

# Old-Slavonic Sanctuaries in Czechia and Slovakia

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*Presented are: the catalogue of ancient sanctuaries of the Czechian and Slovakian Slavs discovered archaeologically, relations to the particular regions or tribal areas, the role of natural conditions by selecting the place for sanctuary build-up. The author makes comparisons of the ground-plans and geographical orientations. The interpretation of the preserved constructive elements is given. The evidences of fire and its signification in the religious ceremonies are discussed. The same was made for the ox as a cultic animal, for the finds of cultic sacrifices and gifts to the sanctuaries. The status of the "žrec" in the Old-Slavonic society is also discussed. The Old-Slavonic cult faded out at the time of Christianity.*

The sources of recognizing the pre-Christian religion of the Slovakian and Czechian Slavs are very fragmental. One of the basic reasons is the fact that the Slovakian and Czechian Slavs did not create any literature of their own before adopting Christianity. The documents registering political events and social conditions on the mentioned territory originated in relation to Christianity only. The authors, all to a man foreign annalists, did not make any note of information concerning the original religion of the Christianized ethnics. Therefore, due to the absence of any direct written reports, in studying the pre-Christian religion of the Slovakian and Czechian Slavs we are dependent on philological interpretations of some local names, etymology or folklore survivals documented in later records, exceptionally surviving in today's folk culture (Polák 1956, 119-121). This information fixes only several aspects of the Slavonic religiousness; e.g. the position of cultic places cannot be identified by means of written sources. One of the few attempts at identifying a concrete site with a Slavonic sanctuary is connected with the name of the Czech archaeologist I. Borkovský. This researcher stated his presumption that on the hill *Žiži*, mentioned by the annalists Kosmas and Vincencius in connection with fights between the army of the Polish King Boleslav the Brave and the Czech princes Jaromír and Oldřich in 1004, a pre-Christian sanctuary was located originally. The term *Žiži* was explained by him as an Old-Slavonic expression for fire, flame, or shining. He situated the hill below the foundations of the oldest church in the Prague Castle, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which should replace the original cult by Christianity as soon as possible (Borkovský 1949, 38, 40; 1969, 92-93). Borkovský's localization was doubted by later excavations according to which the church of the Virgin Mary was built within the common settlement layer whereby the reconstruction of the original surface geomorphology also opposed the aforesaid theory (Frolík - Smetánka 1997, 48, 63). Devín, the hilltop fort above the confluence of the rivers Danube and Morava is also sometimes mentioned as a cultic place, because of its especial position (Rybakov 1981, 285). But not even the long-lasting archaeological research offered

any finding situation or artifacts which could be associated with a cult (Plachá – Hlavicová – Keller 1990).

The research of some churches built within the 9<sup>th</sup> century on the territory of Great Moravia showed that these were situated on the places of earlier wooden constructions, the presence of which is evidenced by the groups of post holes. These terrene ascertainments are interpreted by several researchers as the remnants of pre-Christian sanctuaries, whereby the cultic continuity of given place is meant (Richter 1965a, 121; 1965b, 202-204). However, the discovered ground-plans can neither be reconstructed nor dated more precisely. In addition, among the inventory from excavations the artifacts are absent which could support these presumptions.

In spite of the aforesaid, it is actually archaeology which is today bringing fresh light to the study of the original Slavonic religion. In Central Europe, thanks to country researches, we know of several pre-Christian sanctuaries built up on sites where the cultic tradition after Christianisation was not quite continuous; however, they cause no problems of interpretation.

**List of Old-Slavonic sanctuaries in Czechia and Slovakia**

1. Hradsko in Kokořín region (Mělník District, Czech Republic)

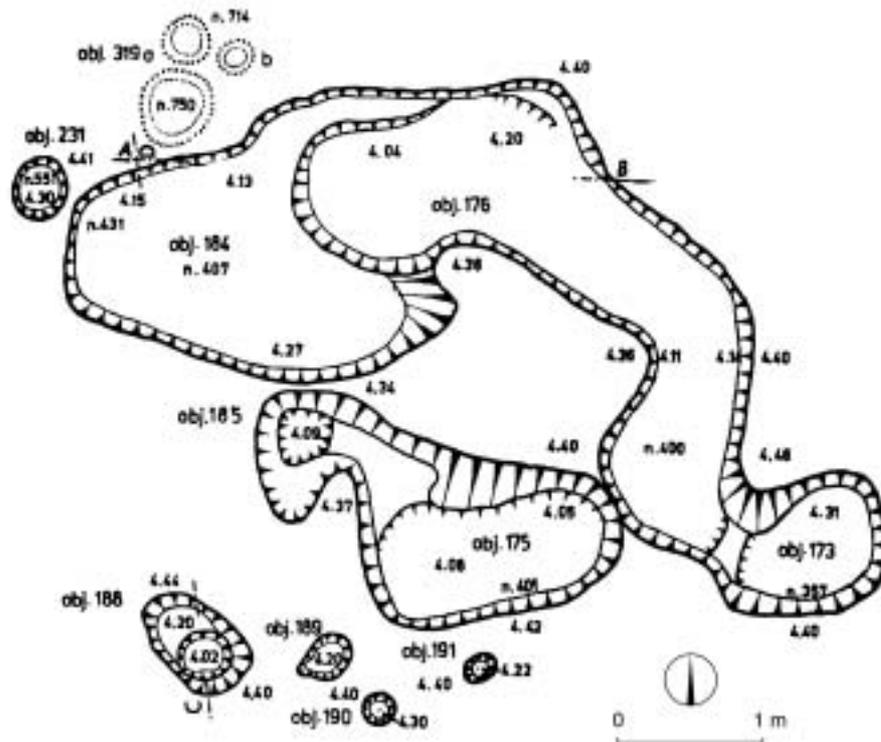


Fig. 1. Hradsko in Kokořín, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. After Šolle 1977.

Early-medieval hill fort. The object is situated on the western slope of a plateau, 16 m northward from the group of farming and craft establishments. Consisting of an irregular groove-like ring with longer axis west-east orientated, 100 cm wide, 50-60 cm sunk. At the northwest edge supplemented by post holes to a circular ground-plan. In the central section occurs the overground part of approximately quadratic shape with side-length about 105 cm. The object filling contained sherds from clay vessels, iron needle as well as bones of cattle, sows and wild boars, less sheeps and goats, exceptionally horse. The object is dated to the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.1).

Lit.: Šolle 1977, 359-360; 1998, 66-70.

2.

