

THE ORIGINS AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE BLATNICA-MIKULČICE PARADIGM¹

Z B I G N I E W R O B A K

The paper presents a compilation of the current knowledge on the so called 'Blatnica deposit' and its individual components, extended by a series of my own studies dedicated particularly to the gilded set of bronze fittings. The article is divided into two main parts: the first one presents a more focused perspective on the issue and provides all the necessary pieces of information about each part of the deposit together with respective chronological and stylistic findings. The second part, on the other hand, introduces a broader perspective, embedding the history of the deposit and studies on it in the methodological context proposed by Thomas S. Kuhn. Based on the Kuhnian model of science and the concept of paradigm I have analysed and then decomposed the so called Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept that proved to be based, at best, on some misunderstandings or, at worst, on a hoax. Detailed typological and stylistic analyses of these items became a starting point for re-evaluation of their chronology and led me to draw a conclusion that the youngest components of the deposit cannot be older than the second third of the 9th century. Both the archive query and the analysis of archaeological sources seem to disprove arguments used to support the hypothesis that the 'Blatnica collection' served as equipment of a nobleman grave. Most probably it was only a loose collection of relics coming from different and so far unknown sources, later transferred in bulk to the museum. Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that the source value of the 'Blatnica relics' has long been overestimated and in any case should no longer serve as a chronological benchmark for other archaeological materials.

Key words: Early Middle Ages, Carolingian Art, Blatnica deposit, Great Moravia, chronology, paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

The paper presents a compilation of the current knowledge on the so called 'Blatnica deposit' and its individual components, extended by a series of my own studies dedicated particularly to the gilded set of bronze fittings. The article is divided into two main parts: the first one presents a more focused perspective on the issue and provides all the necessary pieces of information about each part of the deposit together with respective chronological and stylistic findings. The second part, on the other hand, introduces a broader perspective, embedding the history of the deposit and studies on it in the methodological context proposed by Thomas S. Kuhn. Based on the Kuhnian model of science and the concept of paradigm I have analysed and then decomposed the so called Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept that proved to be based, at best, on some misunderstandings or, at worst, on a hoax. Detailed typological and stylistic analyses of these items became a starting point for re-evaluation of

their chronology and led me to draw a conclusion that the youngest components of the deposit cannot be older than the second third of the 9th century. Both the archive query and the analysis of archaeological sources seem to disprove arguments used to support the hypothesis that the 'Blatnica collection' served as equipment of a nobleman grave. Most probably it was only a loose collection of relics coming from different and so far unknown sources, later transferred in bulk to the museum. Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that the source value of the 'Blatnica relics' has long been overestimated and in any case should no longer serve as a chronological benchmark for other archaeological materials.

On 13. 11. 2013 I performed a museum query aimed at verifying information delivered in a number of scientific and popular studies on the composition and origins of the set of relics commonly referred to as a 'hoard' or 'grave equipment' from Blatnica.² These relics for years were of interest to archaeologists and provided foundations

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² A small number of items were not physically available for analysis due to on-going conservation or rental for an exhibition. Items and catalogues were made available through courtesy of Dr. Gergely Szente from the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum in Budapest. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Andras Csuthy from Podunajské Múzeum in Komarno for facilitating my contacts with the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (MNM), translation of Hungarian texts and valuable chronological comments on the Avar relics included in the Blatnica deposit.



Fig. 1. Front sides of 22 components of the 'Blatnica deposit'. Numbers 2-5 prior to assembling into one cross fitting (Fettich 1937).



Fig. 2. Back sides of 22 components of the 'Blatnica deposit'. Numbers 2-5 prior to assembling into one cross fitting (Fettich 1937).

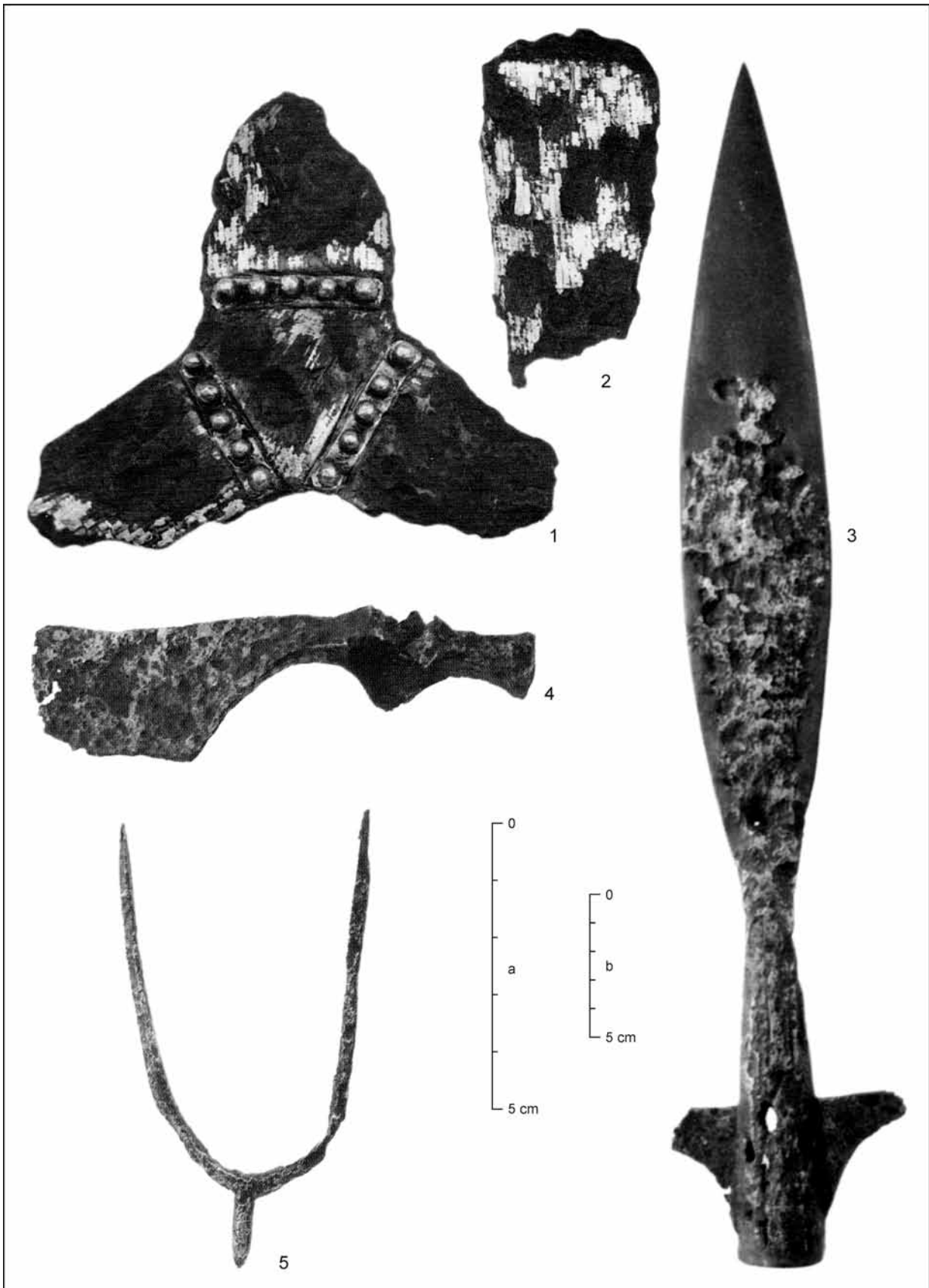


Fig. 3. Other parts of the 'Blatnica deposit'. 1 - trefoil fitting; 2 - strap end (?); 3 - winged spearhead; 4 - beard axe; 5 - spur. State as of 2013 (Szóke 2014). Scale: a - 1, 2; b - 3-5.

for construction of numerous theories concerning development of the Great Moravian culture. In the 50 years since the publication of the last analysis of the 'Blatnica deposit' by *K. Benda (1963)*, many theories and myths aroused around the relics from Blatnica. Furthermore, since the very beginning the information concerning these relics was imprecise and often contradictory. Components of the 'Blatnica deposit' are among most often cited relics in the entire European archaeological literature. The popularity of this collection stems mainly from the fact that in the 50's and 60's of the 20th century Czech and Slovak researchers used it as a source base for constructing a theory of development of the Slavic crafts at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries. The craftsmanship was generally characterised as a continuation of the Avar (Avar-Slavic) casting tradition with some significant Carolingian influences (*Eisner 1952, 328*) and is commonly known in the literature as the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice horizon', 'phase' or 'style'. However, as it turns out, there are numerous doubts about nearly each and every piece of information describing the alleged assemblage – starting from its origins, through the way it was acquired, to its actual composition and chronology of individual finds.

THE DEPOSIT

It is generally accepted that the 'Blatnica deposit' is constituted by 22 relics preserved at MNH³ (Fig. 1; 2; 3: 1, 2; 4: 10; 5: 8). These include: a sword, 20 various strap fittings (recently some fragments have been identified as parts of two cross fittings)⁴ and two decorative domed elements, possibly middle parts of faleras or some other ornaments. Sometimes, depending on the interpretation, knowledge and needs of researchers, the 'deposit' is expanded also by: a winged spearhead, an axe and an iron plate spur (Fig. 3: 3–5; *Szőke 2014, fig. 6*). The 'Blatnica deposit' is commonly treated as a coherent set and considered either as equipment of a nobleman grave (*Benda 1963, 199; Eisner 1952, 324; Fettich 1937, 263; Garam 2000, 144; Profantová/Vích 2012, 202*) or a hoard (*Profantová 2004, 294; Wachowski 1989, 210*). The archive query, however, revealed many interesting facts concerning both

the actual composition of the 'Blatnica deposit' and circumstances of its acquisition by the Budapest Museum.

This situation may be a consequence of the fact that the 'Blatnica deposit' was never fully critically published. Aside from the already mentioned analysis of *K. Benda (1963)*, who focused on the 'Carolingian part' of the deposit, there are four fundamental publications that still serve as a source of pictures and photos, although they are not free from flaws. The publication of *J. Hampel (1905)* lacks a detailed description of items, some of them were omitted, and drawings, although professional, are inaccurate. Particularly the ornament was presented schematically and in several points it was clearly 'improved' by a draftsman. The publication by *E. Garam (2000)* shows relics before conservation. These are, however, the only widely available colour, complete and relatively legible photographs of the core of the 'Blatnica deposit', at least of the Avar fittings belonging to it.⁵ It covers also descriptions of individual relics in a form of a catalogue. Probably also the work of *B. M. Szőke (2014)*, where the author presents so far unpublished components of the deposit and refers to some important facts concerning its acquisition, will be widely cited. The most comprehensive, unfortunately, to this day, remains the study by *N. Fettich (1937)* including good quality photos (although black and white) – the only photos presenting items from both sides. Nowadays, following cleaning and conserving relics, it seems natural to publish the 'deposit' once again using the *ad fontes* method and to shed some new light on its origins. Let us thus try to determine which of the contemporary pieces of information rise doubts and how a small mistake at the beginning eventually turned out to be a great error.

