time the Moravians no longer captured slaves, but rather acted as **middlemen** in business transactions between the northerners, arriving along the former Amber Road, and merchants from the south and the west. The trade route which entered Moravia near Kostice led from the central Danubian region and Hungary and headed either to the northwest towards Prague, or along the former Amber Road to Poland and the Baltic. It became established as early as the end of the 10th century, which is confirmed, apart from the finds in Kostice – Zadní hrúd, by hoards of **hundreds** West-European and Arabian coins and fragments of silver from northern and central Moravia, in Kelč, Komárov and most recently Kojetín. Finds of early medieval merchant weights, of which several dozen have already been recorded in Moravia, also accumulate along this route.

The hypothesis that the slave trade was a lifeline for Great Moravia and the Přemyslid Bohemia as proposed by Dušan Třeštík, cannot be unequivocally confirmed by archaeological means with the current state of our knowledge. However, many indirect indicators testify to it being correct. It is hoped that future research will take a further step in our awareness of this interesting phenomenon.

THE SLAVE TRADE IN GREAT MORAVIA: REALITY OR FICTION?

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Gniezno Doors, 12th c.

The recent research concerning the Early Mediaeval slave trade in Central Europe



Dušan Třeštík

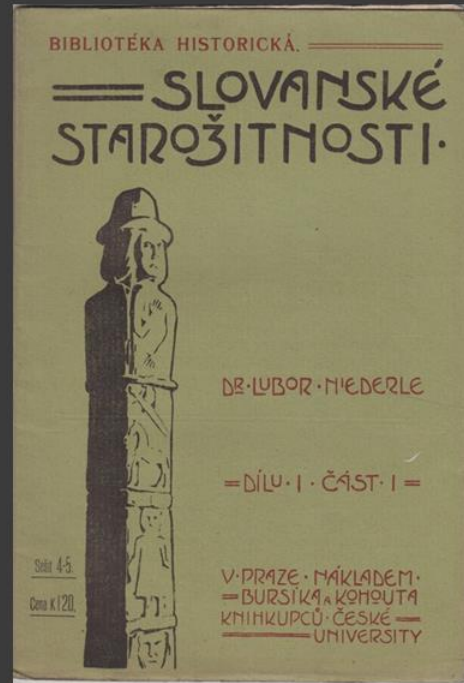


Michael McCormick



Joachim Henning

Lubor Niederle: Slav x slave



Etymology of the word “slave” in various European languages:

- German – *Sklave*
- Dutch – *slaef*
- French – *esclave*
- Spanish – *esclavo*
- Portuguese – *escravo*
- Italian – *schiaivo*

Slavic term for slaves:
rab or *otrok*

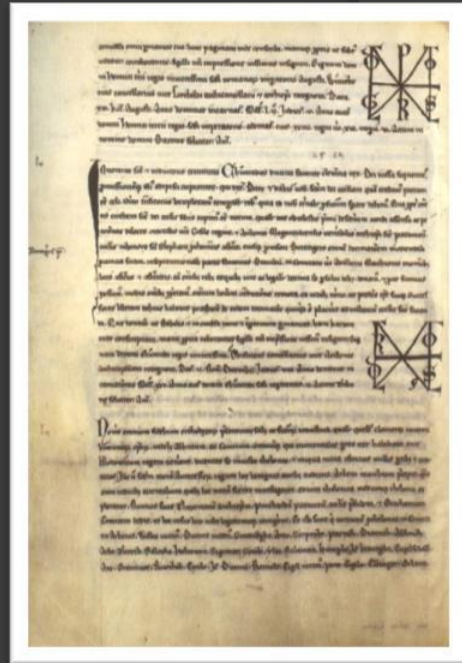
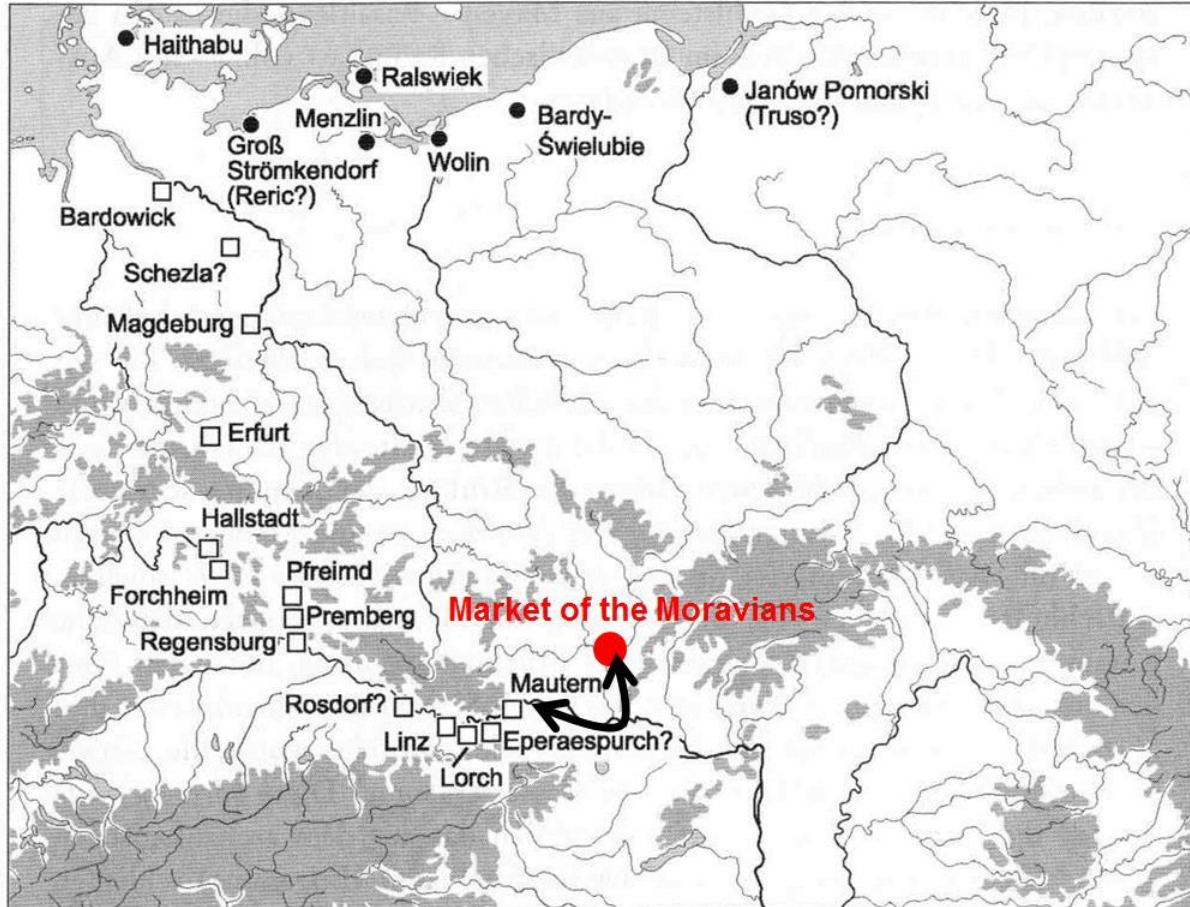
L. Niederle (1923): “the national name **Slav** did not originate, as some used to hold, from the designation of a **slave**, but quite on the contrary”

Dušan Třeštík (2000)



*“the slave trade
was the driving
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process of the
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Europe“*

Market of the Moravians

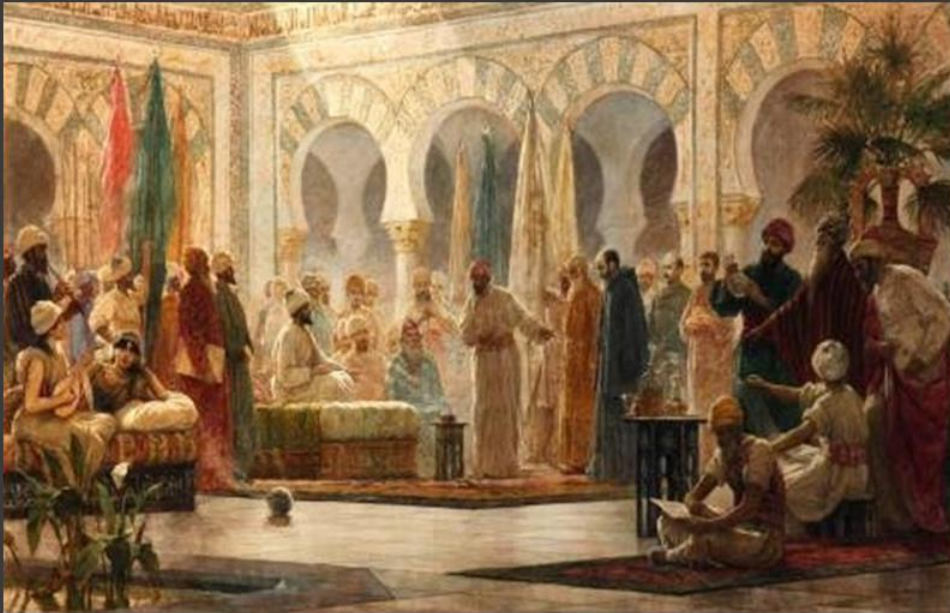


Raffeletten Customs
Regulations
903-905

Abb. 66. Seehandelsplätze (●) und Grenzhandelsorte (□) des 9. Jahrhunderts. Die administrativ festgesetzten Plätze für den Handel mit den Slawen sind aus dem Diederhofener Capitulare von 805 und der Raffeletten Zollordnung von 903/905 bekannt. Sämtliche Seehandelsplätze lassen sich, da sie im 10. Jahrhundert aufgegeben wurden, nur mit Hilfe der Archäologie lokalisieren, wenn auch *Reric* und *Truso* namentlich überliefert sind Nach S. Brather (ergänzt)