Mikulčice I, loc. Klášteřisko (Hodonín District, Czech Republic)

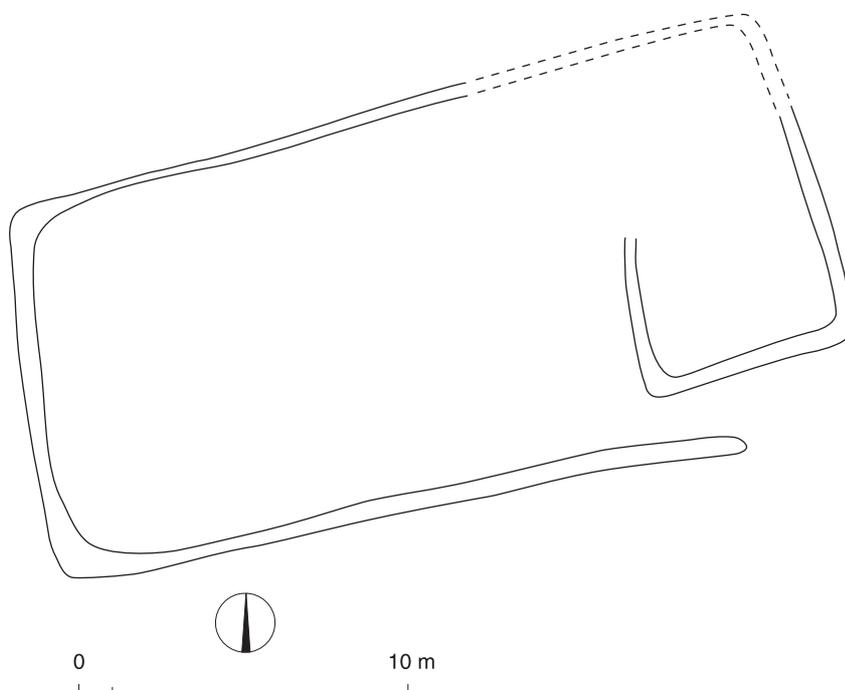


Fig. 2. Mikulčice I, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. After Klanica 1997.

Early-medieval stronghold of central rank. The object of an oblong ground-plan with size 11,3x24 m, longer side east-west orientated, the entrance probably in the south-west side. The circumference is created by a groove 40 cm wide in which some traces of wooden posts appear, set in close to each other. The inner space was divided into one central strip 5 m wide with two fireplaces and two strips 2 m wide along the longer sides, used for burials. In the east end 3 horse skeletons occurred. In and around the graves lay individuals with numerous physical anomalies, outgrowths or amputations as well as separate human rests detached at the place of the joints. The object is dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.2).

Lit.: Klanica 1985a, 476-489; 1997, 104.

3.

Mikulčice II, loc. Pri kniežacom hrade (Hodonín District, Czech Republic)

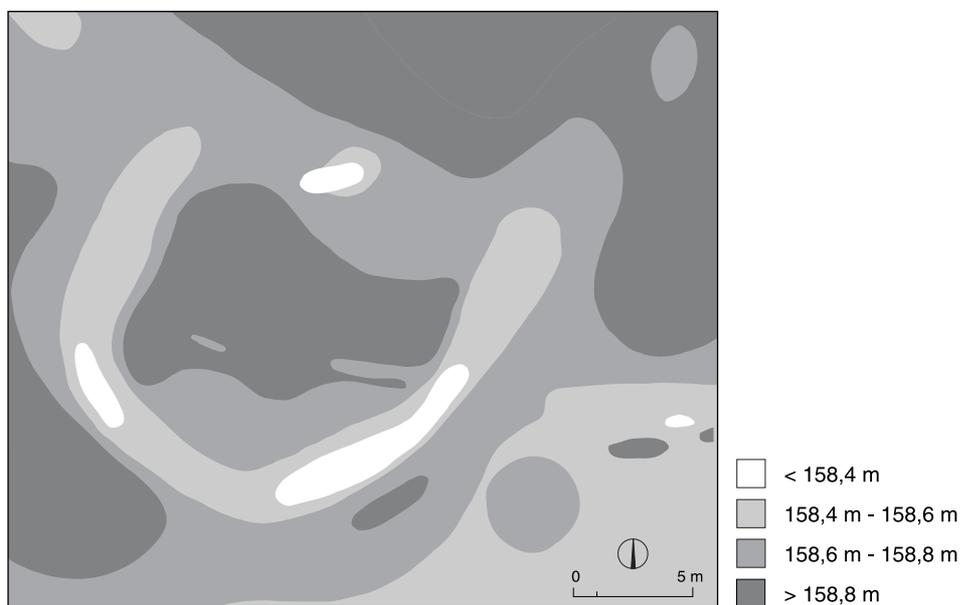


Fig. 3. Mikulčice II, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. After Klanica 1985a.

Early-medieval stronghold of central rank. On the north bank of the river Morava's branch, being protected from the south, east and west by flow-round waters a round ditch occurred, up to 3 m wide, of 15 m inner diameter. In the filling appeared some irregularly spread nests containing iron articles (bars, axes) and grindstones as well. On the north side a large post hole of 1 m diameter was found with the rim solidified by stones. The object is dated to the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.3).

Lit.: Klanica 1985a, 488; 1985b, 131-133; 1997, 103.

4.

Most pri Bratislave, loc. Pod pšenom (Senec District, Slovak Republic)

Settlement objects. Approximately in the centre of the investigated area, Object 14 was found of a circle-segment shape, created by a groove above 27 m long and maximally 280 cm wide, open eastward. The object with its central part bilaterally enlarged was sunk into subsoil by 20-50 cm. Around the margin several irregularly spread post holes were posited. By four post holes in the north part the oblong was formed with one fireplace filled with oak ashes and coal-pieces. Beside this fireplace appeared an ox horn. Northward from the fireplace occurred several burnt amorphous places and local gray layers, probably the rests of small short-term fireplaces. The object filling contained sherds and animal bones. Dating: from the terminal 8<sup>th</sup> to commencing 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.4).

Lit.: Turčan 1985, 243.

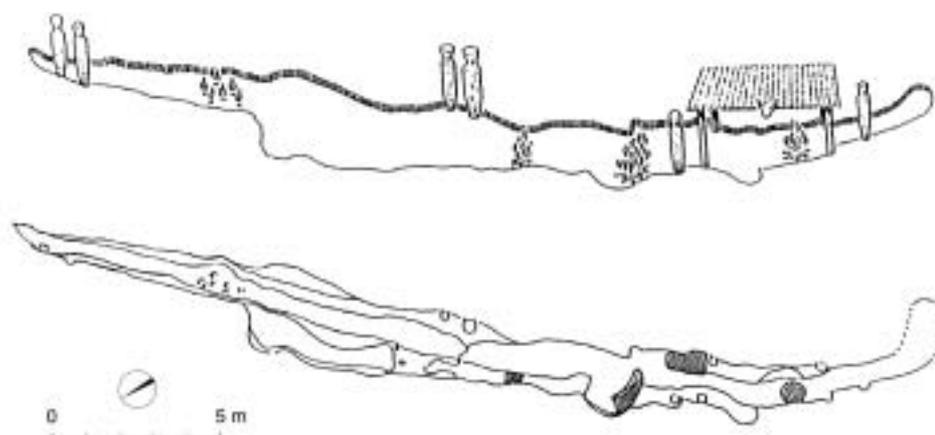


Fig. 4. Most pri Bratislave, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. A plan and reconstruction.

5.  
Pohansko u Břeclavi (Břeclav District, Czech Republic)

A magnate court. Object 39 was built up at a distance of 11 m from the Christian church around which burials were practised from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. (at the time of the sanctuary build-up it was probably in ruins already). The object consisted of one big central post hole of 85 cm diameter by 25 cm depth as well as 8 marginal, circle-like ordered post holes of 46-60 cm diameter by 825 cm depth and one arched groove 22 cm wide, 7-11 cm deep, lining the object in the north. Dating: the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.5). Another object of an analogical ground-plan, not published in detail so far, was situated in the south part of the hill fort.