Circumstances of the acquisition by the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum

Items that today are considered as components of the 'Blatnica deposit' have been transferred to the MNM in three tranches, although without detailed information about their origins and mingled with relics from other locations. The first tranche

³ In *Dekan (1976, fig. 82)*, on a picture described as 'selection of relics from a nobleman grave (...). Blatnica' there are four trapezoidal late Avar fittings that certainly were not components of the deposit. Possibly these were fittings from Keszthely (see: *Szőke 2014, Fig. 14*).

⁴ See: *Fettich 1937, pl. XCVII: 2–5* and *Szőke 2014, fig. 2–5*.

⁵ On the pictures in albums published by *J. Dekan's (1976)* and *D. Bialeková (1981)* details of ornaments are not clearly distinguishable, since they present also the condition prior to restoration and photographs are of poor quality. Also the most recent publication of the deposit, by *B. M. Szőke (2014)*, presents relics, except for a trefoil fitting and a recovered fragment of a belt-end fitting, photographed before cleaning.

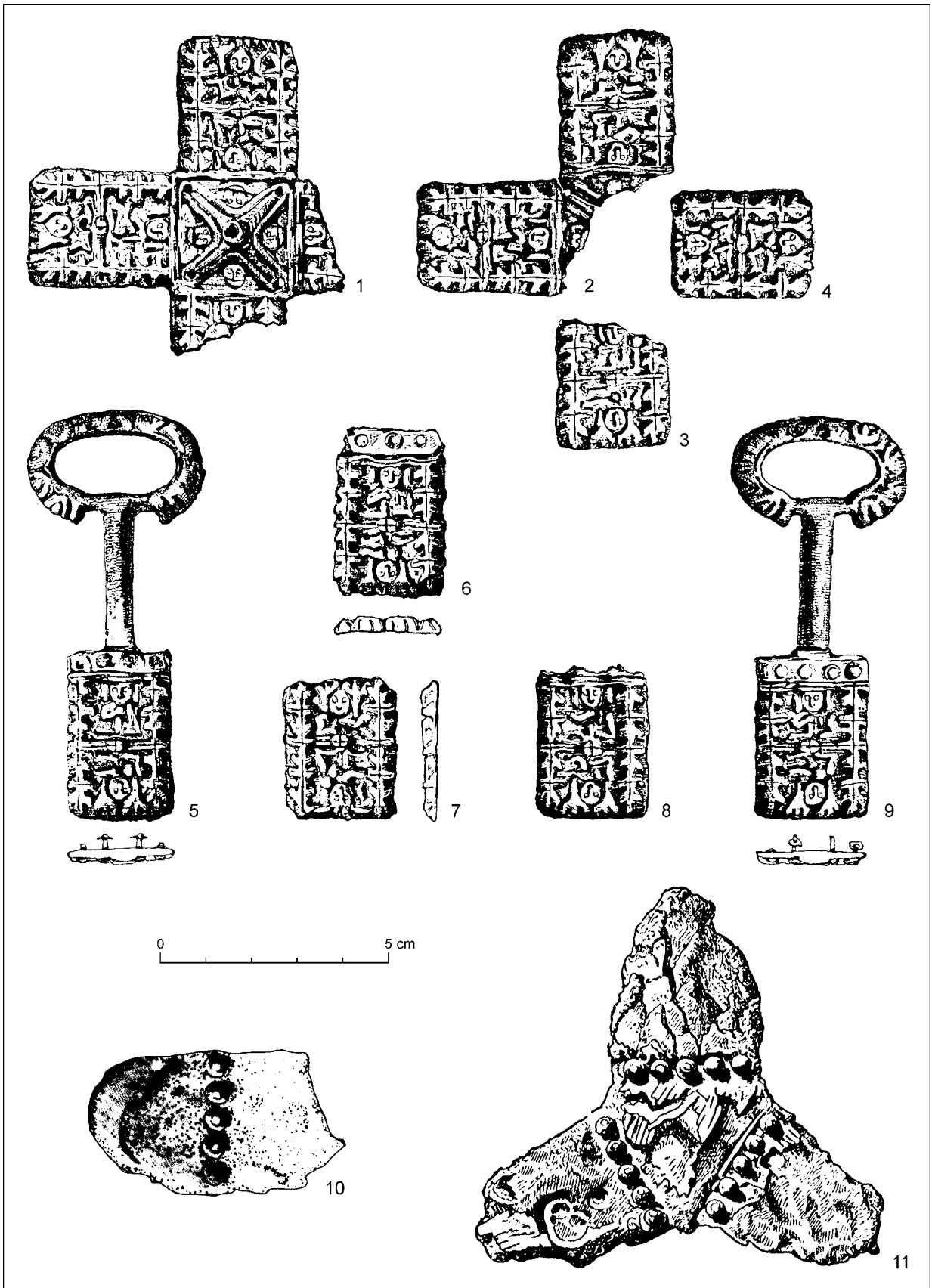


Fig. 4. The 'Blatnica deposit'. 1-9 – idealised drawings of the bronze fittings (Hampel 1905); 10 – missing part (oval fitting) of the sword belt set (Capelle 1968); 11 – trefoil fitting (Hampel 1905).

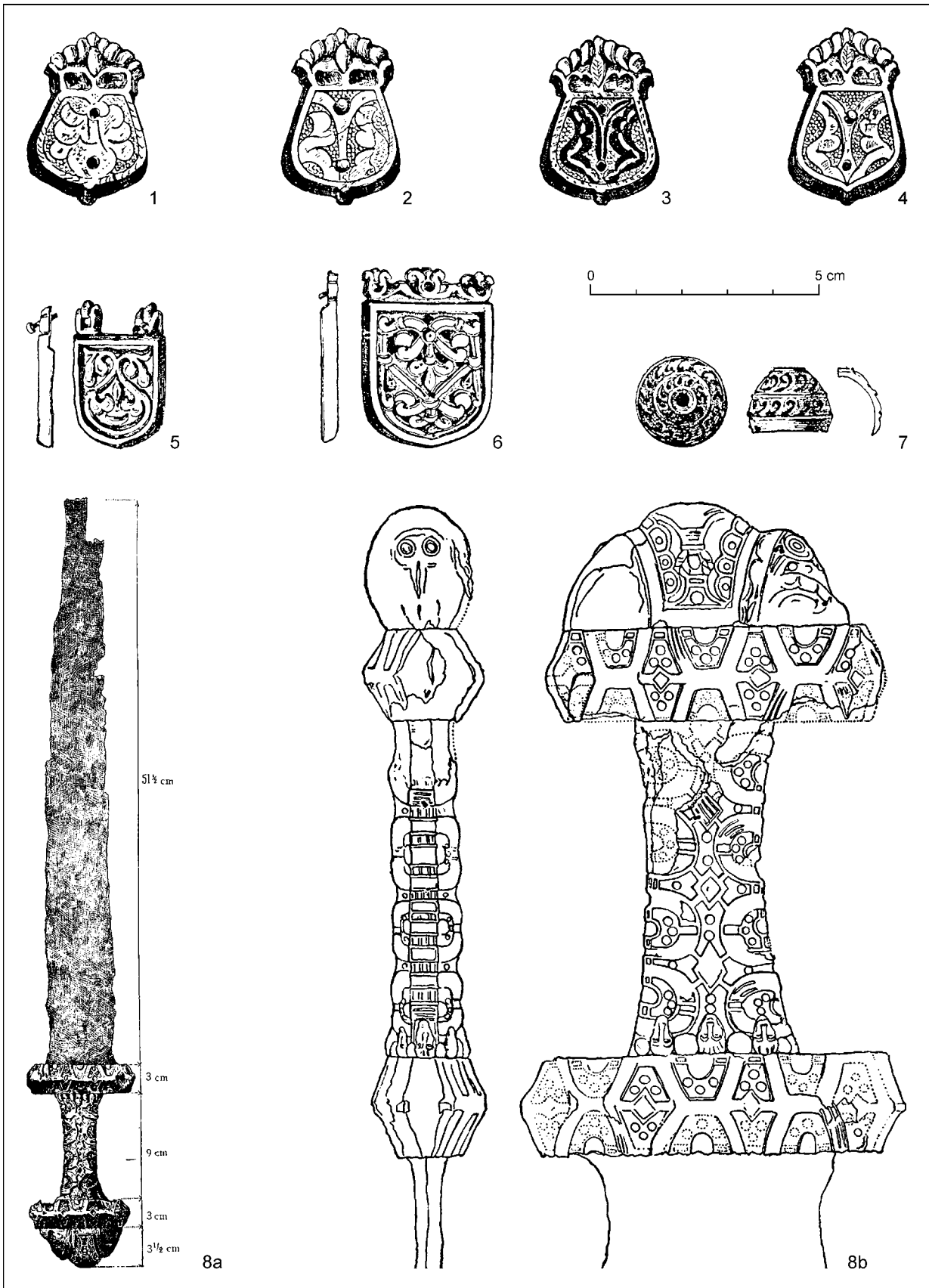


Fig. 5. The 'Blatnica deposit'. 1-7 - Avar bronze fittings; 8a, 8b - sword (Hampel 1905).