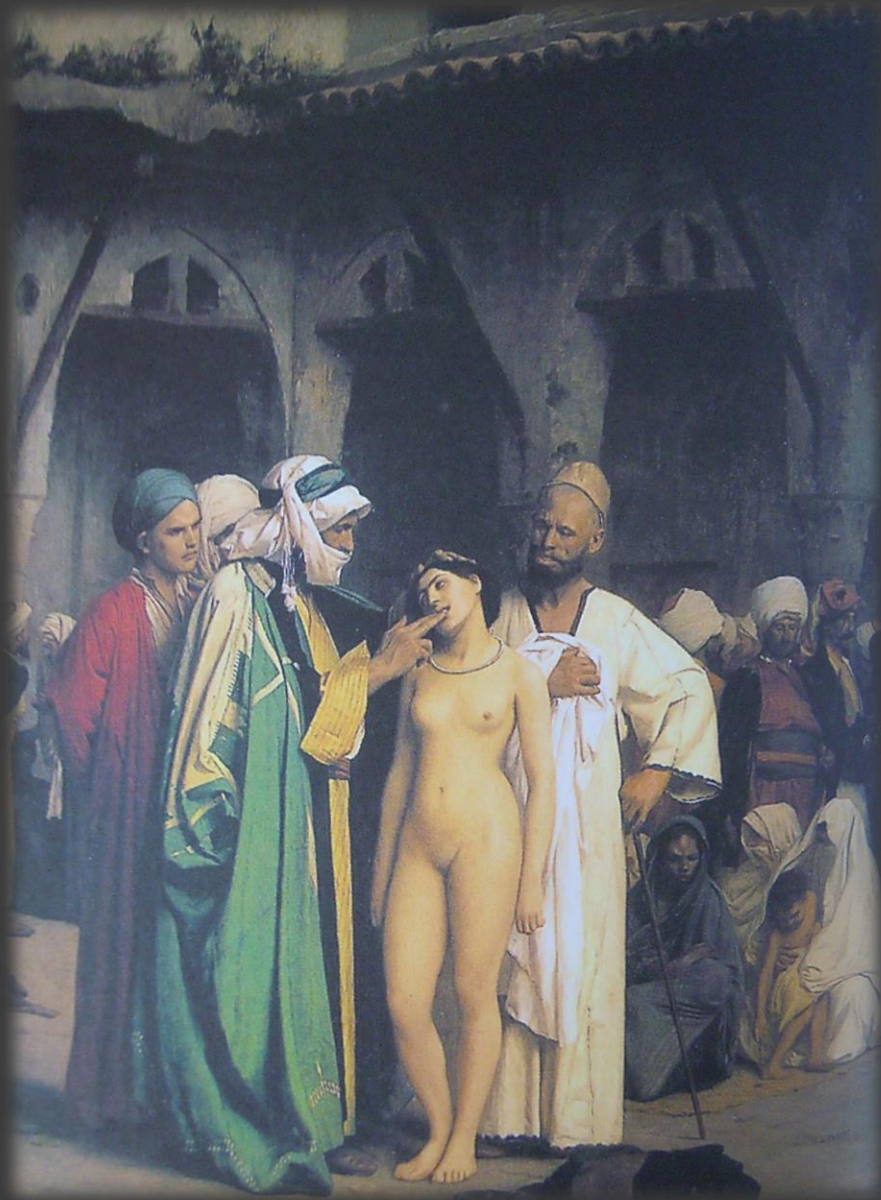
Abd-ar-Rahman III

Emir and Caliph of Córdoba (912–961)

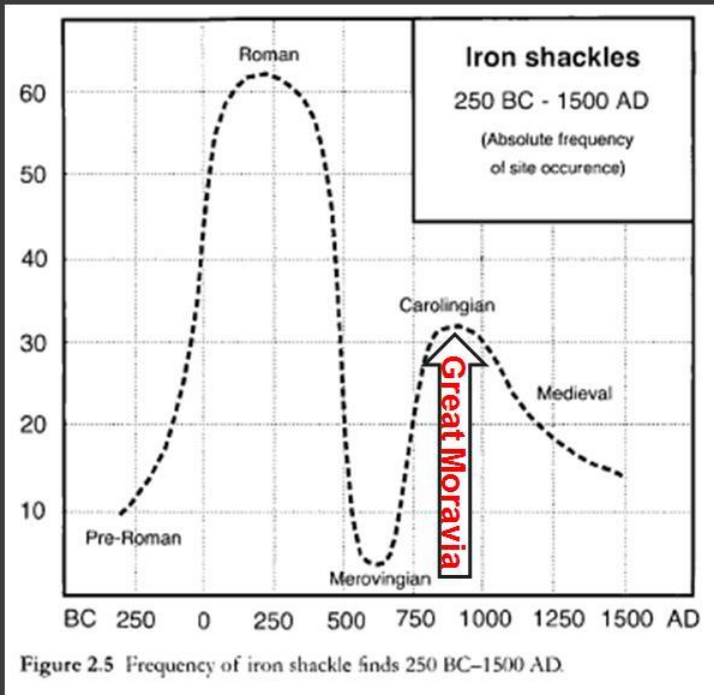


In the court of one of the caliphs of Córdoba, Abd-ar-Rahman III, in the first half of the 10th century, was 13 750 Slav slaves, called al-Sakaliba

Romantic imagination of the slave market in Maghreb



Chronological and spatial distribution of (Post-)Roman shackles

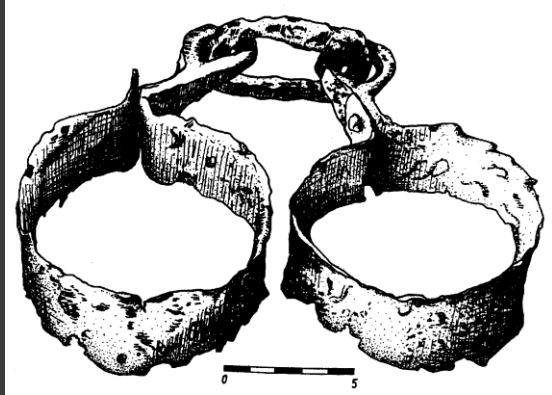


according to Henning 2007

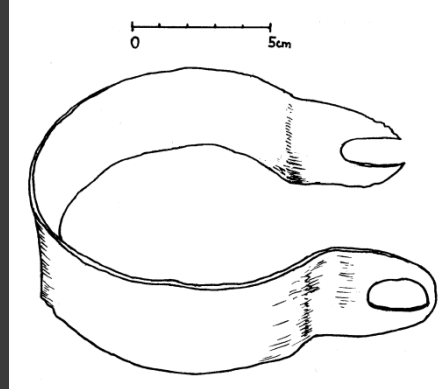


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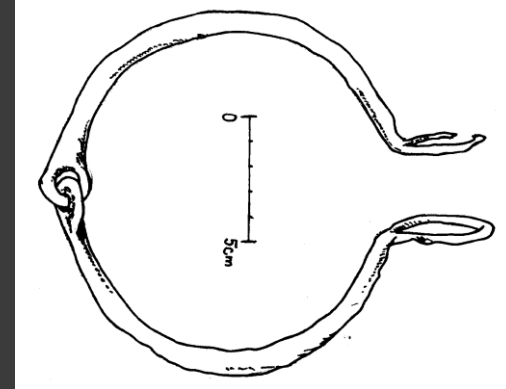
Iron shackles from Great Moravia