Lit.: Dostál 1968, 3-25; 1975, 104-110; Kalousek - Dostál - Vignatiová - Šik 1977 - 1978, 162, obr. 4; Macháček - Pleterski 2000, 13 - 14, Abb. 3.

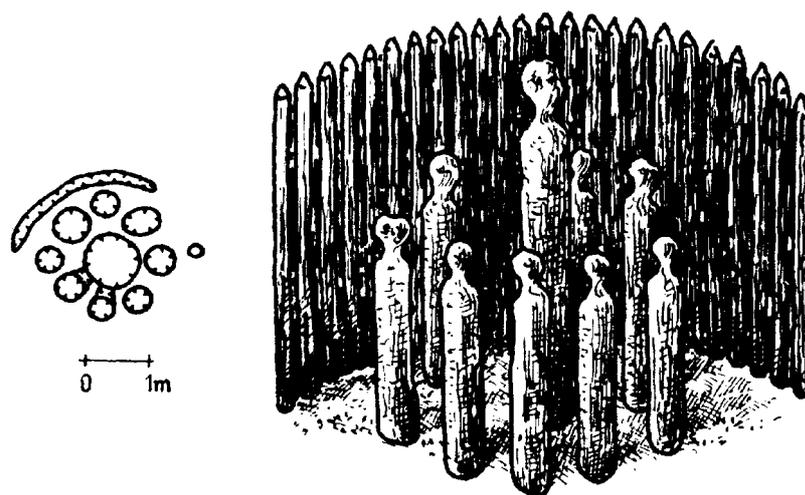


Fig. 5. Pohansko u Břeclavi, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. After Dostál 1968.

6.  
Stará Kouřim (Kolín District, Czech Republic)

Early-medieval hill fort on a mighty hillock, flowed round by the small river Kouřimka. Between the central mound's central gate and the inner mound a cultic place was found near to Libuše's lakelet; beyond the lakelet a cemetery is situated.

At a distance of 5-6 m from the north-west lake bank there was an arched ditch 2 m deep and 4 m wide, on average. Within the ditch and the space between the lakelet and the ditch as well, some pits were found with fire traces and daubing. One part of these pits was protected by light wooden constructions. The area is closed in the south by a wall, of which a foundation groove and front post line were well-preserved. Likewise the northern part was closed by means of posts. The cultic complex is dated to the terminal 8<sup>th</sup> and commencing 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.6).

Lit.: Šolle 1966, 136-146.

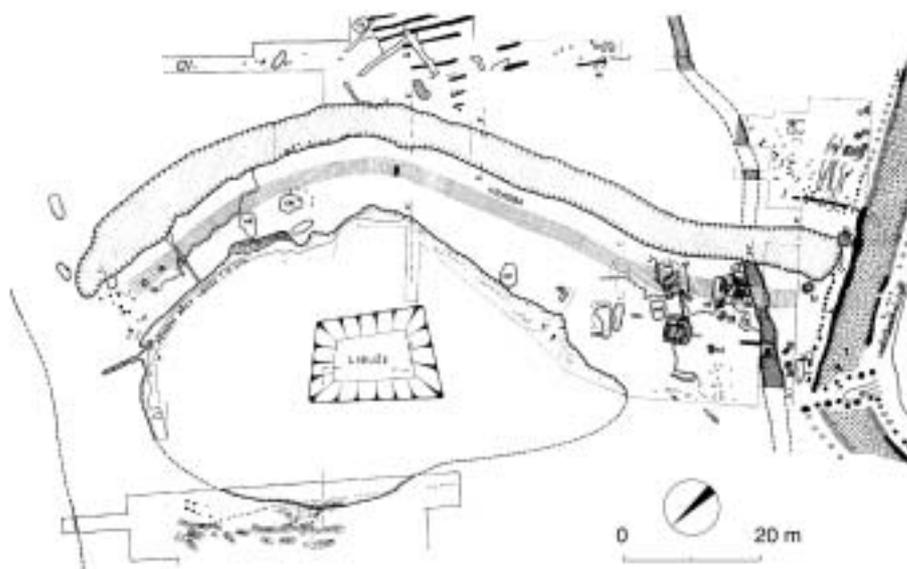


Fig. 6. Stará Kouřim, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. After Šolle 1966.

7.  
Uherské Hradiště - Sady, loc. Horní Kotvice (Uherské Hradiště District, Czech Republic)

The object is situated in the north-west, elevated periphery of the cemetery dated from the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> to the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. Consisting of an arched depression of 940 cm length by 150 cm width by 12-15 cm depth. In the north part it was enlarged by a projection of 170x160 cm size by 10 cm depth. In the middle occurred an oval pit of 150x180cm size by 70 cm depth with the sides sloping to the bottom with a post hole of 60cm diameter. On both sides of this pit some smaller ones were posited with burnt bot-

toms. These were filled with ash-like soil mixed with coal-pieces. The extended northern part of the object was defined by 4 post holes of 30-35 cm diameter and 30-50 cm depth, square-like ordered. In the object filling no finds were discovered, except for one horny frontal bone of ox (*Bos taurus*) lying near the post hole situated next to the aforesaid depressions. The object is dated from the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig.7).

Lit.: Marešová 1983, 5-7.

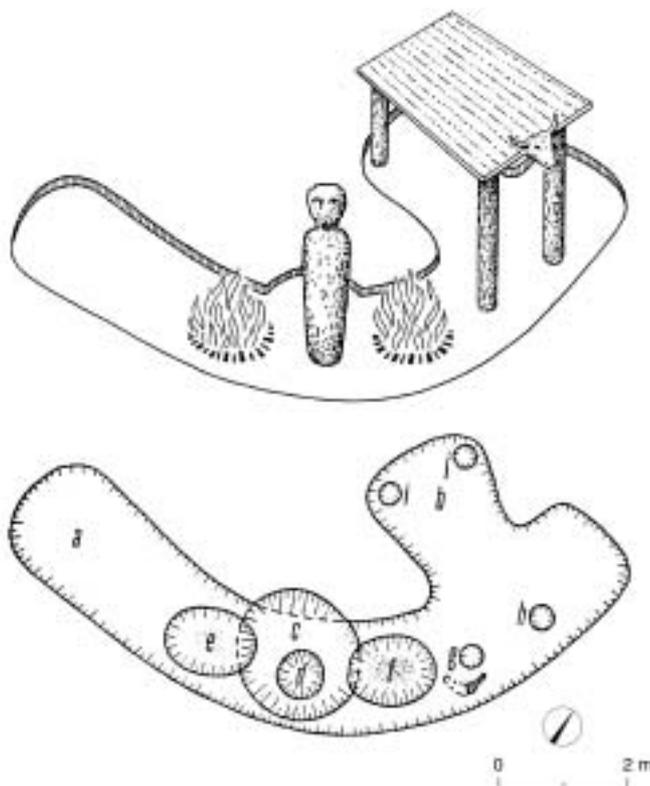


Fig. 7. Uherské Hradiště - Sady, loc. Horní Kotvice, Old-Slavonic sanctuary. A plan after Marešová 1983 and reconstruction.