Fig. 6. A page from the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum catalogue of 1876 with Révay's donation.

transferred by the donator, baron Ferenc Révay in 1876 included a sword, a sword set composed of three items (trefoil fitting, oval fitting and a so far unpublished fragment of a strap end fitting) and a fragment of an iron spur with a heart-shaped plate (never published) accompanied by some other finds, for example 4 arrowheads (Fig. 6; see Fettich 1937, 263). These items were registered as Turócz Szt. Márton (former name of the current city of Martin) egy sirban (in one grave) – this record was added at item no. 17. Only later, the comment ‘Blatnicza?’ was written with a pencil at the entry no. 22, although we cannot be certain what exactly this comment refers to. Possibly it

is linked not with the relics themselves, but with a remark added later in the margin, this time with ink: ‘L.(ásd) egyes részleteit 146/1880’ (meaning: ‘see individual components’, and the number refers to the inventory of the second tranche donated by Révay). It was the second tranche from 1880 (Fig. 7; 8) that was registered as ‘near Blatnicza’ (Blatnicza közelében) that contained fittings from the set of 9 fragments – 2 fittings with neck and loop, 2 broken cross fittings as well as 5 other strap fittings, 6 Avar strap fittings (4 heart-shaped fittings and 2 strap end fittings), and some other items, including Modern Age weaponry, three spurs, a stirrup, winged spearhead and an axe – some of

144.	okt. 1. /1887/	*SPATI-BILIORA RÖVI	1.	Dr. Kerekes
145.	október 4.	1) Bronz kard fűrészkéi, a penge alja félt. egy-egy, vastagságuk 1mm - láb. fél. 3-3 cm. (a - b.)	8.	Dr. Bábikó
RO 1987	V R.O. 1958	2) Bronz kard fűrészkéi. Hegyapóth 1 cm. hosszú, a fűrészkéi 4 cm. hosszúak domb. mag. 2-6 cm. (a - c)	3.	M.O.
RO 1987	V R.O. 1958	3) Bronz kard fűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	6.	M.O.
RO 1987	V R.O. 1958 X	4) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	21.	Dr. Bábikó
146.	október 10.	5) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	6) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	Arch. Inv. M. (1887)	7) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.	8) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	9) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	M.O. 1887.	10) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	11) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	12) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	13) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	14) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	15) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	16) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	17) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	19) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	20) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	22) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	23) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	24) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	25) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	26) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	27) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	28) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	29) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	30) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	31) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	32) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	33) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	34) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	36) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	37) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	38) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	39) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	40) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	41) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	42) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	43) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	44) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	47) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	59) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	60) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	71) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	72) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
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	R.N. 1958	93) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	94) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	95) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	96) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	97) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	98) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	99) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó
	R.N. 1958	100) Csapófűrészkéi. Hegyapóth fűrészkéi.	1.	Dr. Bábikó

Fig. 7. The first page of the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum catalogue of 1880 with Révay's donation.

these items went missing shortly afterwards.⁶ The third tranche, from 1897, contained 5 Avar relics (3 heart-shaped strap fittings and 2 domed fittings) and one broken fitting matching the set donated in 1880 (Fig. 9). Nowhere, apart from the entry no. 17 from 1876 (Fig. 6), the inventory mentions any information about a grave. What is certain, however, is that already then there were significant doubts concerning origins of all these relics.

As illustrated above, there can be no confidence that these items actually came from Blatnica, i. e. that they were found there, because we have no explicit remarks confirming this.⁷ What is more, the donator was a member of the Révay family and this, once having some information about them, shed a different light on the origins of the collection. The whole Révay (Revai) family who moved to Turiec from Syrmia in the 16th century was known for their admiration for

⁶ N. Fettich (1937, 263) mentions a futile search for items no. 241/1876: 22c (a fragment of a strap-end fitting coming from a sword set) and 146/1880: 85a-g (iron fittings including one with three silver needles [rivets?]) - uncertain whether Early Medieval. The item no. 241/1876: 22c has been recovered in the MNM in 2013 (Fig. 3: 2).

⁷ This doubt was also mentioned by J. Eisner (1952, 324).

	1880.		98.
Kékesi császár	140.	1871. 10. / 1871. R.N. 1958 R.N. 1958 R.N. 1958	8) N.a. kék szöglet, kék színű, kék in. elöltekkel kezdődő, szögletes, két szög. 1. 1. megle (Blatnica Kékesi.) u.o.
			9) N.a. 3 szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 1. szög. két szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			10) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			11) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
Bábi császár		arch. Sz. XVI. 2. / 1880. 8-11. sz. 2. szög. H. sz. R.N. 1958 R.N. 1958 u.o. 5. R.N. 1958	12) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			13) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			14) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			15-16) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
M.O. Kékesi császár		M.O. 3. R.N. 1958	17) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			18) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			19) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.
			20) N.a. kék szöglet. két szöglet szöglet. in. elöltekkel kezdődő. Szöglet 2. szög. két szög. 2. szög. 1. 1. u.o.

Fig. 8. The second page of the Magyars Nemzeti Múzeum catalogue of 1880 with Révay's donation.

culture, science, art and collectibles (Komorová 2008). Different members of the family possessed the so called 'chambers of antiquities' in their premises, but in the 19th century the main 'family museum' that successively acquired exhibits from other family collections was located at the Sklabiňa Castle placed about 7 km east from the centre of Martin (Zvedelová 2010, 331). Apart from valuable works of art, weapons, furniture and paintings, the Révays collected also various finds obtained during constructions and earthworks at their properties – they gathered virtually everything, including broken pottery. Unfortunately, their collections were also enhanced by items bought abroad, at various 'flea markets' (Pekariková 2010). According to the information of J. Hampel

(1880, 351–354) the owner of, among others, Blatnica, Sklabiňa and its neighbourhood, baron Ferenc Révay (1835–1916), a noted amateur of art and relics, possessed a significant collection of medieval weaponry and other 'antiquities'. The Révays, however, were not museum experts and it would be naïve to expect that they attached any specific importance to linking their specimens with particular locations. This was not an exceptional situation. In the second half of the 19th century the amateur archaeology, particularly digging mounds, was unfortunately a very popular amusement among the Upper Hungarian nobility (Králiková 2001) and a life mission of various 'explorers of roots of the nation'. A situation similar to that of the 'Blatnica deposit' concerned also a grave from

Folyó szám	A beérkezés napja	A tárgy megnevezése	Darab szám	Lelhely	Érték	
					ft	kr.
112	Szeptember 9. (félszáz) 121 R.R. 1952	121) Székelyi fegyverek	1	Torda		
		122) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
		123) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
		R.Ö. 1990 R.Ö. 1990 124) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
		R.Ö. 1990 R.Ö. 1990 125) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
		R.Ü. 1958 126) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
113	Szeptember 9. R.N. 1952	127) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	3	A Blatnicai (Torda) múzeumban		
		128) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
		129) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			
114	Szeptember 9. R.Ö. 1952	130) Székelyi fegyverek, törökös fegyverek, székely székelyi fegyverek	1			

Fig. 9. A page of the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum catalogue of 1897 with Révay's donation.

nearby Malý Čepčín, dug up in 1872 by a teacher from Kláštor pod Znievom, V. Groó. This grave contained 'fabulous' equipment⁸, similar to that of the 'Blatnica deposit'. The only certain information, however, about the equipment of this grave is that a historian and ethnographer, future organiser of the museum in Mukačevo, T. Lehoczky was informed in 1874 by V. Groó about items coming from this allegedly dug up grave, saw them, although not in situ, and three of these items were transferred later to the museum passing through his hands. What, however, actually came from the grave in Malý Čepčín – we do not

know. The difference between these two graves lies in the fact that V. Budinský-Krička located the grave in Malý Čepčín, dug it up again and even found several overlooked items including a fragment of an Avar fitting matching stylistically the fitting that was transferred to Mukačevo, which lends credence to the entire story (Budinský-Krička 1936). No such luck, so far, had the archaeologist with the 'Blatnica deposit'.

Baron F. Révay generously donated items from the family collection to museums, mainly the National Museum in Budapest, which probably saved some more valuable relics from destruction. In 1940

⁸ The spear, axe, arrowheads, two stirrups of the eastern form, spur, six pairs of silver gilded 'clasps' and silver globular metal buttons (gombik). The grave allegedly contained a burial of a man with a horse (Budinský-Krička 1936).

the museum in Martin acquired the remains of relics from the Sklabiňa Castle, the seat of the Révay family. They come probably from the same 'chamber of antiquities' mentioned by J. Hampel (1880, 352–353) and visited by the head of the Museum F. Pulszky, the chamber that presumably included also the 'Blatnica relics' prior to their donation to the Museum. The chamber itself had a relatively long history. In 1801 it was visited by Palatine Joseph. Undevastated and even restored, it existed at least until 1921, when it was visited by the chief archivist of Turiec Župa, Ján Hajný. According to the testimony he left, there were "beautiful old tapestries, antique paintings, pieces of old tools from the 13th to the 17th century, a vast archive transferred from Mošovce, library and an abundant collection of old weapons..." [„pekné staré gobelíny, starožitné obrazy, kusy starého náradia z 13. až 17. storočia, bohatý archív prenesený z Mošoviec, knižnica a bohatá zbierka starých zbraní..."] (Hajný 1923, 18; Králiková 2004, 348). Unfortunately in 1940 no inventory of relics has been made. We have only brief remarks contained in the report:

"Single pieces of furniture coming from the 'pre-March' period (Biedermaier) and mythological paintings from the second half of the 18th century of a foreign provenience, imported to Sklabiňa, and thus cannot be considered as Slovenica.

- *Weaponry and equipment is of a common type, it has no more valuable decorative details and thus has no greater collectible value. From the technical perspective these weapons are generally of more recent origins, from 18th century.*
- *Plans and blueprints of Baroque buildings and castles should be compared with individual relics in Slovakia, it seems, however, that they have no closer relationship with Slovakia.*
- *Archives are of private nature (economic reports, correspondence) and also more recent (18th – 19th century). Smaller gauche vedute (landscapes) come generally from the first half of the 19th century and would come into consideration only if presenting themes from Slovakia.*

- *The collection contains no archaeological or historical discoveries, finds and items with exact location specified (emphasis added – ZR).*
- *Parts of weaponry, smaller metal items and all small fragments are worthless for the museum.*
- *Pottery is of a utility type and significantly damaged, and thus is of low-value.*
- *Parts of military uniforms as well as other fabrics (upholstery, with painted coats of arms, etc.) are damaged by moths and humidity, which significantly reduces their value..."*

Archive of SNM, f. MSS, letter no. 1215/40 of 28th of May 1940 (see Pekariková 2010).

It is thus clear how extensive and qualitatively diverse was the Révays' collection – and these are only descriptions of its sad remnants. The text provides, however, other important information, namely that through the centuries there was no inventory of the collection and thus no bystander could determine where the items come from, unless it was personally known by the current owner from the Révay family. The key question is, whether baron F. Révay knew where his collections came from, or did he make the location up? Experience teaches that amateur collectors, due to various reasons (they wish to keep the site secret, add 'dignity' to some location, cover their ignorance or carelessness, and sometimes simply out of malice), often conceal information about actual locations of their finds.

Summarising the source data obtained in the MNM in Budapest, the information about the donor and customs adopted in his family, together with the report on the state of the collection in 1940, it should be concluded that the only highly probable hypothesis about origins of items transferred to the MNM in Budapest is restricted to a general statement that they come from the Révays' noble collection (see Benda 1963, 199). But still it remains uncertain how these items entered the collection. Here we have more space to hypothesise, as they could come from several assemblages found somewhere in the Turiec Valley, for example some damaged graves⁹ or/and a deposit

⁹ E. Mályusz (1922, 31) provides information about some "three burial mounds" containing skeletal burials in Priekopa (today suburbs of Martin) from which in 1804 spears, arrowheads, spurs, axes, gold jewellery and belt components were acquired. He himself, however, considers the information of baron Révay about one grave bogus! This was pointed out, among others, by I. Červinka (1928, 183). A. Petrovský-Šichman (1964, 40, 41; footnote 12) on the other hand speculates that the discovery could have been made in 1857 during reconstruction of the St. Andrew's church in Sebeslavce, a village below the Blatnica castle. As it is certified, however, by accidental finds of graves in the neighbourhood quoted by this author, such events as the discovery of a nobleman grave were kept in memory of local communities for a long time, and thus it is rather dubious that the discovery of such a splendid find as the Blatnica deposit has not been noticed. The contemporary local tradition places the burial in the "upper (presumably the northern) end of the village Blatnica" or in Sebeslavce, administratively being today a part of Blatnica (Odler 2011, 24, 25), which proves that even local people are not unanimous about the proper location of the find – presumably 'making up' a story consistent with the version of the origin of the discovery they happen to know. M. Odler (2011, 25) analysing settlement processes in the Turiec Valley noticed that the hypothetical grave from the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries in Blatnica would have no settlement background in its immediate vicinity, although, he indicated that the area is poorly archaeologically recognised, even in terms of surface surveys. But the fact remains that in the vicinity there is no stronghold that the alleged nobleman could belong to (Zábojník 2011, 210).