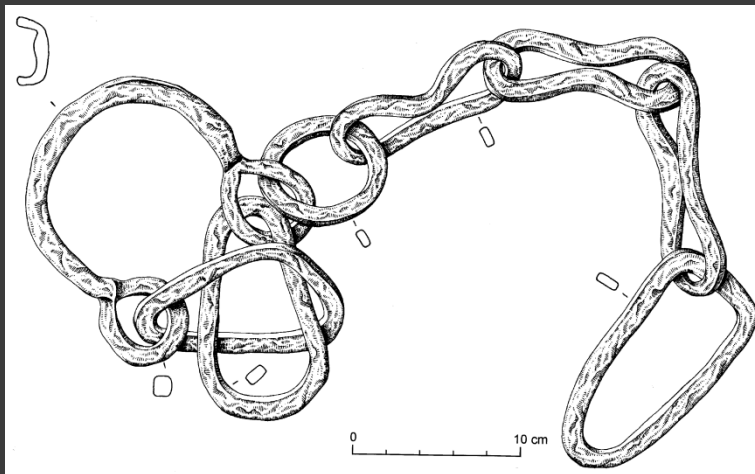
Staré Město



Chotěbuz/Podobora

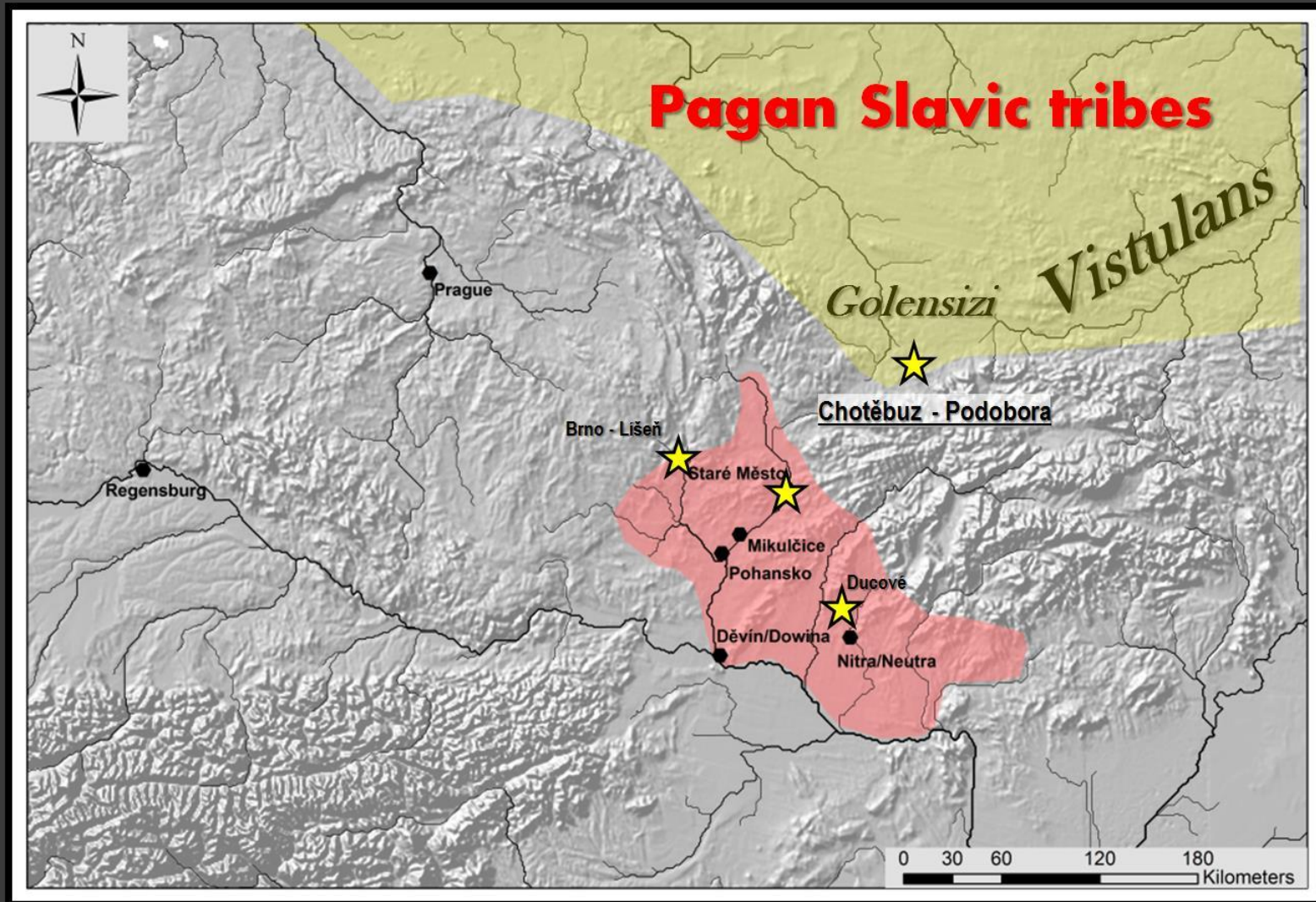


St. Zámky/Brno-Líšeň



Bojná

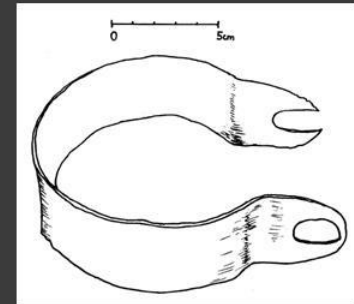
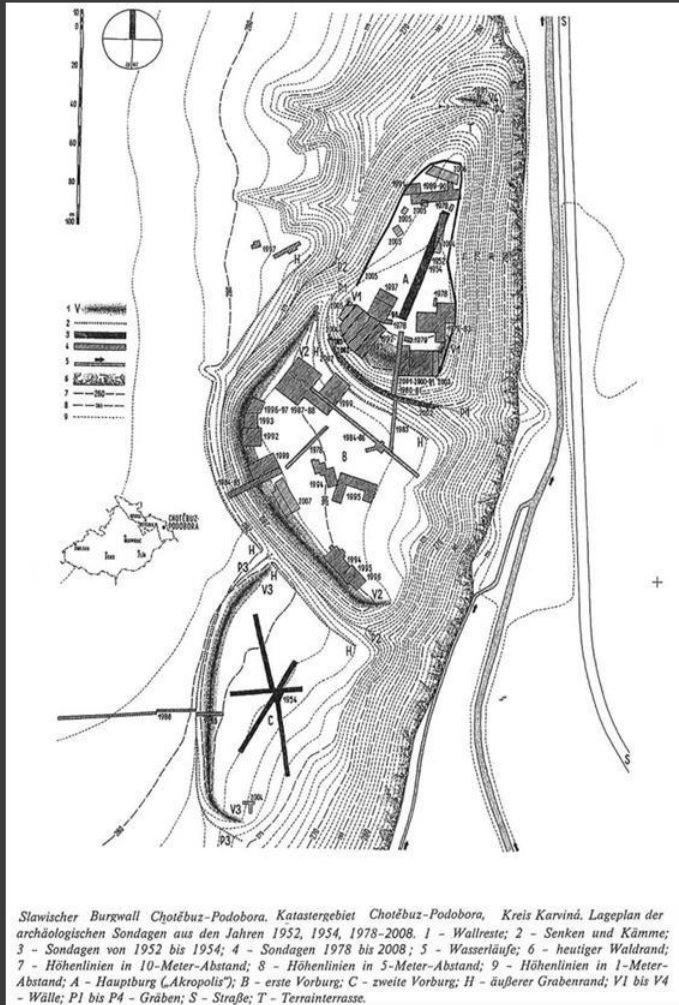
Distribution of shackles in the core of the Great Moravian (in red) and in its periphery