Following the map (Fig.8), from among the seven sanctuaries known hitherto, four (Mikulčice I and II, Břeclav-Pohansko, Uherské Hradiště) are situated on the west bank of the river Morava within the region representing the crystallization core of the later Great-Moravian Empire with a high concentration of inhabitants. At the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> cent. the process of tribal identification was culminating here and one supertribal organization was formed – the Moravian Principdom. There was an analogical process running in the Bohemian Basin as well. Also here the cultic centres were representing a part of tribal identity. From this territory even some tribal names are known, concretely those of the Zličané for the sanctuary in Stará Kouřim and the Pšované for Hradsko. We should also make mention of the aforesaid when discussing the location Žiži in Prague, the power centre of the Czech tribe.

However, some different political and social background can be questioned for in Most pri Bratislave. It is situated at Žitný ostrov (Rye Island), a holm formed by the waters of the

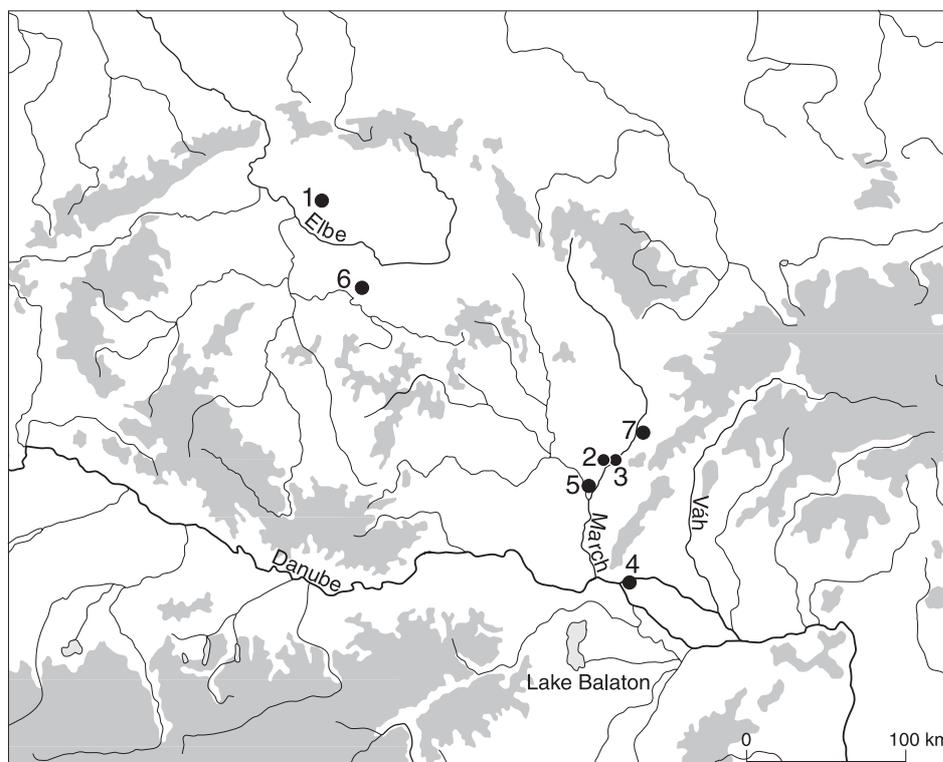


Fig. 8. A map of Old-Slavonic sanctuaries in Czechia and Slovakia: 1. Hradsko in Kokořín, 2-3. Mikulčice I and II, 4. Most pri Bratislave, 5. Pohansko u Břeclavi, 6. Stará Kouřim, 7. Uherské Hradiště.

river Danube. Within the investigated time span no permanent seats can be documented in this area. Due to its marshy character and many blind and side branches changing after yearly floods, Žitný ostrov was used more or less only for exploiting the living nature (Turčan 1991, 25-29). Obviously it was the natural environment which incited to a cultic perception of this site. We can consider here similar contexts like those which in some regions caused the Eastern Slavs to build their sanctuaries in so-called “mud forts” (bolotnye gorodishcha). These were specific rounded fortifications built for the sake of defending the tribal cultic place in marshy, hardly accessible and unsettled areas (Rybakov 1987, 148-150). By choosing them, the cultic significance of water was manifested which was adduced by the Slavs in other relations (Rajewski 1970, 409-413).

The location of sanctuaries within the settlement structures does not indicate any united principle by selection of a precinct. Both sanctuaries of Mikulčice as well as the cultic objects at Hradsko and in Stará Kouřim were integrated into the urbanism of fortified power centres. Their location underlined the significance of particular strongholds being the political and spiritual centres of tribes. Some other symbolical meaning, however, can be sought at the sacred object in Uherské Hradiště. In this relation not only its function with links to a cemetery is the question but the fact that this graveyard, according to the inventory, probably served for a rural community. The swords are also as remarkably prominent as in any of the more luxurious female and male jewelry typical of the then high

society of the Uherské Hradiště region (Galuška 1996; Hrubý 1965). Also in Most pri Bratislave a population with lower status can be found making use of the Žitný ostrov region for their own economic activities, as already mentioned. In this context there is the important fact that within the hill forts in the area of the so-called Bratislava Gate not one cultic object has yet been discovered (Štefanovičová 1975, 14-20; Kraskovská 1970, 202-206). Besides South Moravia, the acceleration process of social development was also running at that time northward from Žitný ostrov where the Nitra Princedom had been crystallizing. By discovering the hinterland of the cultic place in Most pri Bratislave one must point out that sherd material from the site also indicates some links to the area southward from the river Danube, i.e. to the adjacent territory of present Hungary.

Very exceptional is the place where the round object in Břeclav-Pohansko was built at the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> cent. It arose over two older graves around the Christian church as a symbol of restoring the original Slavonic religion (Dostál 1968, 3-25). Nevertheless, later development showed that this was only a short-term renaissance.

The written reports do not offer any basis for deliberations on ritual practices accompanying the selection of a place for sanctuary establishment; e.g. the ancient Hungarians were choosing a cultic place so that the shaman, mounted on a stallion, galloped towards a forest. Where the stallion halted, a sanctuary was built by the nomads (Nawrocki 1988, 137). Similar rituals by selection of a precinct also cannot be excluded among the Slavs. One should also take into account the accent put on rational items (habitation topography, access road, geographical conditions, accidentally registered natural phenomena etc.). Obviously there was an ancient well and grove worship surviving (Brückner 1985, 51; Váňa 1990, 164-167); e.g. the Bulgarian Slavs established a sanctuary within a cave and in the adjacent frontal area (Belkov 1952, 378).

By entering a cultic place the believer found himself in other dimension - in sacred space. The necessary atmosphere was achieved not only through ceremonies but by the sacral architecture itself. In attempts to reconstruct its overground parts the basic fact is important that five from among seven sanctuaries nowadays known are created by a groove-like ring. This disposition does not occur anywhere else on Slavonic territory outside of Central Europe, therefore it is to be singled out as an independent typological and territorial group.