(a hoard) of bronze scrap. But on the other hand they can constitute randomly mixed parts of the vast collection of baron Révay (or one of his ancestors), who only decided to transfer them to the museum. The second alternative is supported also by the fact that the collection was transferred in three tranches within several years (1876, 1880 and 1897), while the sword and the sword set including three components were transferred already in the first tranche and only these items constitute a relatively consistent entirety coherent both in typological and chronological (although not stylistic) terms. Personally, I do not suppose baron Révay himself mingled the (typologically) Carolingian sword with an incomplete, although also Carolingian, sword set. As a Hungarian nobleman and collector he certainly was acquainted with melee weapons and thus functions of some components could be obvious for him, but it seems more probable that the juxtaposition was made, for example, either by J. Hampel or the then director of the MNM Ferenc Pulszky, who visited baron and admired his collections. In my opinion, these components could be originally stored together and together they were transferred to the museum and registered in the catalogue in 1876¹⁰ (and even accurately drawn), while the spur and various arrowheads were registered separately. Furthermore, components of the Carolingian and Avar sets from the second tranche have little in common besides the material they were made of – gilded bronze. The third tranche probably contains items that were ‘overlooked’, when the second tranche was transferred. In the least optimistic version, we would be forced to assume that these items were not found in the vicinity of Blatnica, or even in Slovakia, but one of the Révays brought them from abroad. Judging by the marginal comments from 1876 it seems that the first tranche of items was classified as a part of the ‘Blatnica deposit’ retrospectively, that is only after receiving the second tranche in 1880 or maybe even later. The information about the assemblage is provided only in 1905 by J. Hampel¹¹ – earlier there are no hints indicating a single set, the only common point for all these relics to that time was their donor. The catalogue provides no information about origins of the items donated in

the first tranche and the remark ‘*Blatnicza?*’ suggests that the person writing it also had no certainty. In 1880 baron Révay donated further relics to the Museum: the Carolingian winged spearhead, three spurs, stirrup, axe and the already mentioned iron fittings (one with a silver rivet). The fittings unfortunately were lost. All these finds were ‘in bulk’ ascribed to the ‘Blatnica sword set’ (Benda 1963, 199; Fettich 1937, 263; Nagy 1906).

Analysis of the collection

Despite the undetermined origins of the relics, the collection remains a precious, impressive and unique set of items that could be subjected to detailed stylistic analyses. This shall contribute to determining origins and chronology not of the entire ‘deposit’, but particularly of its individual components. The collection of the early medieval relics donated by baron Révay, in addition to numerous, random items, such as ceramics or arrowheads, includes only three relatively coherent ‘assemblages’:

1. a D-type sword that presumably should be linked with an incomplete set of strap fittings with a trefoil fitting (Fig. 3: 1, 2; 4: 10; 5: 8);
2. a set of similar heart-shaped Avar fittings, in fact derived from different sets (Fig. 1: 14–20);
3. an incomplete set of fittings of the Carolingian type, presumably decorations of a horse tack (Fig. 1: 1–11).

None of these ‘assemblages’ could be combined with either two clearly late-Avar strap-end fittings (Fig. 1: 12, 13) or two domed fittings (Fig. 1: 21, 22) – possibly middle parts of faleras (although for clarity I will discuss them below together with other Avar components of the collection). Let us now proceed with a more detailed analysis of the relics included in these three sets.

The Avar relics

The ‘Avar’ part of the collection (Fig. 1: 12–22; 5: 1–7) raises the least doubts regarding the chronology and origins of fittings. It includes seven very

¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that for a long time it was believed, based on the Scandinavian analogies, that the trefoil fitting is in fact a Scandinavian clasp, only a needle was missing (Eisner 1933, 251). This provides an additional argument in favour of complementarity of the trefoil fitting and the sword, because otherwise, if these relics were obtained separately, they would not know the function of the ‘clasp’ and that it should be linked with the sword. The oldest finds of sword sets with a trefoil fitting from a grave with a sword include an accidental find from Kolín in 1864 (Šafránek 1881) and the excavations performed by F. Příkryl in Jarohněvice in Moravia in 1884 (Příkryl 1890). None of the authors, however, writing about the Blatnica deposit until the middle of the 20th century quotes these studies – just as they do not mention the work by S. Müller (1880, 165), where the author correctly defined the function of the item that later gave birth of trefoil clasps. It should be further noted that in the catalogue of finds the trefoil fitting was drawn on the sword, similarly as in the publication presenting the sword and fitting from Jarohněvice. The issue was later studied by J. Cincík (1947, 215–221), who correctly determined the function of the Blatnica trefoil fitting as a strap divider in a sword set.

¹¹ Hampel 1905, II, 427. It is interesting that in the article of 1906 G. Nagy (1906, 133, 134) claims that the sword and four arrowheads come from Martin. Is it possible then G. Nagy saw the catalogue without the comment?

similar heart-shaped fittings (type IV according to Csuthy 2012), two strap-end fittings and two domed fittings. All have stylistic and typological analogies mainly among findings from the late-Avar cemeteries around Komárno, but are known also from numerous other sites, both from territories of the former Avar Khaganate and from areas inhabited solely by the Slavs (Csuthy 2012; 2015, pl. Xla–b; LVII; Jarc 2007, 92; Profantová 2004, 294, 295; Profantová/Vích 2012; Szenthe 2013, fig. 3; Trugly 1987, pl. I: 1). All these fittings, independently, can also be dated back to the late-Avar period SS III–IV¹² (ca. 750–800/825), and possibly even to a younger phase of this period (Csuthy 2012, pl. IV; V; 2015, 122, 161, 162, 167; Profantová 2004, 294; Szenthe 2013, 316; 2015, 302; Zábajník 2011, 210). It was then that motifs combining small floral ornaments with geometrical symmetry (the best known example is the set of fittings from Hohenberg) as well as motifs of drop-like leaves at a punctured background became popular (Daim 2000, 185; Szenthe 2013, 318). Our attention is rather drawn by the fact that the Avar fittings from the ‘Blatnica deposit’ do not constitute any assemblage (even seemingly similar heart-shaped fittings have slightly different ornaments)¹³ and present at least three different decorative manners (engraved image of symmetrical leaves at a punctured background, floral relief at a punctured background and openwork floral and geometrical ornament) and may come both from a warrior’s attire or a horse tack (Fig. 5: 1–6). Consequently this set resembles rather a random collection of components that are not internally linked than the equipment of a single grave (Profantová 2004, 294).

The sword

Researchers repeatedly spoke about the sword (Fig. 5: 8; 10) from the Blatnica deposit (recently: Biborski et al. 2010, 36–38; Marek 2004, 29, 30; Žabiński 2007, 59, 60 also including the older literature) and they seem to agree that this is not a local item, although it is also difficult to accept it unquestionably as a product imported from the continental part of Western Europe. Comparative analyses performed imply that the sword (or more precisely its hilt) is most likely a product coming from Scandinavia, or



Fig. 10. The hilt of the Blatnica-sword (Szóke 2014).

Rus, because similar specimens are found along the entire route linking Scandinavia and Byzantium (Biborski et al. 2010, 36–38; Kirpichnikov 1966, 26, 27; Zozulya/Kainov 2008)¹⁴, although we should keep in mind that its closest analogues are definitely swords from Vaage and Eltoft in Norway (Wachowski 1989, fig. 1). Medallion-like decorations based on the cross motif characteristic for one of the ornamental groups of the D-type swords can be considered as a pattern developed in the Scandinavian cultural environment, very similar in its form, as it has already been indicated by J. Petersen, to the one present on turtle fibulas (Androshchuk 2013, 48; Petersen 1919, 74). It should be noted, however, that similarly decorated swords (and generally the D-type swords) are not present among archaeological finds from Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria or Hungary.¹⁵ This does not

¹² According to: Zábajník 1991, 248.

¹³ I thank Dr. A. Csuthy for drawing my attention to this fact.

¹⁴ While other Carolingian relics do not appear there at all. This allows us to assume that these swords were imported there through Scandinavia, because if we were dealing with a direct import to Ruthenia from Western Europe, we would observe there also other components of sword sets as well as other Carolingian products delivered there, in the worst scenario, accidentally. According to current state of art I cannot indicate strap fittings or other components of the early- or late Carolingian sword or strap fittings sets that would be stylistically coherent with swords of the D type – contrary to swords of the so called Mannheim, special I, K, H, X, Y types which stylistics finds its reflection also in components of matching sword sets or strap and belt fittings.

¹⁵ In works of Russian researchers (including Kainov/Zozulya 2014, 36; Kirpichnikov/Kainov 2001, 70) the sword from the Blatnica deposit is counted among specimens coming from Hungary.

appear to support the hypothesis accepted by some researchers that the ornament has strictly Carolingian origins (*Benda 1963, 210; Ruttkay, A. 1976, 247, 248; 273; Wachowski 1989, 211*). On the other hand, outside Scandinavia the D-type swords are being found only in areas covered by the Scandinavian settlement or in their direct vicinity (Ireland, Scotland, Ruthenia, Polish and German Pomerania).¹⁶

For a long time the fact that the hilt of the sword was decorated with mask motifs (allegedly confirming its Carolingian origins) was decisive for determining the 'cultural affiliation' of the sword from Blatnica (*Benda 1963, 210; Bialeková 2002, 97; Dekan 1976, fig. 88*). It should be noted, however, that both in the Carolingian and in the Great Moravian¹⁷ ornamentation of components of strap fittings sets and other parts of weaponry, the mask motif was not nearly as popular as some studies seem to suggest (*Profantová 2011, 91, 92*) and most specimens from territories of Western Europe quoted in the reference literature are items of liturgical character, for which the face motif has a very specific and obvious significance. This excludes those artefacts as sources of straightforward analogies. It is generally very difficult to indicate a single group of Carolingian relics that could be imitated by the ornament on the sword from Blatnica. The Scandinavian ornamentation, on the other hand, often reaches for mask motifs used for decoration of numerous items starting already from the Migration Period (*Biborski et al. 2010, 34; Lemm 2004–2005*), and thus their presence on the sword produced in that cultural environment cannot be as surprising as in the case of items attributed to the Carolingian or the Great Moravian craft.