★ finds of shackles

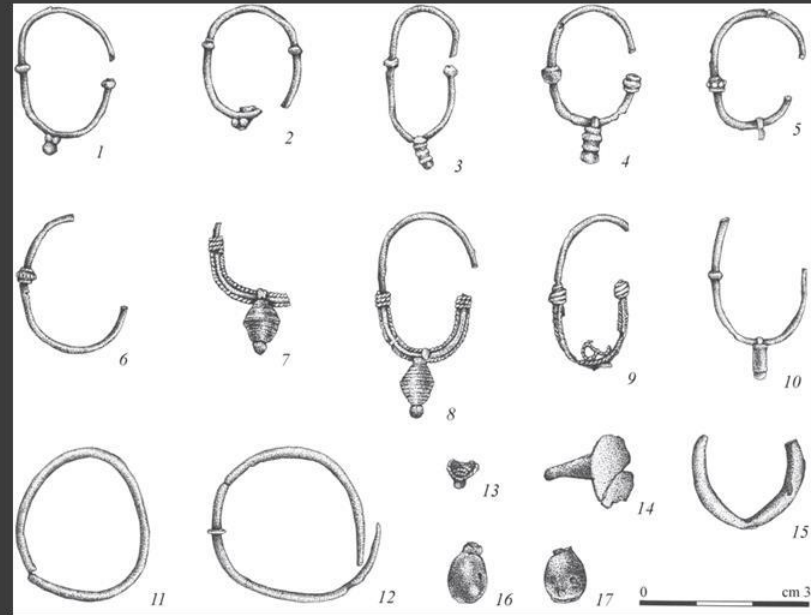
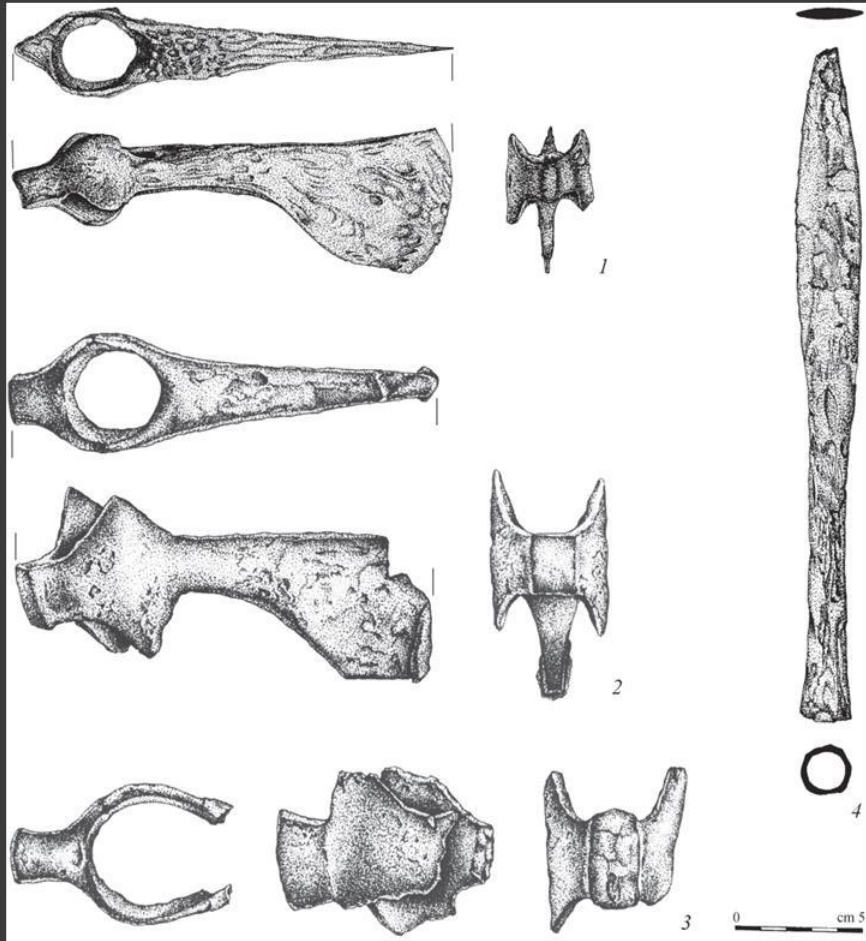
Chotěbuz/Podobora:

base of the Great Moravians for launching an expansion against pagan Slavic tribes in Silesia



Chotěbuz – Podobora:

Great Moravian weapons and jewelry



Mikulčice - Valy

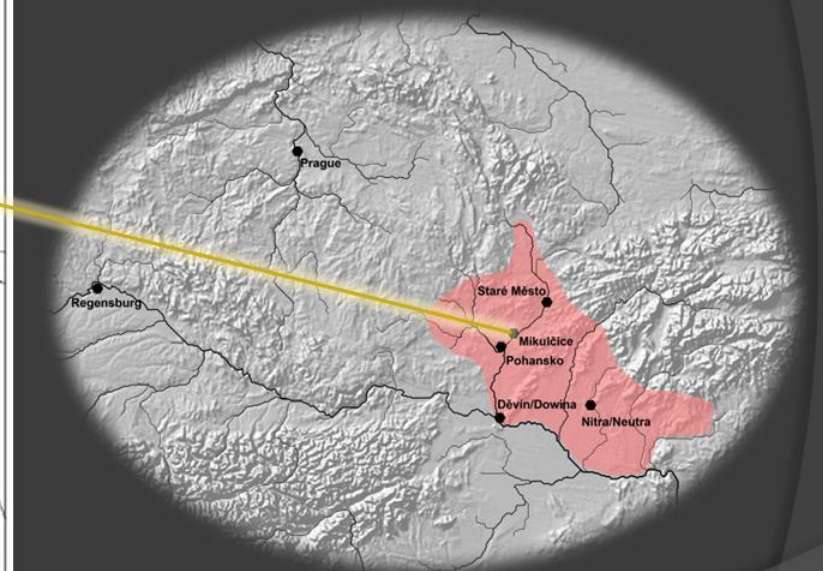
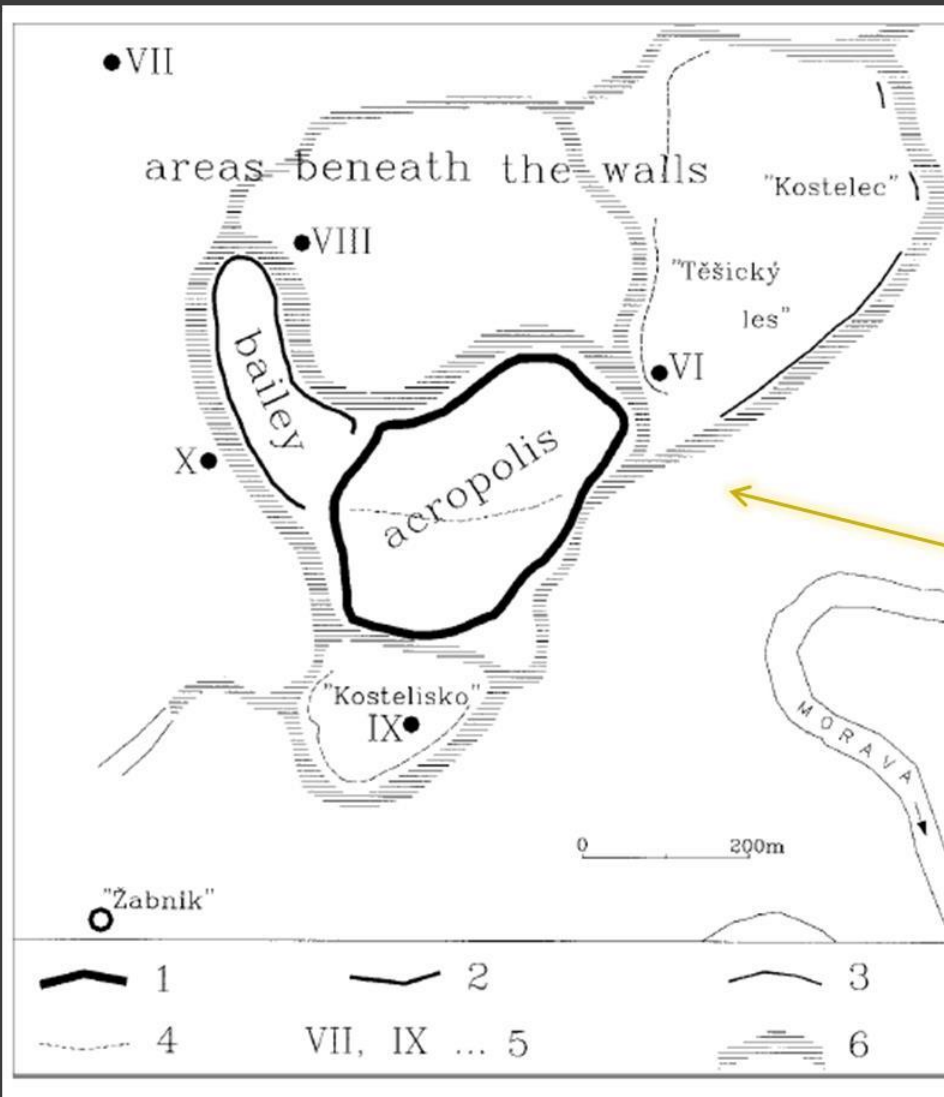
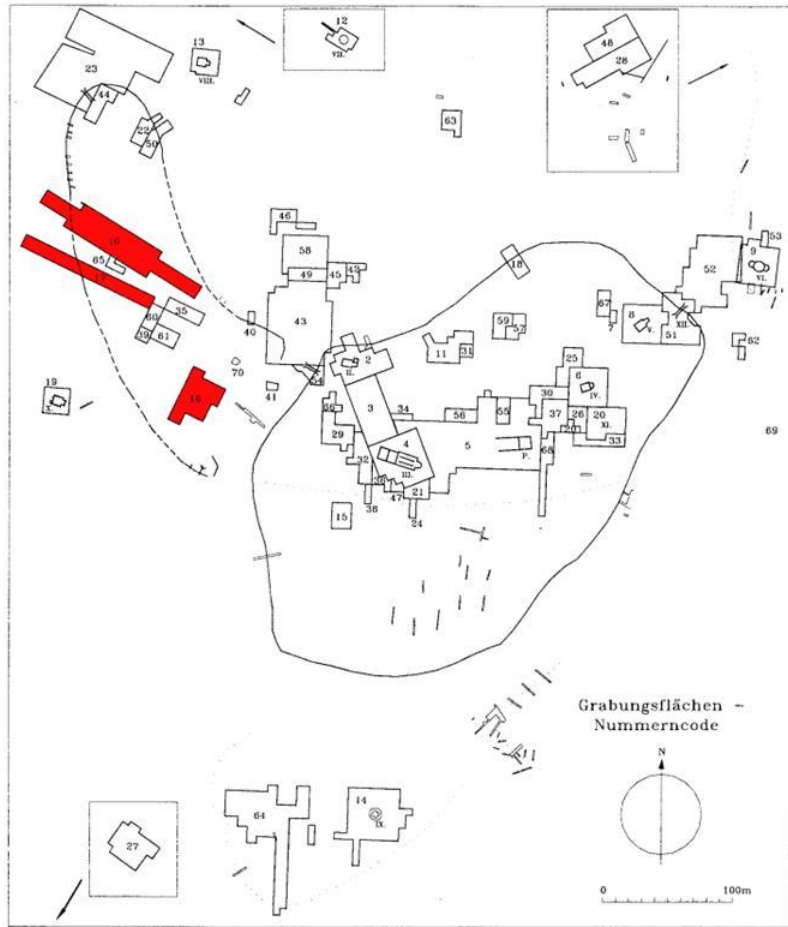