The sacral buildings from the aforesaid group were of various extent. In Stará Kouřim the distance between two marginal points of the object was 113 m by max. width 7.5 m, at the remaining sanctuaries these measurements were much smaller: in Most pri Bratislave 27 m (max. width 2.8 m), in Mikulčice II 18 m (3 m), in Uherské Hradiště 9.4 m (1.5 m) and hitherto the smallest sacral object of this plan was found at Hradsko, 2.7 m long (max. width 1m). However, more problems are caused by comparing the depths of particular grooves because these data are dependent not only on the original vertical size of the excavated groove but also on the research method. In Stará Kouřim the bottom was found at 2 m depth below the actual surface, the next are Mikulčice (1.6 m), Hradsko (0.5 - 0.6 m), Most pri Bratislave (0.2 - 0.5 m) and Uherské Hradiště (0.12 - 0.15 m). Comparing the radii of the investigated objects is not decisive as none of them was of a regular groove-shape. The grooves were not regularly arched, thus we would obtain various radii in particular segments. Anyway, larger sanctuaries had been opened more than the smaller ones, in general. It is interesting to observe the cardinal point at which the sanctuaries are free-opened. At Hradsko, in Stará Kouřim and in Most pri Bratislave they are orientated due south (in the two latter cases there is a tendency to the south-east). This

is the cardinal point at which also the grooves around the Slavonic tumuli used to be interrupted (Zoll-Adamikowa 1979, 82; Kucharenko 1955, 33). After P. Charvát (1988, 79), the aforesaid phenomenon, however, does not mean that the beyond had to be placed in the south. The remaining two sanctuaries orientated northward, concretely Mikulčice II to the north-east and Uherské Hradiště to the north-west, also warn one to be careful about

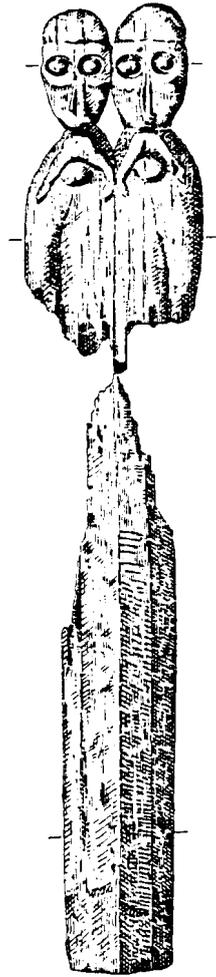


Fig. 9. Fischerinsel. The couple holes.  
After Gringmuth-Dallmer-Hollnagel 1971.

making any conclusions by means of the orientation of cultic establishments (i.e. tumuli and sanctuaries). For the time being we cannot decipher which pieces of information are coded in the facts mentioned. Attention must also be paid to a thesis of the cultic meaning of the grooves being regarded as a border symbol between the worlds of life and death (Charvát 1988, 79), therefore actually the contact point between the profane and the sacred.

The only well-preserved remains of the overground parts are the post holes. These were revealed at all the cultic objects of a given ground-plan type hitherto discovered. They occur isolated (Hradsko, Stará Kouřim, Most pri Bratislave, Mikulčice II), in couples (Most pri Bratislave, Uherské Hradiště) or in oblong-like quartets (Uherské Hradiště, Most pri Bratislave). The post holes occurring individually were either placed within a groove (Most pri Bratislave, Uherské Hradiště), on the rim of (Most pri Bratislave) or next to a sunk part of the object (Hradsko, Stará Kouřim). By looking for the origins we can rely on the written records related to the cult of the Eastern and Baltic Slavs. The Russian annalist Nestor mentioned some posts standing along the roads, onto which the urns filled with ashes of burnt corpses were placed (Nestor 1867, 9). In a similar way also the post holes can be interpreted which were found beneath the tumuli covering-mounds in some parts of Bohemia (Turek 1946, 170). Because of the investigated sanctuaries already dated to the time of the Slavs practising inhumation, any funeral alternative is not likely. One should rather take notice of the theory of S.A.Izjumova according to which the foundation holes for wooden sculptures of Slavonic gods are the matter (Izjumova 1961, 257). The existence of wooden idols raised outside the graveyards is confirmed by several co-eval annalists as well. The wooden Perun (Slavonic god of thunder) with silver head and golden hair is already mentioned by the aforesaid Nestor (1867, 60). Likewise the Arabian traveller Ibn Fadlân had seen in Rus some posts of human-body shape to which the sacrifices were brought (Tret'jakov 1958, 186). With the Baltic Slavs the reports of post-like idols with set-into-ground "legs" were noted down by the Germanic priest Helmold (1925, 253-4) as well as by Herbord, the biographer of St.Otto (Labuda 1999, 174). Although most of the idols were obviously made of wood, as assumed by L.Niederle (1916, 197) already, through archaeological research

the stone ones are also documented as being of a height up to 3 m (Rybakov 1987, 130). The authors hereby mention that the face parts and hands of the idols were well-formed (Lambert Miš 1997, 131; Rybakov 1987, 130).

While the interpretation of the solitary post holes does not cause any major problems, it is more complicated to find any cultic meaning of the couple holes observed in Most pri Bratislave. As the most likely analogy we can adduce the geminate oak-wood idols with separate heads and beards (Fig.9) found in the settlement Fischerinsel bei Neu-Brandenburg (Gringmuth-Dallmer-Hollnagel 1971, 122). Unlike Fischerinsel where the sculptures were of a common body, the ones in Most pri Bratislave could be separated artifacts. To complete the view, we also must refer to some other, though unlikely, possibilities of the interpretation published. For example, the Arabian traveller Ibn Rusta had noted down the information of a Slavonic custom according to which if a new widow was supposed to have been the most beloved woman of her dead husband, she took two trunks setting them into the ground, put the third lintel timber thereon and then hanged herself (Pauliny 1999, 99). A.N.Liavdansky had published a construction consisting of two robust posts set into the ground and one lintel timber fixed above, into which the other bilaterally pointed post was vertically thrust (Fig.10). By turning it round, the "sacred fire" was obtained (A.N.Liavdansky's work has not been made available to me; citation after: Rybakov 1981, 33).

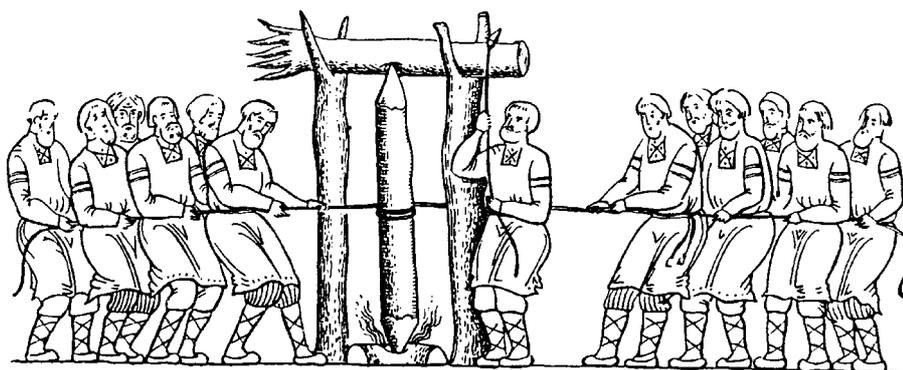


Fig. 10. "The sacred fire". After Rybakov 1981.