And, by the way, it should also be noted that the argument from the 'mask motif' is notoriously overused to support claims about the so called 'Blatnica-Mikulčice syncretic style' and the resulting chronology of relics (e.g. *Bialeková 1999, 137; Jaworski et al. 2012, 41*). However, since its recognition as a "typical for the Blatnica-Mikulčice style" (without any definition of that 'style' provided to this day) relying solely on spurs from the grave 44/II from Mikulčice

(*Poulik 1975, 62*), not many items confirming this 'typicality'¹⁸ and supporting similar hypotheses were found. A small group of items dated back to the end of the 8th and the 9th century known from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, decorated with different motifs of human faces are either Carolingian or late-Avar products, for which we can find numerous analogies among formally similar relics (see *Fettich 1963, fig. 1: 3; Profantová 2011, fig. 16; Profantová/Rypka 2010, fig. 4*). *J. Petersen (1919, 72–74)* considered the group of swords decorated with an ornament based on lines of cruciform figures (sometimes referred to in the more recent literature as D1) as older than the group decorated with lines of small convex silvered bronze badges (D2). Despite, however, 100 years of research, we are still unable to determine a clear chronology of these two groups. And there still remains an open question, how, if at all, is this stylistic differentiation important for the chronology of the type D or a closer determination of its temporal genesis. The D-type swords, most of which are loose finds without any archaeological context, could be generally dated back only to the 9th century – the first half of the 10th century, with their greatest popularity (*heyday*) assumed as the second half of the 9th century (*Androshchuk 2013, 48, 49*).

The sword set

As already mentioned above, the sword is functionally linked with the incomplete set of strap fittings used for fixing it. This set includes one trefoil fitting (Fig. 3: 1; 4: 11), one oval fitting (Fig. 4: 10; damaged) and one longitudinal fragment of a fitting, presumably a strap-end fitting (Fig. 3: 2). These types of sets, generally including a trefoil fitting, two oval fittings, a fitting with a loop, a long strap-end fitting and a buckle¹⁹ were already subjects of numerous studies (*Baumeister 1998, 173–176; Košta/Hošek 2008; Robak 2013, 93–96, 140–146; Ungerman 2011a, 580, 581; 2015; Wamers 1981*).²⁰ This type of a sword set was definitely the most popular type among the Carolingian environment (so far we know 11 recon-

¹⁶ Swords from Wesenberg, Kr. Neubrandenburg (*Schoknecht 1988, 142, fig. 2a*), Kępska, pow. Koszalin (*Sarnowska 1955, fig. 22*), both without pommels and a fragment of a cross-guard from Truso (*Biborski et al. 2010, Fig. 7*).

¹⁷ The term 'Great Moravian' is used in this context only to name the material culture characteristic for the Slavs inhabiting territories of today Moravia and Slovakia between the turn of the first and the second quarter of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century (similarly as the 'Lusatian culture'). I am aware that the label derived from the historical understanding of the Great Moravia indicates a specific political entity, which lifetime does not have to coincide or perfectly overlap with the archaeological dates assigned to the material culture.

¹⁸ This conviction inclines some researchers to see 'masks' on the Great Moravian products, even if actually there are none (*Poulik 1975, pl. 38: 2; Ungerman 2011a, 584*).

¹⁹ Variant A according to *Ungerman 2011, 580, 581*; type I according to *Robak 2013, 140–145*.

²⁰ The history of research on the Carolingian sword sets presented in: *Robak 2013, 93–96*. The list of publications should be supplemented with the most recent studies: *Košta/Lutovský 2014, 64–76; Ungerman 2015*.



Fig. 11. Stuttgart Psalter, fol. 22r (Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart).

structed sets), which is confirmed also by numerous individual finds of fittings comprising it (Robak 2013, 41). Unlike the D-type swords known only from areas linked with the Scandinavian settlement, the sword sets with a trefoil fitting are observed throughout Europe, wherever the Carolingian influences reached: from the British Isles and Scandinavia to Dalmatia (Robak 2013, maps 6, 7, 12). There are none, however, known from Eastern Europe.

The period, when sets with a trefoil fitting were used falls in the time between the first and the third third of the 9th century. During that time this type of sets has undergone no significant modifications²¹ (although it is possible that it served as a base for development of other Carolingian types of sword sets) and thus dating of individual sets relies mainly

on the stylistic of their ornaments, respectively on dating assemblages within which they were found but with different than archaeological methods. *Terminus ante quem* of a sword set with a trefoil fitting is designated by an image of such item on an illustration from the Stuttgart Psalter (fol. 22r; Fig. 11) dated back to about 820/830 (Wamers 2005b, 44). This period, however, could not be very long, because at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries, and most likely in the first third of the 9th century, the most popular were sword sets of the early Carolingian types (Robak 2013, 96–104, 154–157; Wamers 2008, 43, 44; 2011, 69) that contained no trefoil fittings. Its function, at least in one of the early Carolingian sword set types, has been taken over by a three-fold strap divider with movable ferrules

²¹ There is, for example, a noticeable tendency to elongate looped fittings (Robak 2013, 143).

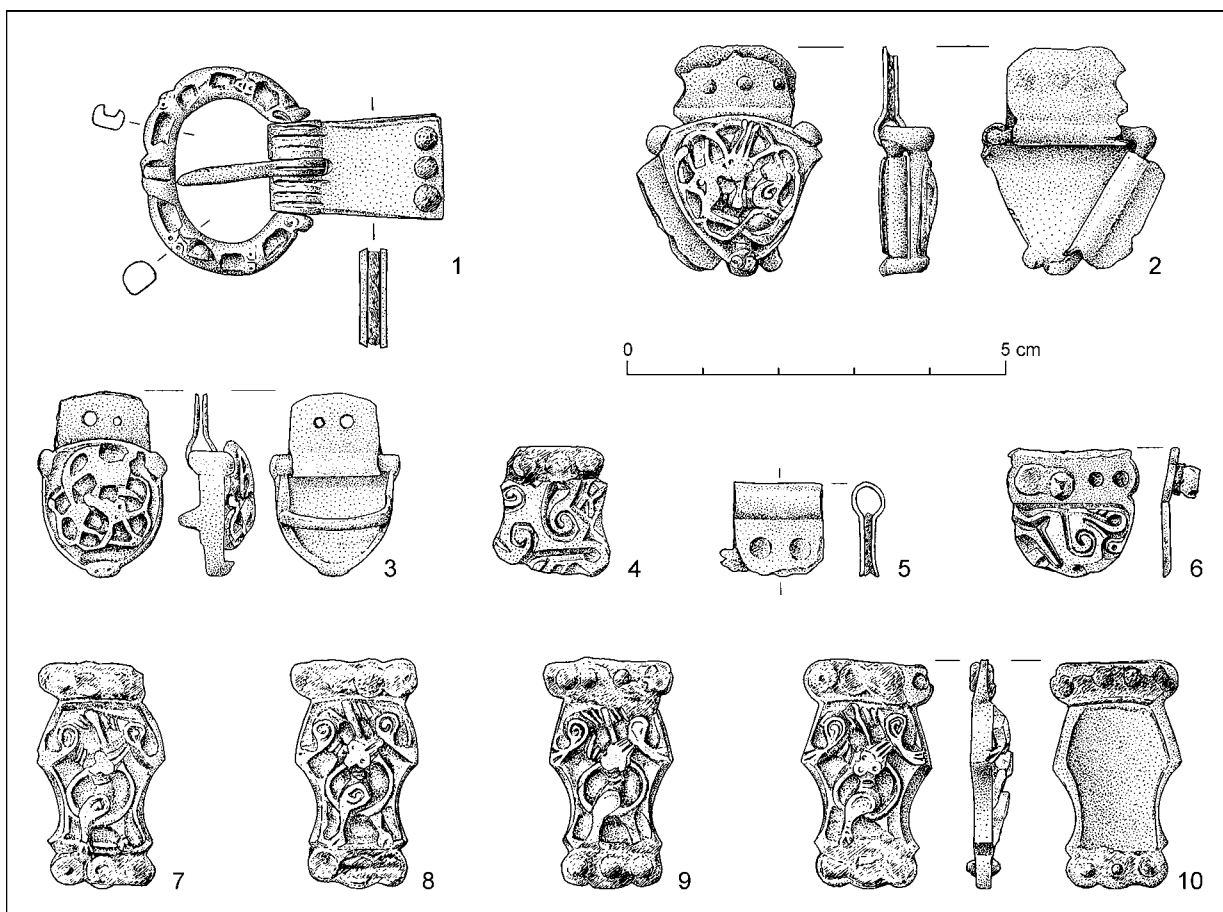


Fig. 12. Aggbichl bei Marquartstein, Lkr. Traunstein. Parts of the belt sets (Helmbrecht 2008).

(Helmbrecht 2008, fig. 3: 2; Robak 2013, 105, 106, pl. LXXXVIII: 1b) that possibly is also a genetic ancestor of trefoil fittings (Fig. 12: 2). Dates of the oldest image of a trefoil fitting in the Stuttgart Psalter are consistent also with dates of archaeological finds.

The oldest examples of sword sets with a trefoil fitting include a set found in the grave no. 6 in Biskupija-Crkvina (Fig. 13; Jelovina 1986, 20) that stylistically could be linked with forms and ornamental motifs popular in the last third of the 8th century and at the beginning of the 9th century (Robak 2013, 107; Wamers 1981, 120, 121). This grave, similarly as several neighbouring, is attributed generally to the older section of the Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon, dated back to ca. 790–820/830 (Robak 2013, 19, 21).²² Also the grave no. 1 from Koljane Gornje, where a sword set with a trefoil fitting was found, is assigned to this chronology (Fig. 14; Jelovina 1986, 32, 33), although this set is slightly younger than the set from the grave no. 6, which is confirmed by the lack of features characteristic for the early Carolingian period (protrusions, geniculate

swellings, etc. although the edges are still faceted). This is, so far, also the only known complete sword set with a trefoil fitting (Robak 2013, 109).

The trefoil fitting from the grave no. 6 was T-shaped (Fig. 13: 1), a shape uncommon among other trefoil fittings known from sword sets. The fitting from the grave in Koljane Gornje (Fig. 14: 2) was already symmetrically shaped in a form of a cloverleaf consequently applied throughout the period these fittings were used. It seems unlikely, however, that the T-shaped fitting preceded development of the cloverleaf fittings. Despite stylistic differences between both sets, they could and probably were used in the same time. Presumably the T-shaped fittings are a side branch in the development of this type of items, very soon abandoned anyway.

It is also likely that the damaged oval fitting from the Blatnica deposit was originally a fitting with a loop, but this cannot be confirmed as there is no publication showing the reverse side of the item. In such case it would be possible that fittings included in the set from Blatnica constituted

²² The issue of dating the Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon was recently discussed in: Kleemann 2010; Robak 2013, 17–22.