Fig. 10. Mikulčice-Valy (district Hodonín), hillfort. Schematic layout of the topographic situation. Legend: 1. the acropolis fortification; 2. archeologically proved fortification of the bailey; 3. earth embankment along the east line of "Těšický les" in the area beneath the walls; 4. field edges of raised parts on the acropolis and in the area beneath the walls; 5. established numbering of churches (indicated only churches in the area beneath the walls); 6. assumed course of river channels

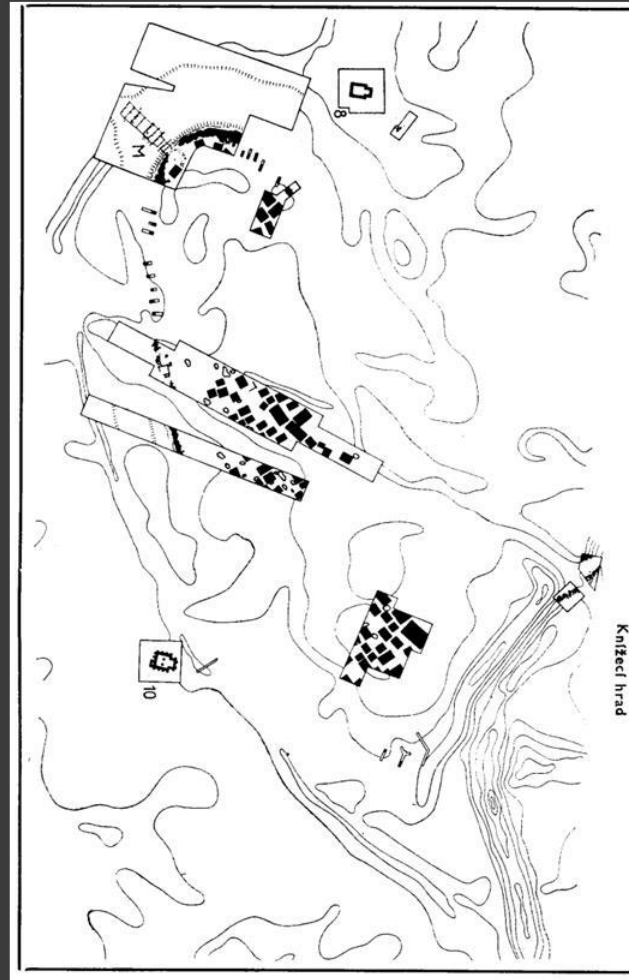
according to Polacek 2007

Mikulčice–Valy: excavation of bailey



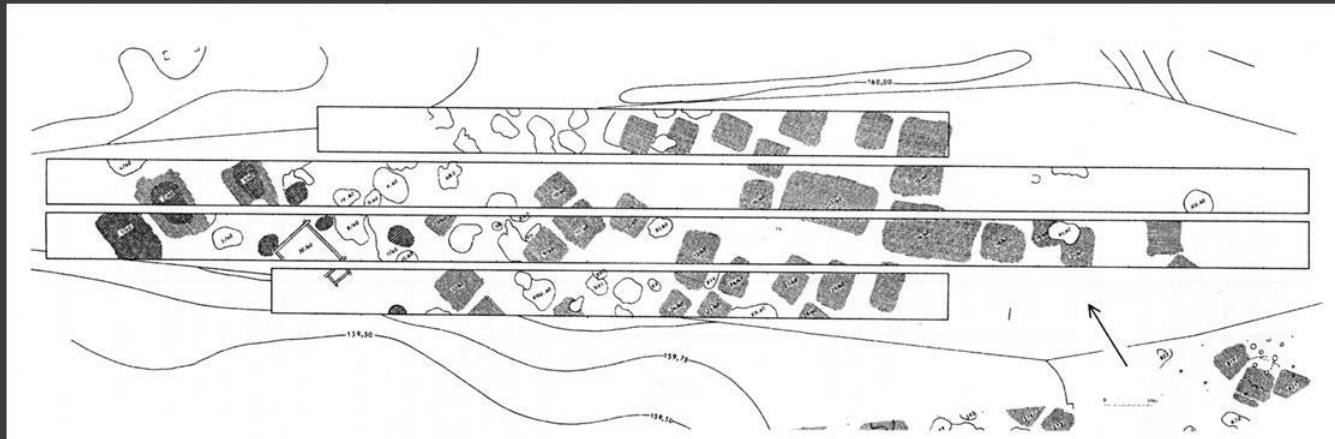
Mikulčice-Valy. Untersuchte Fläche 1954-1992 mit Nummerncode der Grabungsflächen (2-70):