On two sites the oblong-shaped quartets of post holes were observed. In Uherské Hradiště the holes were demarcating an area of about 5.12 m<sup>2</sup> size, formed by enlarging the groove north-westward (Fig.7). In Most pri Bratislave the post-holes quartet occurred in the south part of the sanctuary (Fig.4). Within this limited area of about 5.8 m<sup>2</sup> around a sunk-into-ground fireplace was situated. Easier manipulation of the fire was enabled through a cut-out in the opposite side. The post holes are to be regarded most likely as the remains of supporting poles bearing some lighter roof construction similar to the one described by the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus (1150-1216) in connection with the Svantovit's temple in Arkona. After him, this was situated inside the hall temple, with textile curtains instead of walls (reconstruction Fig.11). Nevertheless, the chronicler did not adduce any more detailed information concerning the function thereof (Niederle 1916, 289).

The purpose of the roof constructions did not have to be the same in both cases. In Uherské Hradiště, for example, one can consider the place for depositing a corpse before

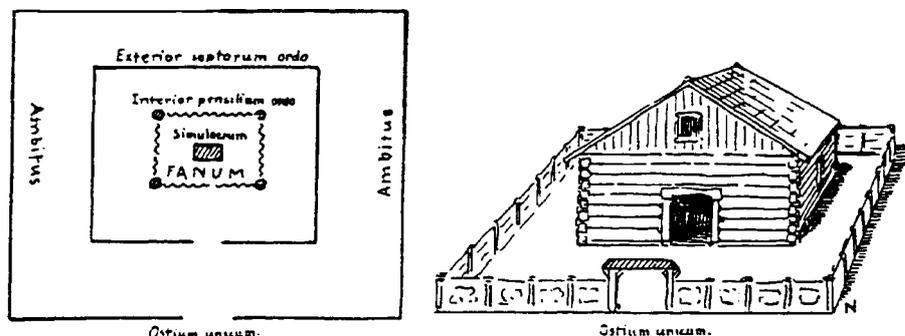


Fig. 11. A reconstruction of the Arcona temple. After Niederle 1916.

a funeral. The finding situation in Most pri Bratislave, however, excludes such an interpretation. This place served most likely for any priestly performances at religious ceremonies. Close to the post-hole quartets in Uherské Hradiště as well as in Most pri Bratislave the horny frontal bones of oxen (*Bos taurus* L.) were found. By several sources the ox is evidenced as being a totem animal of the Slavs. Since it had been domesticated it was taken for a sexual symbol by mankind (Niederle 1916, 72; Caras 1999, 91-92). Among the Slavs, the cultic context of oxen is documented for the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. already (i.e. just after the Slavs arrived in their historic homeland), in the form of animal-like clay figurines found in Mikulčice (Novotný 1966, 677). The important role of this animal in Slavonic religion is truthfully characterized through a report by Thietmar concerning the sanctuary of the Redars tribe at the castle of Radogoszcz, built of wood and standing on the foundations of animal horns (Labuda 1999, 172), which should be interpreted as the “building sacrifice” (see the article of V. Schmidt in this number of *Studia mythologica Slavica*). The totemic function of the ox is also confirmed by the skulls found within destruction layers by the sanctuaries of the Baltic Slavs (Schuldt 1976, 51). By particular researchers, the placement thereof is assumed from the facing of the temple roofs (Fig.12). The oxen frontal bones of the sanctuaries in Uherské Hradiště and Most pri Bratislave were observed near the right front post hole (seen from outside of the groove segment). An equal finding situation enables one to assume the placement thereof on particular posts or, which is more likely, on the front, honourable part of the roof (drawing reconstructions of the latter alternative in Figs.4 and 7).

Except for Hradsko and Pohansko, in all the remaining sanctuaries of a groove-ring plan the fireplaces occurred. The fire was burning mostly within the grooves directly. In Uherské Hradiště (Fig.7) there were two hearths of different size established within oval bowl-like pits which were found beside the big post, obviously a wooden idol (Marešová 1983, 6). In Most pri Bratislave (Fig.4) there dominated the fireplace, which was situated beneath the aforesaid covering-construction. Another three strong-burnt amorphous areas, as well as some traces of short-term fire, occurred in the north groove-continuation. In Stará Kouřim (Fig.6) we encounter some sunk-into-ground fireplaces spread between the groove and the cultic lakelet. The character of their filling indicates mostly a short-term fire (Šolle 1966, 137). The sanctuary of Mikulčice II was surrounded by some hearths situated within the ditch lining the cultic area (Fig.3). After Z.Klanica, the coal-pieces appeared

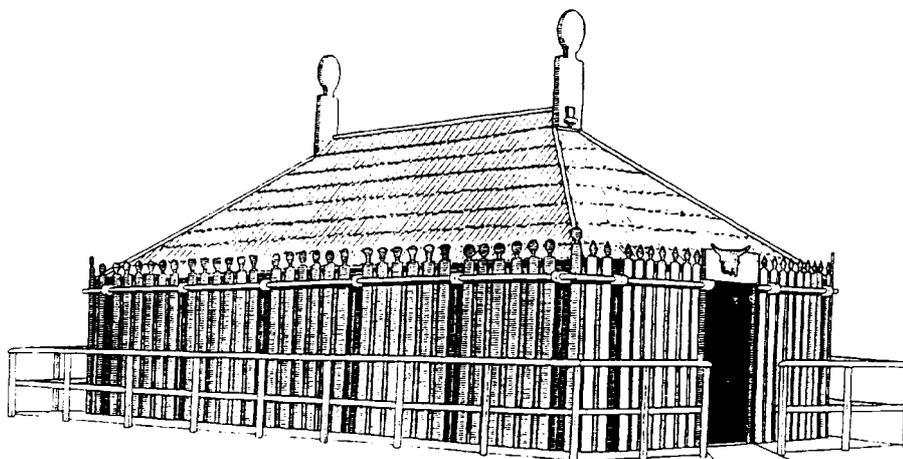


Fig. 12. A reconstruction of the temple in Gross Raden. After Schuldt 1976

forming some “irregular nests” (perhaps the hearths) where iron articles and grindstones were found (Klanica 1985, 131; 1994, 103).

Fire worship was brought by the Slavs from their original homeland whereby the cultic perception of this natural element is of deeper, Indo-European roots (Janko 1912, 224; Vaňa 1990, 99, 140). Likewise by several Arabian travellers the Slavs were characterised as being the “Worshippers of Fire” (Paulíny 1999, 99, 140). The Slavs were practising cremation burials, too (Zoll-Adamikowa 1979). The constatation of the graveyards situated mostly on the southern slopes is put by M. Hanuliak into relation to the purgative function of fire, symbolically replaced by the sunshine (Hanuliak 1993, 16). The belief in the cultic power of this natural element can also be found in the custom of fire burn-up on skeletal graves, which survived until the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (Eisner 1952, 231-232; Marešová 1983, 49-50). The fire was an attribute of several Slavonic gods. In the first place it was Svarog, the fire god himself (Niederle 1916, 105-112; Miroljubov 1983, 78; Brückner 1985, 114-139; Vaňa 1990, 67-70), but also Perun, the god of storm, thunder and lightning (Niederle 1916, 93-105; Miroljubov 1983, 78-79; Brückner 1985, 99-113; Vaňa 1990, 70-74).