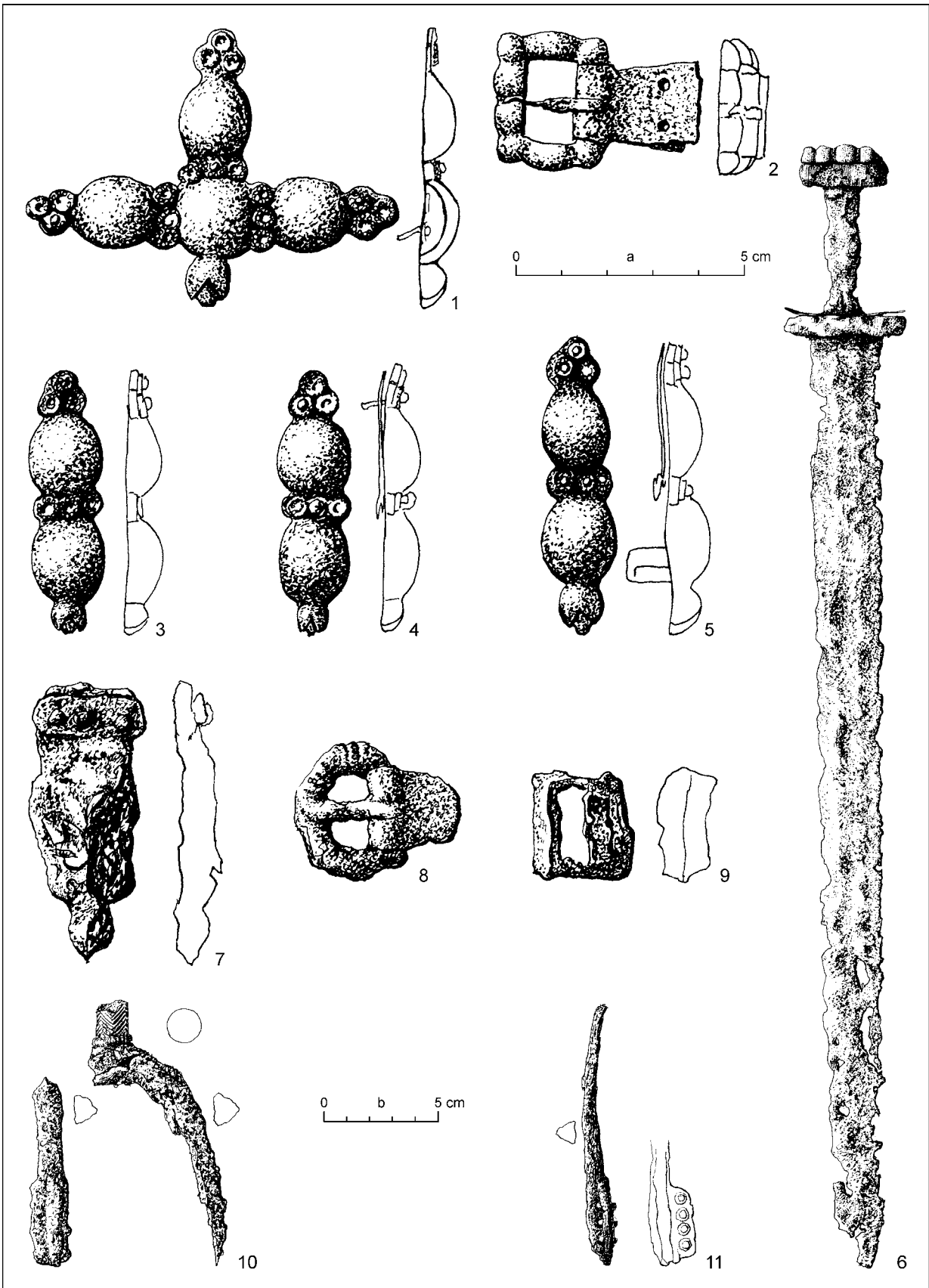


Fig. 13. Biskupija-Crkvina, grave 6 (Jelovina 1986). Scale: a – 1–5, 7–9; b – 10, 11; without scale – 6.

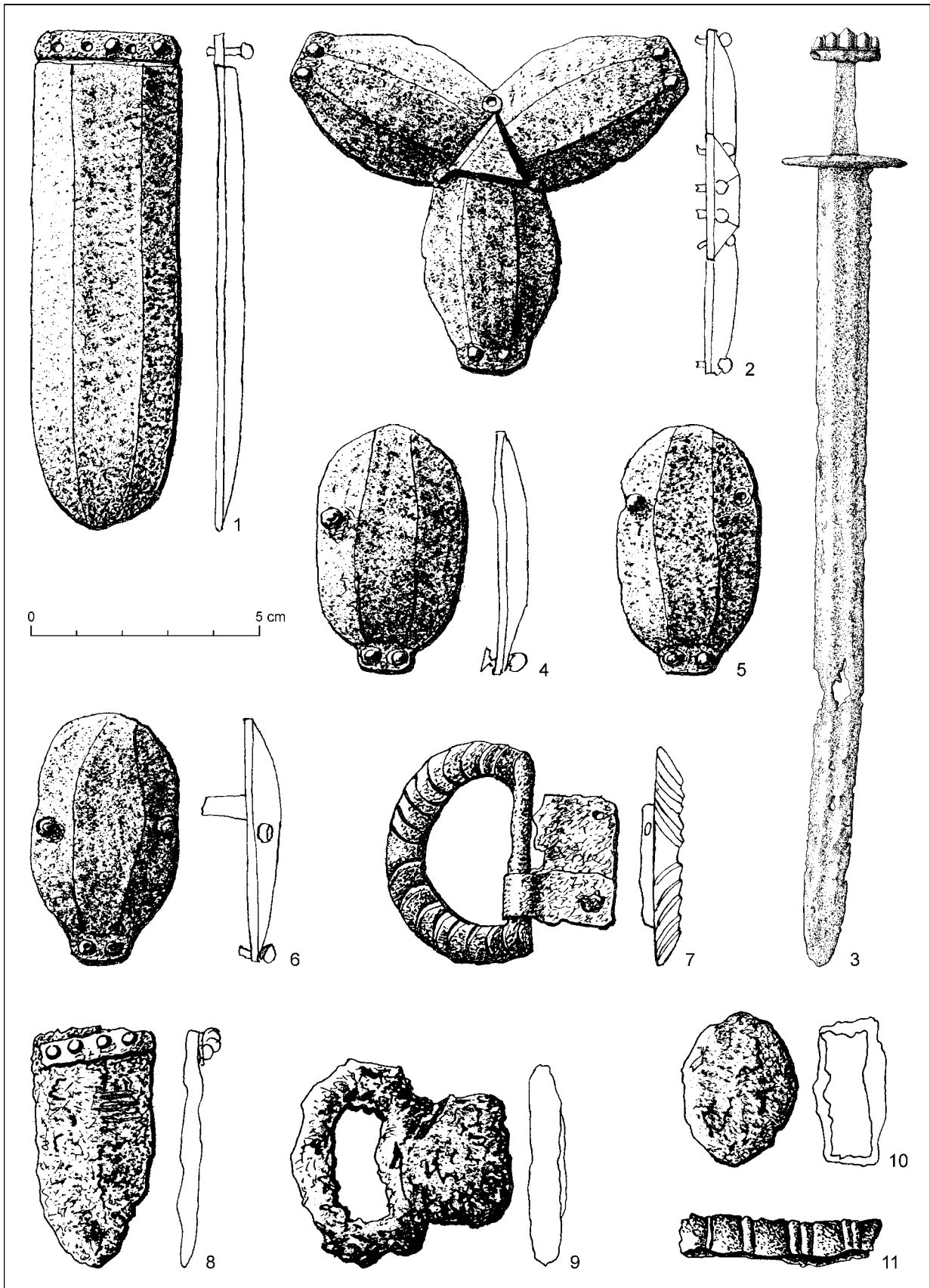


Fig. 14. Koljane Gornje-Vukovića Most, grave 1 (Jelovina 1986). Without scale – 3.

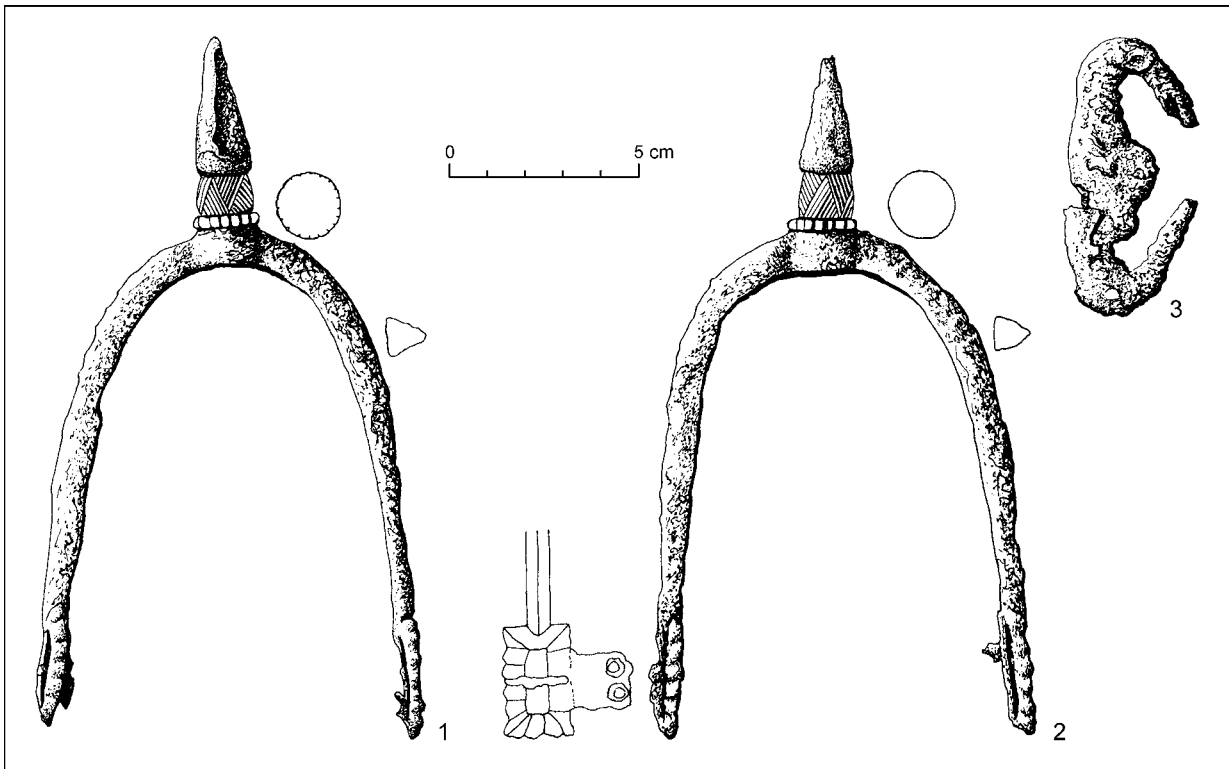


Fig. 15. Koljane Gornje-Vukovića Most, grave 1 (Jelovina 1986).

another, less popular type of a sword set, in which oval fittings were replaced by the so called roof-like fittings (Fig. 16).²³ This, however, does not affect the chronology of the collection. Both types of sets with a trefoil fitting were used simultaneously, although the genesis of the second type developed based on the first one is slightly younger (Robak 2013, 146).