according to Polacek and Marek 2005

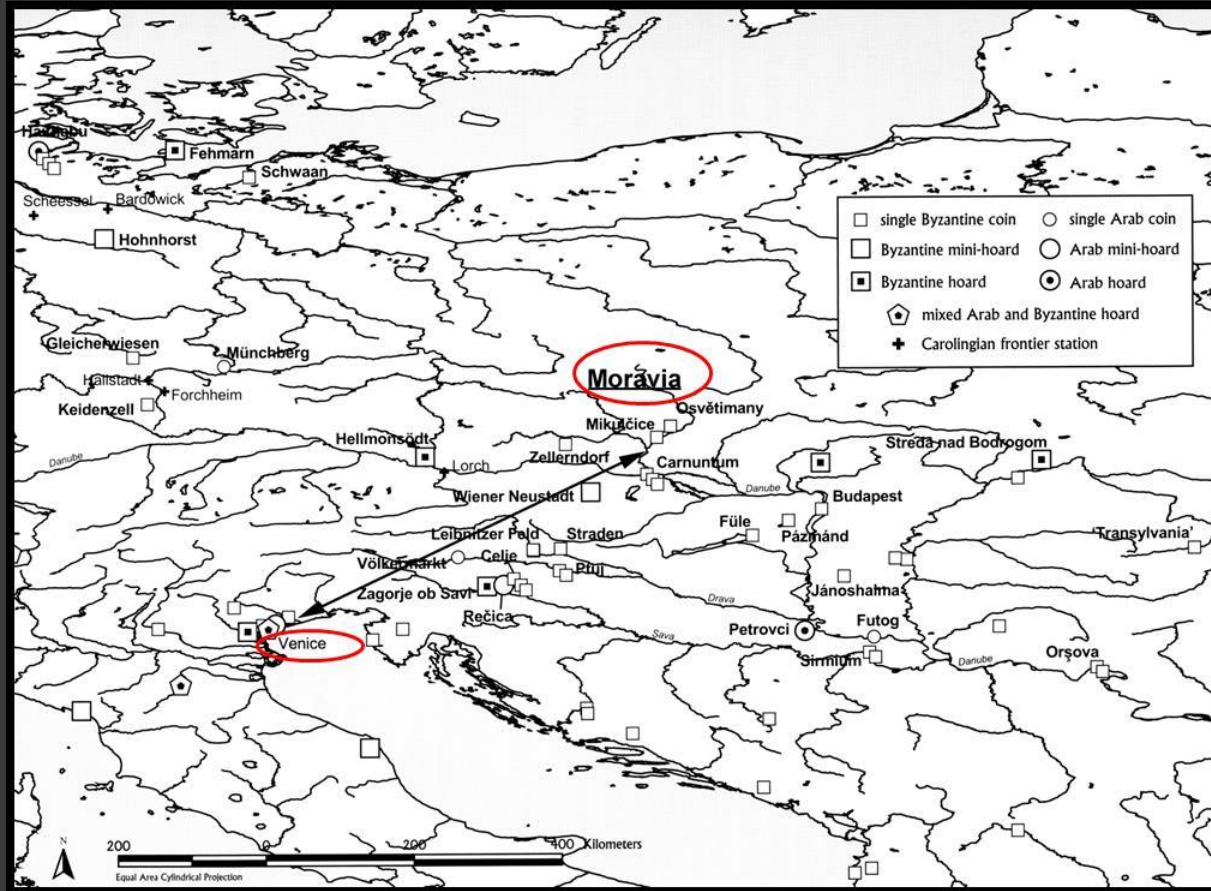


according to Poulik 1975

Mikulčice–Valy: densely built-up area with large-space houses in the bailey

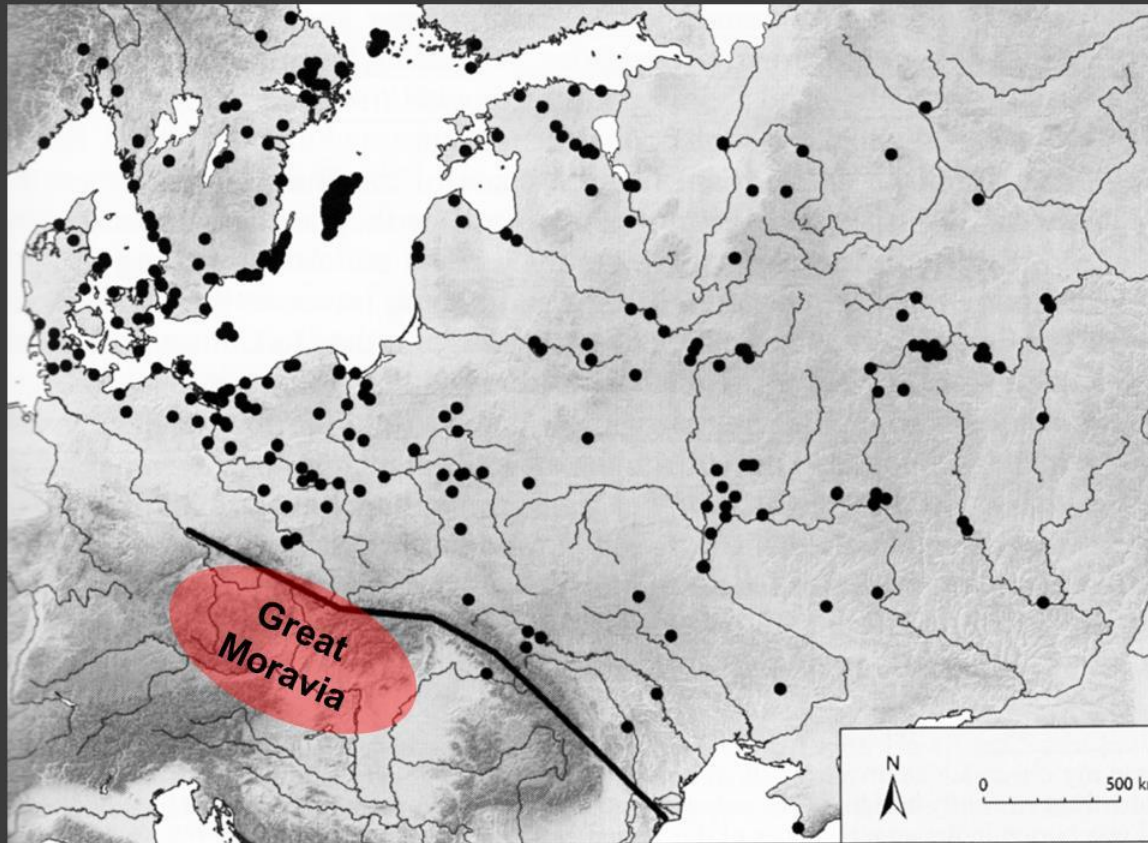


Distribution of individual Byzantine solids along the Amber Road



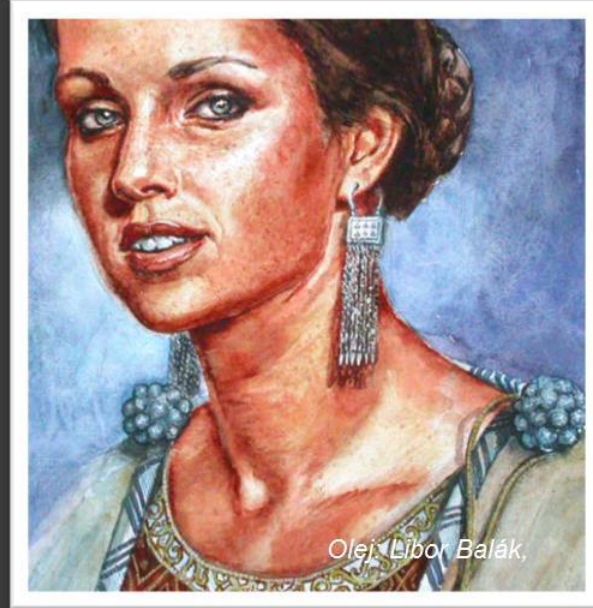
according to M. McCormick

Two different trading systems according to M. Jankowiak

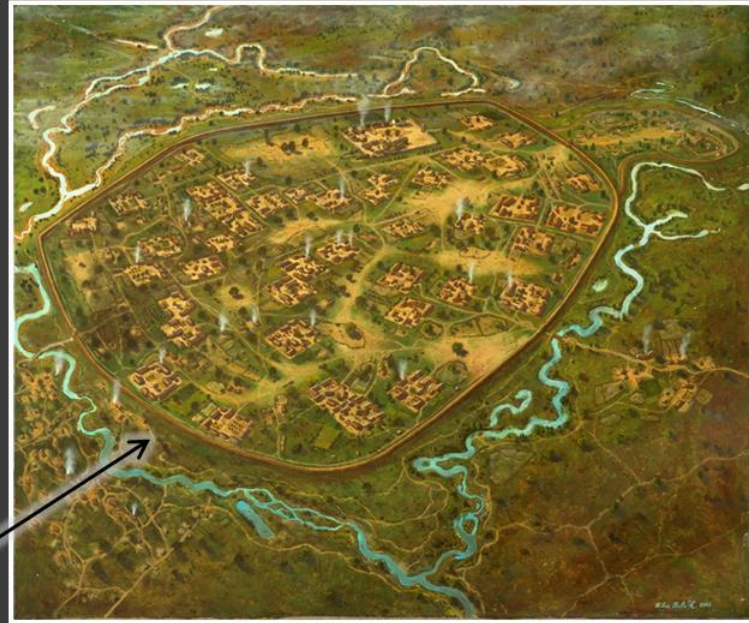
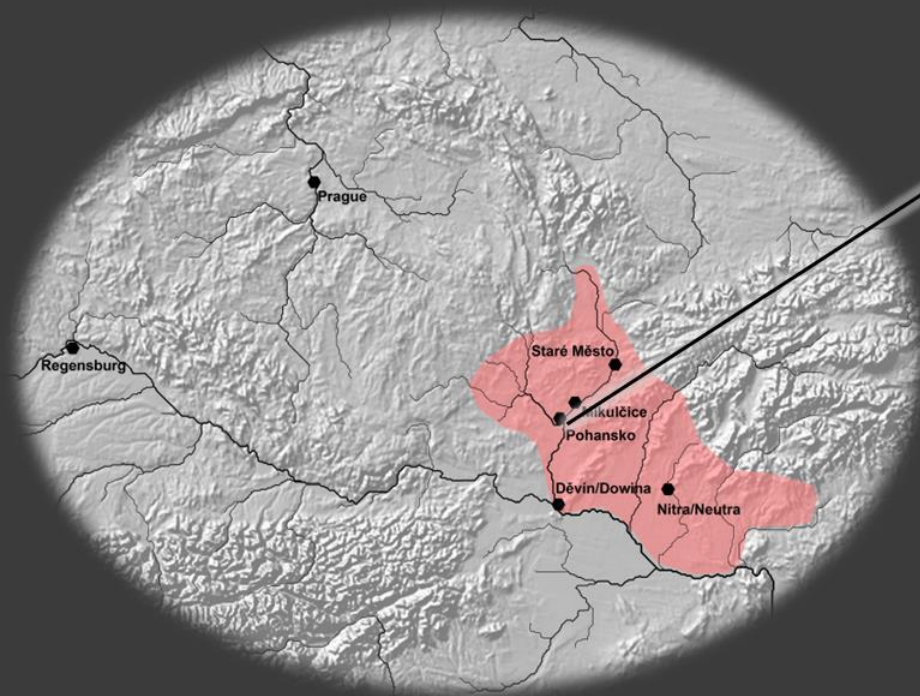