According to terrene ascertainments the fire used to be an integral part of ceremonies by the Eastern Slavs (Rybakov 1981, 33; Sedov 1982, 261-264). The amount of ashes, the colour and extent of particular burnt areas indicates that at least one of the hearths had always to be of permanent, i.e. long-term fire. In Most pri Bratislave, the fireplace as well as the enlarged area behind were protected by the roof construction already mentioned (Fig.4). The fire was burning as a part of the whole-tribe, official ceremonies. If it was put out, it was obviously taken for a bad omen (compare the fire in the Roman temple of the Vestal Virgins). Also some smaller, short-term fireplaces (Stará Kouřim, Most pri Bratislave) were established on the surface level. From the archaeological point of view, there remain only indistinct traces thereof. These were burnt up most likely by private events or they could have been related to annual ceremonies (Niederle 1916, 252).

The “eternal” fire was perhaps ceremonially inflamed and kept in by the priests named *žreci*, as evidenced in writing by the Baltic Slavs. After Helmold, the *žreci* were just as respectable as the rulers (Helmold 1925, 172, 179). Besides cultic affairs they also mas-



Fig. 13. The gilt plaquette from Mikulčice. After Klanica 1985a.

tered a calendar, they could heal illnesses or tell fortune by doing various acts (Niederle 1916, 290; Rybakov 1987, 294-305). After Saxo Grammaticus, they differed from other tribal members by their long hair and moustache (Niederle 1916, 290). Likewise among the Slovakian and Czechian Slavs we have no reason to assume any different status of the žreci. Nevertheless, it is to be pointed out from the whole Slavonic territory that we do not know of any grave which could be characterised as the one of a žrec, and we also do not know of any artifact being identified as being his attribute. Attention should be paid, however, to one gilt plaquette with a wrought portrait of some hairy man being adorned by a massive necklace, which is untypical of the Slavs (Fig.13). The artifact was found in the grave of a 50 to 60-year-old man buried near the entrance of the sanctuary of Mikulčice I. (Klanica 1985a, 533). After Saxo Grammaticus, it was just the long hair which used to be regarded as an attribute of the žrec (Niederle 1916, 290). The remaining grave inventory, as well as the equipment character of neighbouring graves, however, do not support any possible exceptionality of the find. Cultic meaning can also be sought in the horny frontal bones of oxen put into graves. This part of the animal's head obviously served as a totem mask (Marešová 1979, 535-538; Török 1962, 83; Bökönyi 1973, 117-130).

From written sources, likewise, the information concerning any gifts and tributes can be obtained. Most reports of the Baltic Slavs were noted down by the aforesaid Helmold. After this author, the believers used to sacrifice not only animals but also occasionally the Christians, whereby any tributes to the gods had to be paid as well by the merchants (Helmold 1925, 135, 255-256). Another annalist, Herbord, registered that the Slavs were bringing captured weapons and the tenth of any booty into a sanctuary (Labuda 1999, 174). During the Gothic wars of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. the Byzantine historian Prokopios observed the Slavonic custom of bull sacrifices to the god of lightning (i.e. Perun – author's note) (Ratkoš 1968, 33). Similar practices are adduced by the Russian annalist Nestor as well. He also mentioned the Christians being sacrificed occasionally (Nestor 1867, 62). Ibn Fadlān wrote about "long poles" around which the heads of sacrificed animals were deposited by the Russian merchants (Rybakov 1987, 22). Through the archaeological researches of the East-Slavonic sanctuaries not only animal sacrifices (Rusanova-Timoščuk 1986, 90; Tret'jakov 1958, 184 – by him even a bear is mentioned) but also human sacrifices could

be documented (Rusanova-Timošćuk 1986, 90). Thereunto, foodstuffs (Niederle 1916, 183) and even loaf-like clay models occurred (Rybakov 1987, 129).

Due to the almost identical existing customs of the Baltic and Eastern Slavs, their Old-Slavonic roots can be deduced as being brought from the original homeland. Thus, it could be logical to await for any archaeological reflection registered by the Slovakian and Czechian Slavs as well. As a matter of fact, the only exception from among the central sanctuaries is that of Mikulčice II, where iron bars and axes mixed with coal-pieces occurred within some pits. In the same finding situation also a grindstone fragment was found. Although the deposition of this object could have been accidental, we must, however, take notice of a legend surviving in the Russian folklore, according to which Perun used to make lightning by rubbing two grindstones (Puhvel 1997, 271). The objects ordained by god thus obviously passed through the purgative power of fire (Klanica 1985a, 448). A finding situation similar to the ascertainments on the territory of the Baltic and Eastern Slavs can be observed at the lengthwise sanctuary of Mikulčice I, from where come not only human graves but also horse skeletons and metal artifacts (Klanica 1985b, 133). The contradictory archaeological information from particular regions can relate e.g. to any changes in spiritual notions of the Slovakian and Czechian Slavs reflected in the ground-plan dispositions of the sanctuaries. Any further deliberations on this subject, however, would be too speculative, due to the up-to-date research state.

Besides the sanctuaries characterized as the Middle-European type of Slavonic sacral architecture, from the aforesaid region another two cultic objects are known, the ground-plan dispositions of which provide evidence of the links to the Baltic Region i.e. to the Slavonic East.

The cultic object of an oblong plan in Mikulčice I (Fig.2; Klanica 1985a, 476-489; 1997, 104) has its analogies among the Baltic Slavs (Schuldt 1976). J.Herrmann is looking for some Celtic models of this type of sacral buildings (Herrmann 1978, 26). The find from Mikulčice is hitherto the southernmost one of similar ground-plan disposition, but in different geopolitical conditions. By means of the archaeological or historical cognitions so far known, it is not possible to decipher the concrete political or ethnic background signalized by this fact. However, not only a mechanical take-over of some building type is the question here. The ideological affinity of both cases is referred to, e.g. by the horse skeletons found inside the sacred areas (Schuldt 1976, 14, 48; Klanica 1985a, 481).

Judging by its ground-plan (Fig.5), the small central sanctuary in Pohansko u Břeclavi (Dostál 1968, 3-25; 1975, 104-110) pertains unambiguously to the cultic establishments of the Eastern Slavs (Sedov 1982, 261-264; Váňa 1990, 159-161). It is to its build-up at the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> cent. that also the cultic object of Mikulčice II can be dated (i.e. roughly a century later than the other sanctuaries), which suggests some historical contexts related to the extinction of the Great-Moravian State and to the advent of the Hungarian tribes in the Carpathian Basin. In this context ethnic migrations arose during which some small community from the territory of central cultic buildings could reach the investigated area. The material culture of the aforesaid site, however, does not support this assumption. Therefore, there is an alternative to be considered of the sanctuaries of the central ground-plan disposition being built in Central Europe within the foregoing period. This problem is rather associated with the matter of a possible short-term renaissance of the original Slavonic religion within the said time span, i.e. with its assumed survival, though only as an ideology being driven to the society periphery at the time of

mass Christianisation during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In later sources, the surviving of several aspects of the original Slavonic religion is documented. Nevertheless, one is not required to consider the institution form thereof existing, but only the several customs fade-outs which transformed into the new ideological basis of the Middle-Ages society.