The period of the greatest popularity of sets with a trefoil fitting falls on the middle third of the 9th century. It is from this period that most trefoil fittings come (Robak 2013, 111; 2014, List 8) as well as other components of sword sets that included them. Most of these fittings are decorated with a floral ornament that allow following the development of this stylistics. We have also a series of images of swords with fittings from the Carolingian illuminated manuscripts (Robak 2014, pl. CXIV–CXVI; Wamers 2005b, 37–43). The youngest among known trefoil fittings was found in the hoard from Hoen (Westermann-Angerhausen 2006, 106–114). Based on coins accompanying it, the time of its deposition is estimated as not earlier than 852²⁴, the stylistics (a very extensive plant ornament with rectangular leaves), however, compels us to accept the hypo-

thesis that it was produced in the last third of the 9th century (Wamers 1981, 114; 2005b, 55). On the other hand, there are no trefoil fittings decorated with the style characteristic for the end of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century, the so called Carolingian-Ottonian style (see Wamers 1987; 2005a, 308–310; 2008, 49, 50).

The set of fittings from Blatnica is decorated with a geometrical ornament in a form of rhomboids made of rammed thin silver and copper wires. Geometrical ornaments, both in the early and late Carolingian stylistics never gained such popularity as the still popular animal and plant ornaments. The geometrical motifs served commonly as a complement for other ornaments and were used both in decoration of the Tassilo chalice, and in the younger plant style, although often they were composed simply from significantly simplified and schematic floral motifs (Robak 2013, 162, 163). Among the relics of the Carolingian type there is, however, a small, although noticeable group of items decorated with geometrical motifs that cannot be classified as such schematic floral ornaments. This group certainly includes a series of swords which pommels and

²³ Variant B according to Ungerman 2011, 581; type II according to Robak 2013, 145, 146.

²⁴ S. Coupland (2011, 216) determines the time when coins deposited in the hoard were collected as 850–875. The deposition itself had to take place later, presumably even in the last quarter of the 9th century (Wilson 2006, 16).

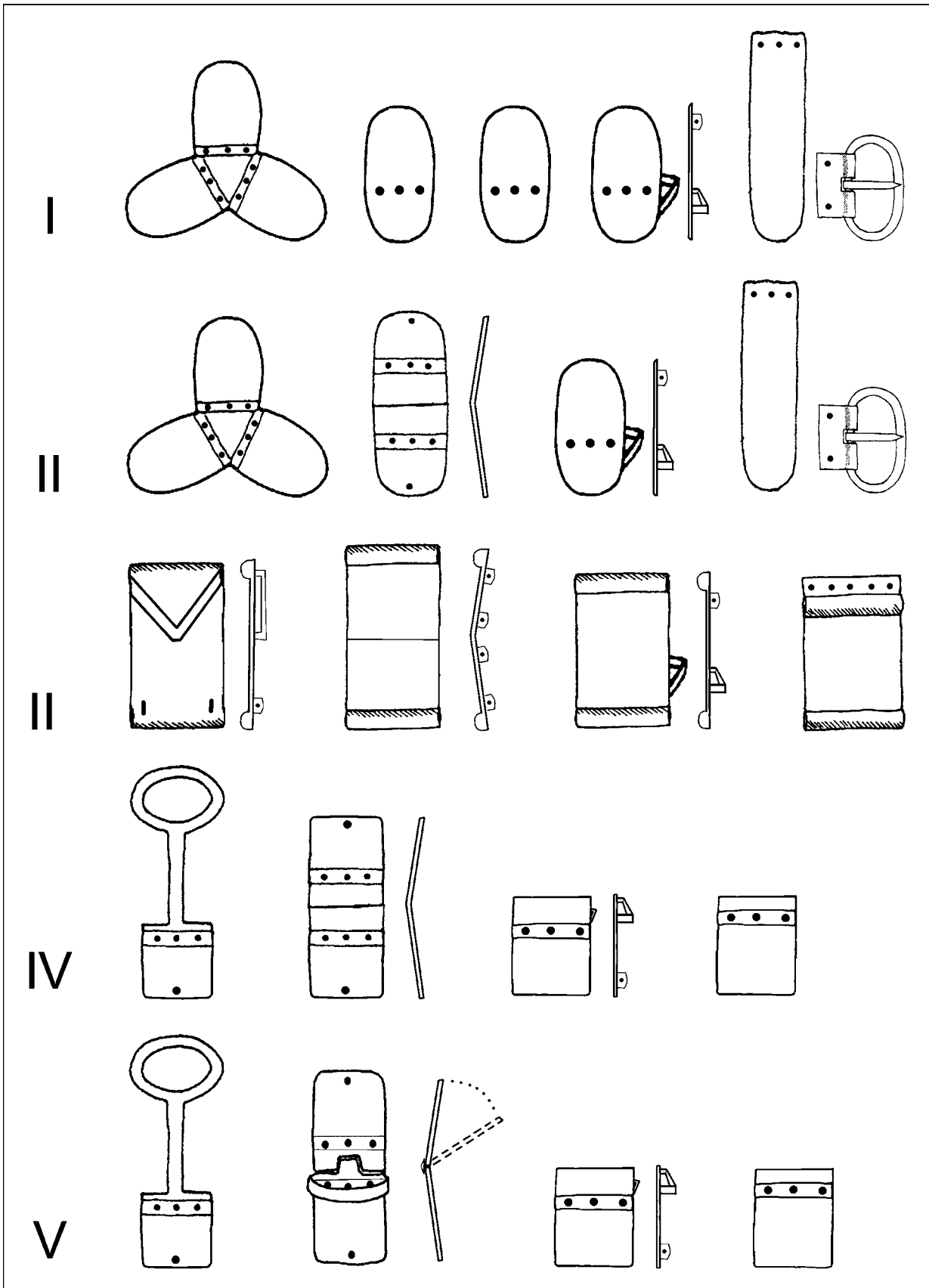


Fig. 16. Typology of the Carolingian-type sword belt sets (Robak 2013).

cross-guards are inlaid and plated with gold and silver arranged in a motif of rows of circles, stripes, herringbone or checkboard. Swords decorated with this manner are characteristic specifically for the second half of the 8th century and the early 9th century, but are present throughout the Carolingian period (*Menghin 1980; Vinski 1983, 497, 498; Westphal 2002*). Much less frequently this technique was applied to components of sword sets and other strap fittings or spurs. The set of fittings from Blatnica should be therefore assigned precisely to this group of items decorated with a geometrical ornament.

The closest analogy for fittings from Blatnica is a fragment of a trefoil fitting found in Paderborn-Balhorn (Fig. 17; *Catalogue München 2008*, no. 18) that is decorated with a nearly identical manner. Unfortunately, the fitting from Paderborn-Balhorn was found in a context that does not allow more precise dating of these items than the 9th century (excluding its first two decades). Findings from Moravia, however, might come here to the aid.



Fig. 17. Paderborn-Balhorn. Fragment of the trefoil fitting (*Catalogue München 2008*).

In the grave 224/51 from Staré Město-Valy an assemblage of spurs with side rivets and a set of strap fittings including buckles, loops and strap-end fittings was found (Fig. 18: 1–4, 7–11). These items are decorated with a mosaic of small brass, copper and silver rectangles divided with a wire and arranged in a diagonal checkboard (*Galuska 1999*). Furthermore, the grave contained also a small, U-shaped strap-end fitting and a buckle with an oval frame constituting a component of the main belt (Fig. 18: 5; *Hrubý 1955, 525*).²⁵

Unfortunately spurs with side rivets prove to be a type excessively insensitive in chronological terms and thus cannot serve as a base for developing the chronology of the Carolingian period, particularly in the 9th century (*Robak 2013, 31, 32*). Repeated attempts to develop a typology of the spurs mentioned (*Belošević 1980, 106–109; Bialeková 1977, 134–138; Dostál 1966, 75; Hrubý 1955, 186–188; Jelovina 1976, 123–126; Kavánová 1976, 40–46; Pöllath 2002, 157–168; Ruttkay, A. 1976, 346–349; Wachowski 1986–1987, 62–66*) provided virtually no results in a form of precise chronology of individual varieties or subtypes. Paradoxically, it is much more convenient to determine the chronology of individual specimens based on dating the sets they were included in using other methods and other accompanying relics as indicators (*Belošević 2007, 283–284; Kleemann 2002; Schulze-Dörrlamm 1993*) or relying solely on ornaments applied on those items (*Jurčević 2011; Kind 2007; Kouřil 2005*) than through applying an overextended typology and measuring relics exactly to the millimetre (*Pöllath 2002, 157–168; Wachowski 1986–1987, 62–63; 1992, 32–38*).

The oldest specimens of spurs with side rivets (J. Kleemann's types 6 and 7; Pöllath's type 1 and 2, although these types are not exactly equivalent) appear in grave assemblages from Lower Saxony and Bavaria, dating back to the second half of the 8th century, reserving, however, the possibility that this type of fastenings were already used in the first half of the 8th century (*Koch, R. 1982, 65*). Most of assemblages coming from Western Europe dates back, however, to the end of the 8th century and the first half of the 9th century (*Kleemann 2002, 128; Kouřil 2004, 69; Pöllath 2002, fig. 33; 34*). A series of items with such dating is also supplemented by assemblages containing spurs with side rivets from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, characteristic for the horizon of the Carolingian finds known from that area, that is the so called Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon (*Belošević 2007, 284; Kind 2007, 554; Kleemann 2002, 291; 2010; Pöllath 2002, fig. 35; Schulze-Dörrlamm 1993, 564, 565; Werner 1978–1979, 232*). Spurs with side rivets also occasionally occur in graves attributed to the so called 'pre-Köttlach horizon' (*Eichert 2010, 127, 128; Nowotny 2005, 213, 214*).

In the literature, there generally is an agreement that the appearance of the earliest examples of spurs with side rivets in Moravia should be expected in the first half of the 9th century and this is exactly the period the most Moravian, similarly as Western European specimens are dated back to (*Košta 2008, 283–287; Kouřil 2004, 65, 69, 70; 2005; Schwarz 1984, 116;*

²⁵ The reference publication contains no drawing of the buckle.