Hoards of dirhams with *tpq* before 960

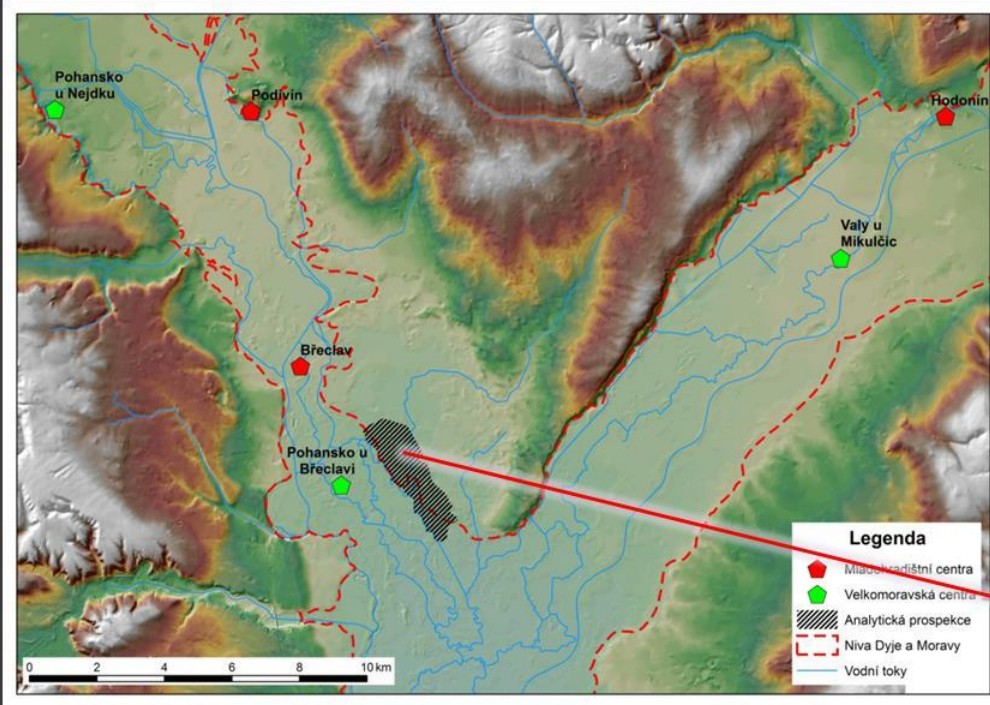
Luxurious Great Moravian jewellery



Pohansko near Breclav: Great Moravian central place

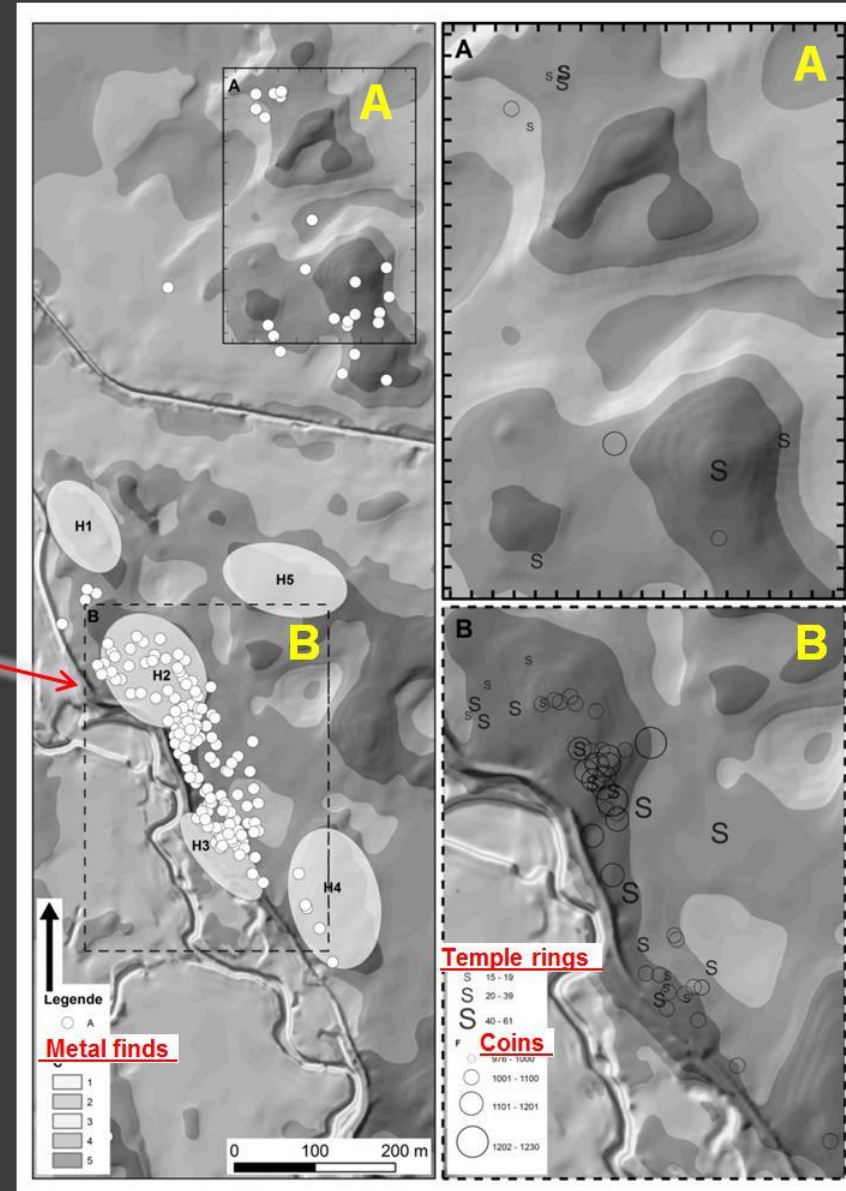


POHANSKO → KOSTICE: Reurbanization of the 10th-11th century



The settlement **Zadni hrud** (cca 32 ha) within the cadastre of **Kostice** may have partly replaced Great Moravian Pohansko taking over its function as an trading place lying on the south-eastern entry to Moravia:

- NOT fortified
- NOT related topographically to aristocratic power
- after AD 900
- similar to the Henning's Early medieval European towns



KOSTICE : Moravian productive site from between the 10th to 12th century

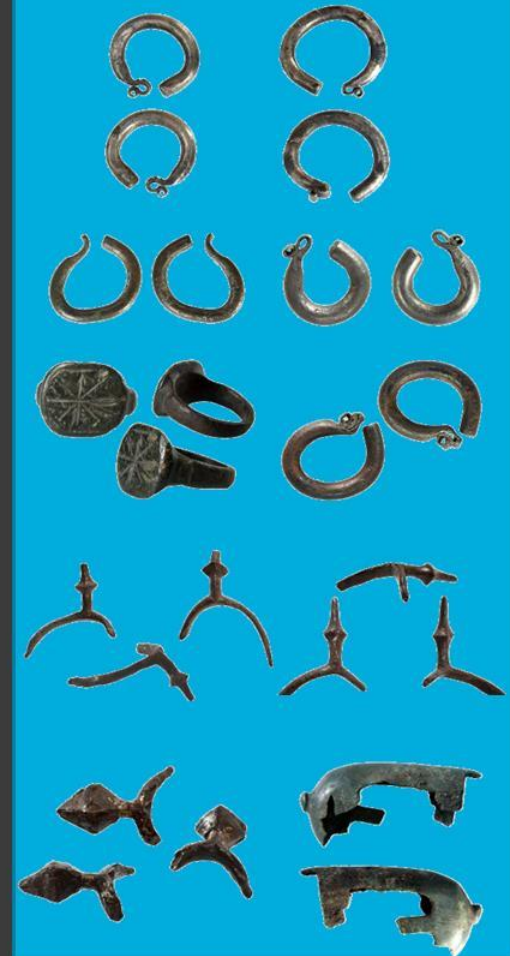
191 coins from 10th to 12th c.



weights, balances and silver fragments



jewelry, spurs and the chape from 11th to 12th c.



KOSTICE

coin loss from the second
half of the 10th century

≤ 976

BAYERN
Heinrich II.
1.Regierung (967-976)
Hahn 15a



BAYERN
Heinrich II.
1.Regierung (967-976)
Hahn 15a (16a)



BAYERN
Otto (967-982)
Hahn - ?