*Translated by Jana Kličová*

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## Svetišča starih Slovanov na Češkem in Slovaškem

Vladimír Turčan

Zaradi odsotnosti neposrednih pisnih poročil smo pri proučevanju predkrščanskega verovanja čeških in slovaških Slovanov omejeni na jezikoslovje, etimologije, morda tudi na narodopisje. Lokalizacija kulturnih mest ostaja nepoznana. Kot ostanke predkrščanskih svetišč interpretirajo sledi lesenih stavb pod nekaterimi cerkvami, ki so bile zgrajene v 9. st. na ozemlju Velike Moravske. V zadnjih desetletjih prinaša novo osvetlitev v proučevanje prvotnega slovanskega verovanja arheologija. To dokazujejo svetišča: Hradsko na Kokořinskem (slika 1), Mikulčice I (slika 2), Mikulčice II (slika 3), Most pri Bratislavi (slika 4), Pohansko pri Břeclavu (slika 5), Stará Kouřim (slika 6), Uherské Hradiště - Sady / Horní Kotvice (slika 7).

Svetišča Mikulčice I in II, Břeclav-Pohansko ter Uherské Hradiště ležijo na področju, ki je bilo kristalizacijsko jedro velikomoravske države (slika 8). Iz Češke kotline poznamo celo imena plemen: konkretno Zličane v Stari Kouřimi ter Pšovane pri Hradskem. Pri svetišču v Mostu pri Bratislavi lahko vidimo drugačno ozadje. Tamkajšnje ozemlje so zaradi njegove močvirnosti uporabljali predvsem za izrabo žive narave, kar mu je seveda dalo podoben kulturni pomen, kot ga imajo pri vzhodnih Slovanih t.i. "blatna gradišča".

Lega svetišč ne kaže enotnega pravila za izbiro posvečenega prostora. V Mikulčicah, na Hradskem in v Stari Kouřimi so bila del centralnih gradišč, v Uherskem Hradištu in v Mostu pri Bratislavi je svetišče uporabljalo prebivalstvo nižje družbene plasti. Objekt na Pohanskem pri Břeclavu je stal poleg krščanske cerkve med starejšimi grobovi kot simbol kratkotrajne obnove prvotnega slovanskega verovanja.

Pisna poročila ne nudijo nobene osnove za proučevanje ritualnih obredov, ki bi spremljali izbiro mesta za postavitev svetišča. Zato je treba upoštevati poselitveno topografijo, dostopne poti, zemljepisne razmere, naključno ugotovljene naravne pojave, čaščenje studencev in gajev itd. Potrebno vzdušje so ustvarili tudi z arhitekturo sakralnih stavb. Pet doslej znanih svetišč tvori pristanost žleb. Tak tloris lahko določimo kot samostojno tipološko in ozemeljsko skupino. Izbrali so si različno velike površine. V Hradskem, Stari Kouřimi in Mostu pri Bratislavi so svetišča obrnjena proti jugu. Na tej strani neba so bili prekinjeni tudi žlebovi okoli gomil. Drugi dve najdišči sta obrnjena proti severu.

Pri vseh kulturnih objektih so našli jame za kole, ki so bile izkopane posamično, v parih ali četvericah. Nestor omenja stebre vzdolž poti, na katere so polagali žare s pepelom mrtvih. V raziskovanem obdobju so češki in slovaški Slovani polagali v zemljo nesežgana trupla, zato bi v svetiščih v jamah lahko stali leseni kipci slovanskih bogov. Njihov obstoj potrjujejo tudi številni tedanji letopisci. Kot primerjavo za dvojni jami v Mostu pri Bratislavi je mogoče navesti idol z naselbine Fischerinsel pri Neubrandenburgu (slika 9).

Četverica jam za kole, ki sestavljajo vogale pravokotnika pri Uherskem Hradištu, omejuje površino pribl. 5,12 m<sup>2</sup>, v Mostu pri Bratislavi pa 5,8 m<sup>2</sup>. Gre nedvomno za sledi strešne konstrukcije, kakršno so opisali pri svetišču v Arkoni. Pri Uherskem Hradištu lahko sklepamo na prostor, kamor so položili pokojnika pred pogrebom, v Mostu pri Bratislavi je najverjetneje služil verskim obredom duhovnika. V bližini obeh konstrukcij so našli lobanjske kosti tura, totemske živali Slovanov, ki so bile nameščene na čelnem delu strehe (sliki 4, 7).

V več svetiščih so našli ognjišča različne velikosti. Ognji so goreli večinoma prav v žlebovih. Čaščenje ognja so Slovani prinesli iz pradomovine. Tudi arabski popotniki so označili Slovane za častilce ognja. Ogenj je bil atribut več božanstev slovanskega panteona. Vsaj en ogenj je stalno gorel kot del uradnega rituala. Kratkotrajne ognje (Stará Kouřim, Most pri Bratislavi) so kurili najverjetneje pri zasebnih priložnostih in pri vsakoletnih slavnostih. "Večni" ogenj so nedvomno obredno zakurili in vzdrževali duhovniki - *žreci*. Doslej še ne poznamo pokopa žreca niti predmetov, ki bi jih lahko istovetili z njegovo funkcijo. Pozornost vzbuja pozlačena ploščica z iztolčenim obrazom lasate moške glave iz groba 50-60-letnega moža (slika 13), ki je bil pokopan pri vhodu v svetišče Mikulčice I. Po Saxu Grammatiku so bili ravno dolgi lasje značilnost žrecov. Kultni pomen lahko vidimo tudi v polaganju turovih lobanjskih kosti z rogovi v grobove v Uherskem Hradištu.

Pisni viri nam nudijo tudi poročila o darovih in dajatvah. V svetiščih čeških in slovaških Slovanov je ta običaj izpričan le v Mikulčicah II, kjer so našli v plasti žganine železne surovce, sekire in odlomek žrnelj, ki so prestali očiščevalno moč ognja. Situacijo, ki je podobna tistim pri Slovanih ob Baltiku in pri vzhodnih Slovanih, lahko ugotovimo tudi v svetišču Mikulčice I, kjer so bili človeški grobovi, konjska okostja in kovinski predmeti.

Poleg svetišč, ki smo jih označili za samostojni tip slovanske sakralne arhitekture, poznamo na obravnavanem ozemlju tudi kultne zgradbe, ki so povezane s prostorom ob Baltiku oziroma s slovanskim vzhodom. Najdba v Mikulčicah je doslej najjužnejša ugotovljena, ki ima podoben tloris.

Centralno svetišče na Pohanskem pri Břeclavu se javlja pri kulturnih zgradbah vzhodnih Slovanov. Njegov nastanek na prelomu 9. in 10. st. je v povezavi z vprašanjem možne kratkotrajne obnove slovanskega verovanja kot ideologije, ki jo je kristjanizacija v 9. st. odrinila na družbeno obrobje. Mlajši viri dokumentirajo preživetje nekaterih vidikov slovanskega verovanja, sicer ne v institucionalni obliki, ampak samo kot odmev nekaterih izročil v srednjem veku.