**BÖHMEN?
MÄHREN?**
Imitativ
Hahn 1986 -

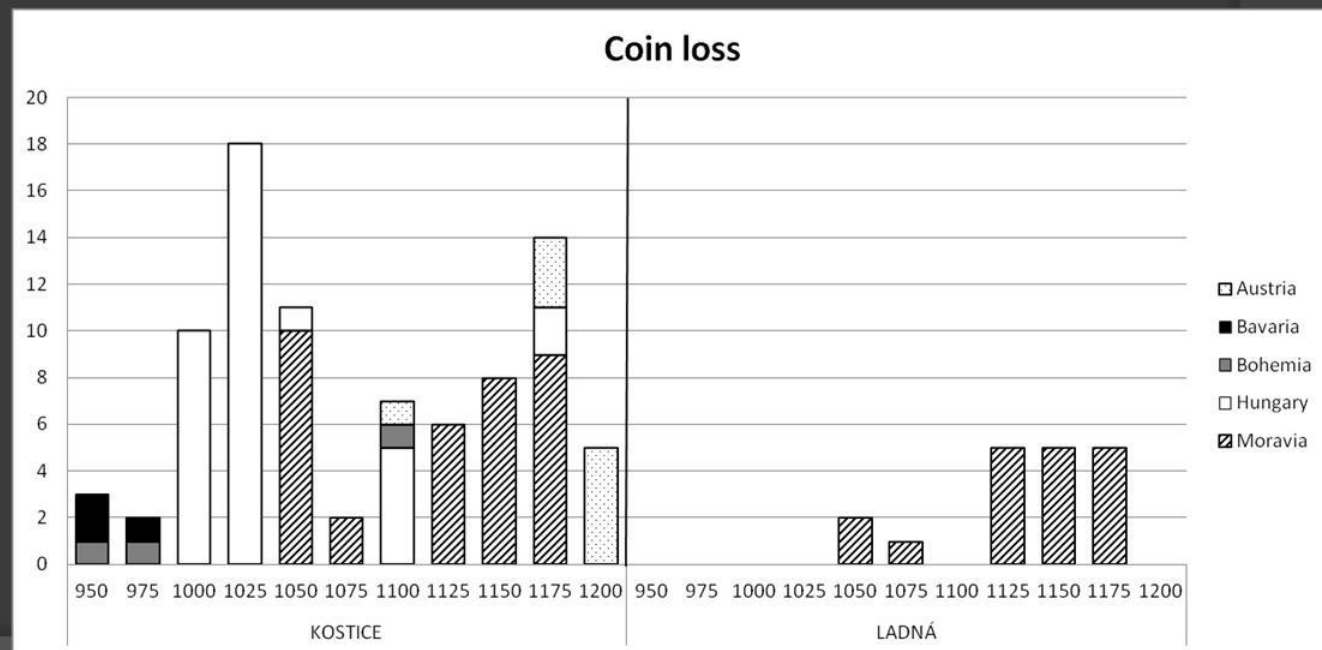
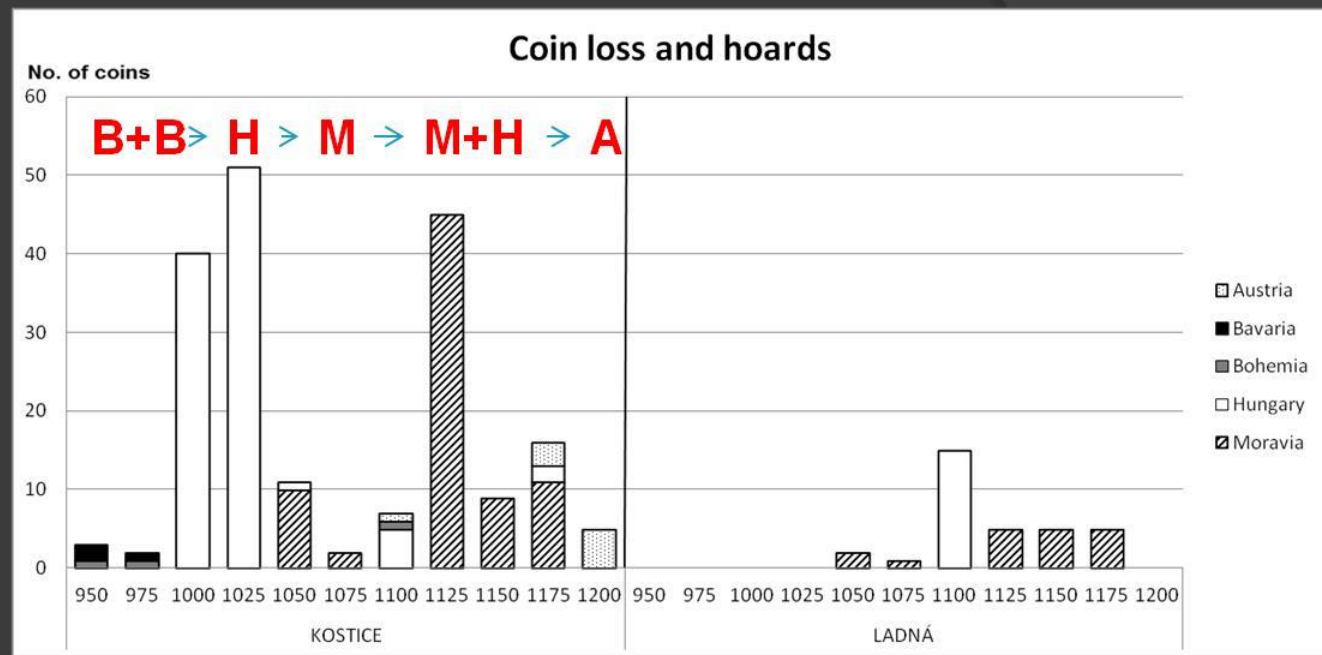


ca 990-995

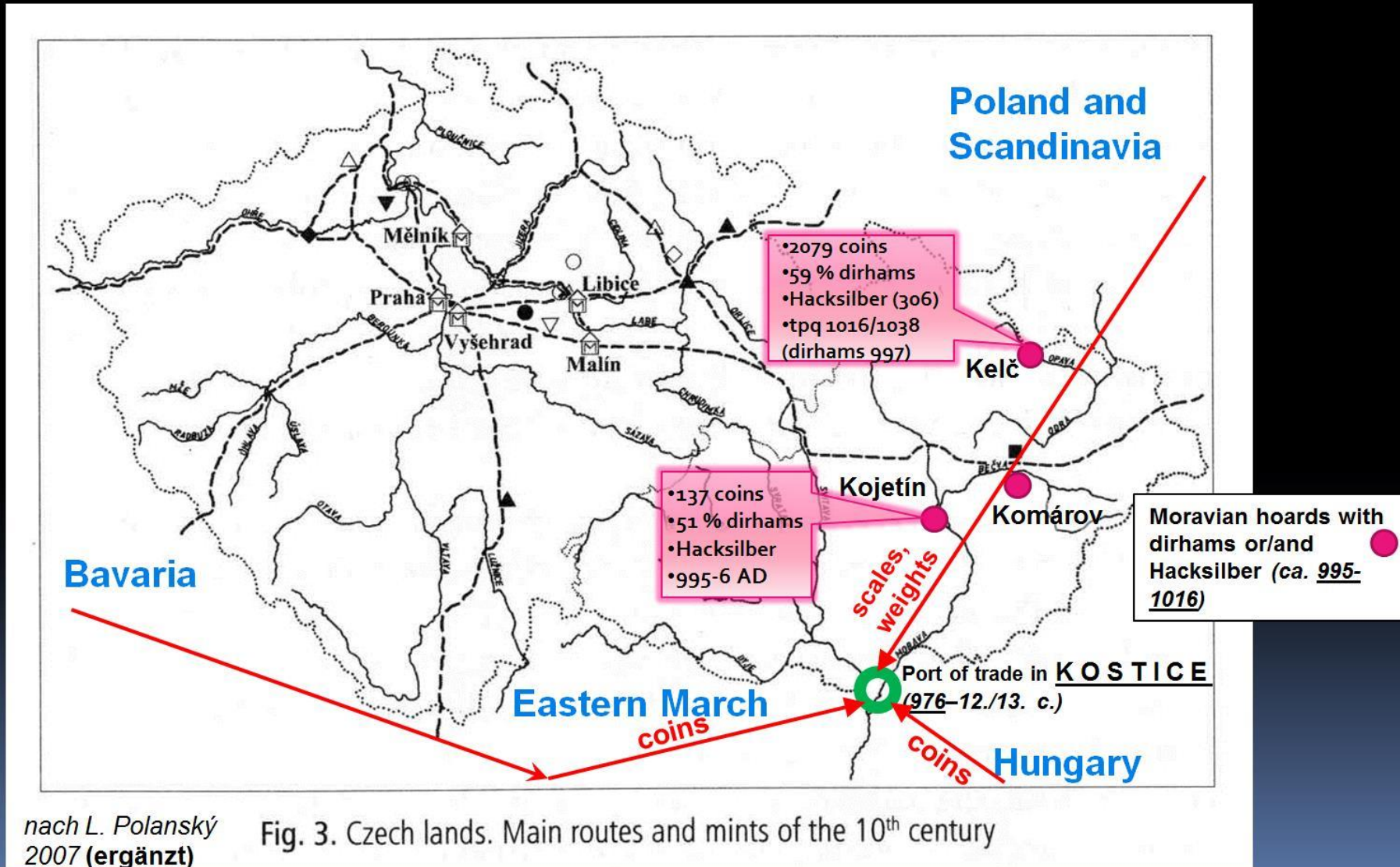
**BÖHMEN?
MÄHREN?**
Obol
Cach 170



Chronological and spatial distribution of coin loss from Kostice and Ladna



Trade routes which entered Moravia near KOSTICE in 10th and 11th century



nach L. Polanský
2007 (ergänzt)

Fig. 3. Czech lands. Main routes and mints of the 10th century