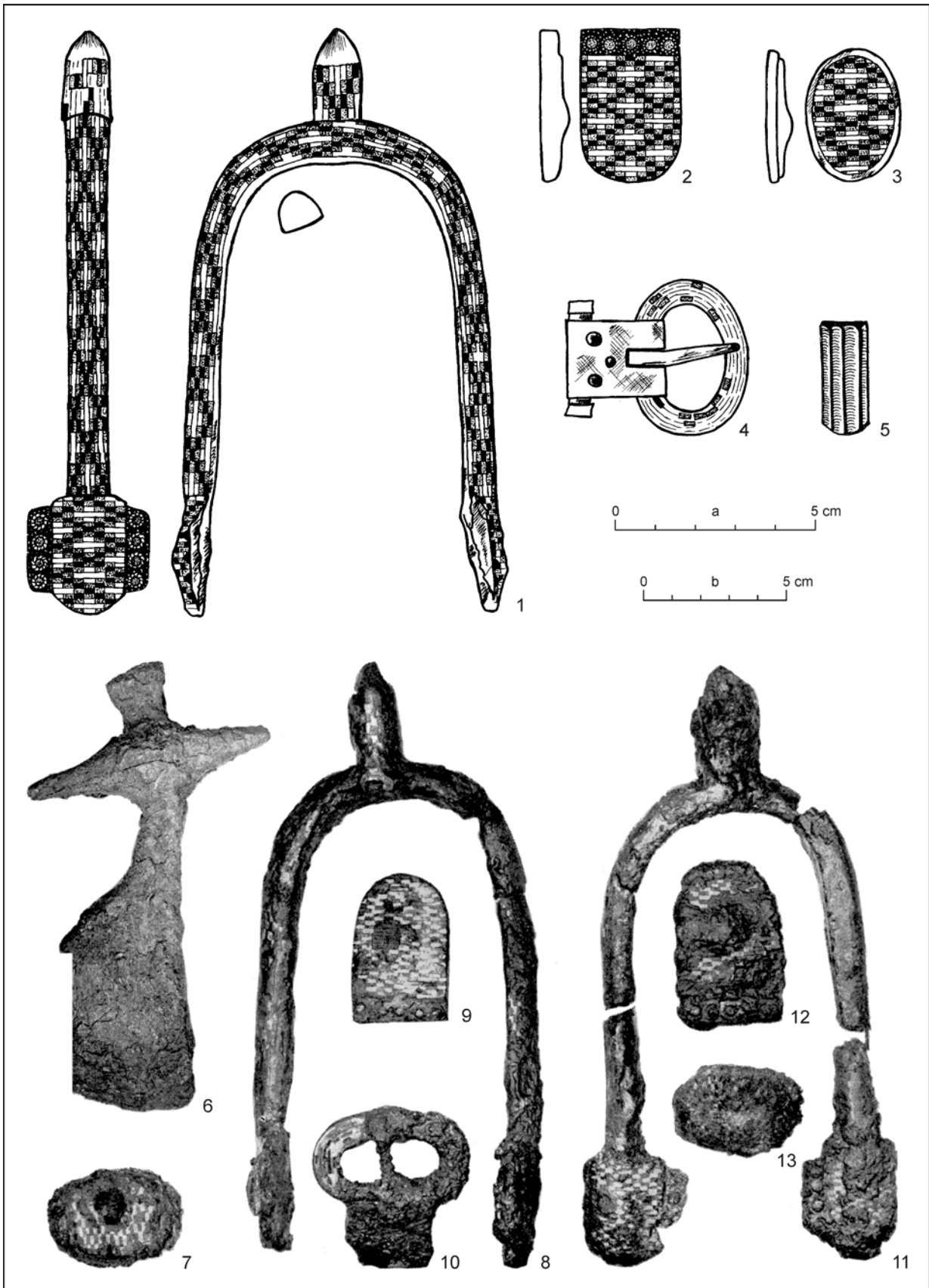


Fig. 18. Staré Město-Valy, grave 224/51 (*Galuška 1999; Hrubý 1955*). 1–6 – grave goods; 7–11 – photo of the numbers 1–5. Scale: a – 1–5, 7–13; b – 6.

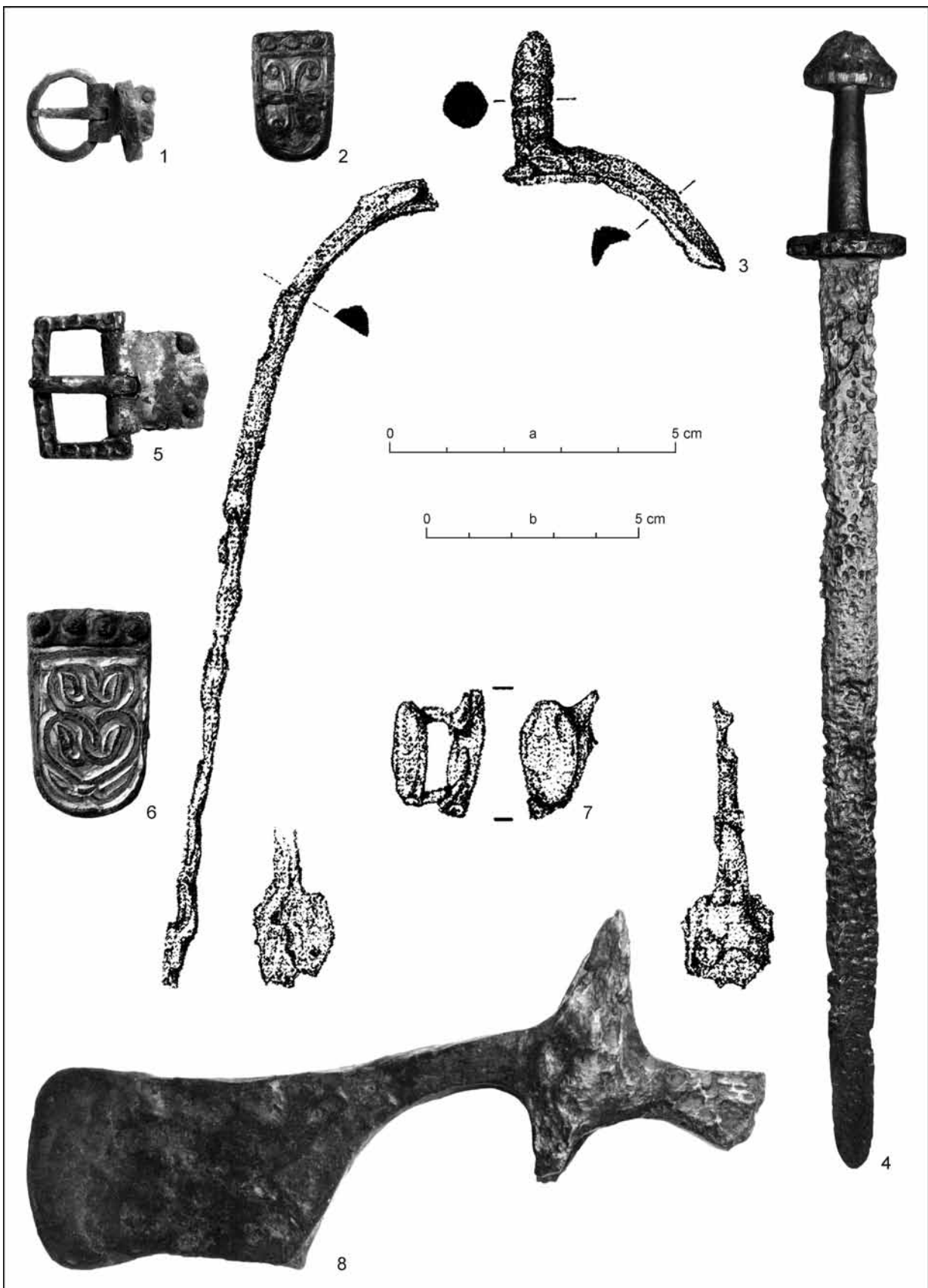


Fig. 19. Staré Město-Valy, grave 223/51 (Kouřil 2005; 2014). Scale: a – 1–3, 5–7; b – 8; without scale – 4.

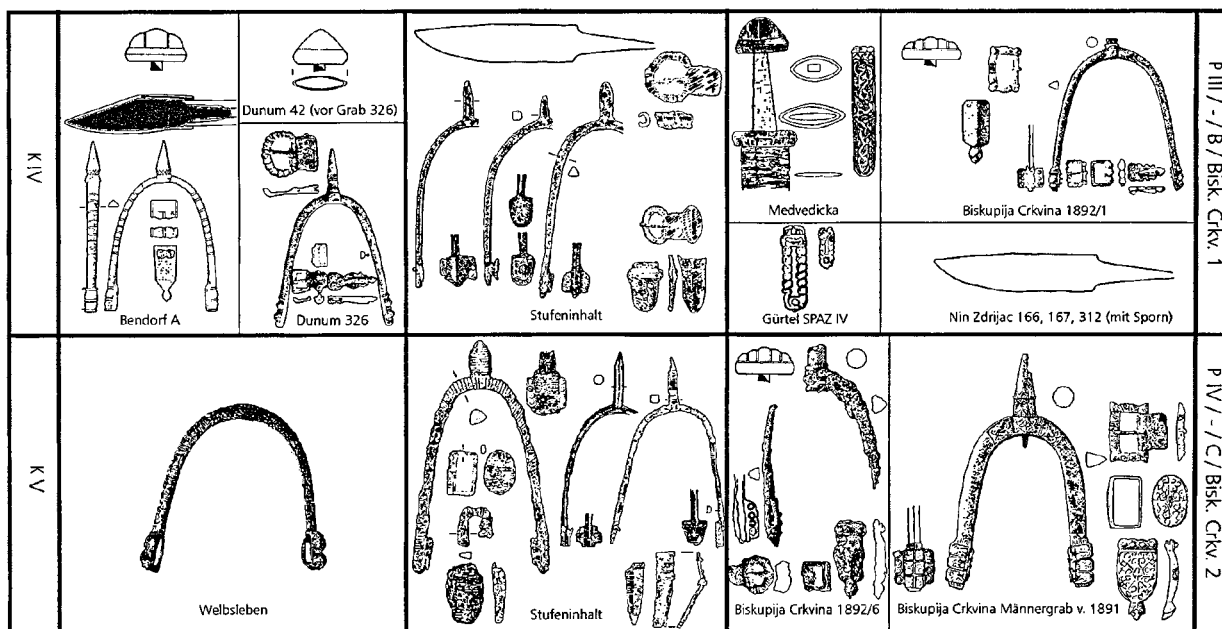


Fig. 20. Contents of the phases of development of the South-Eastern Circle and Northern Circle according to J. Kleemann (2002) and R. Pöllath (2002).

Wamers 1994b, 23). Assemblages with the earliest dating – graves no. 266/49 and 224/51 from Staré Město are sometimes linked with the first quarter of the 9th century or even the end of the 8th century (Galuška 1998, 101; 1999, 103; 2013, 91; Klanica 1985, 109; 1990, 58–62; 2006, 115), which, however, seems to be rather controversial.

The skeletal grave 224/51 from the graveyard in Staré Město constituted, together with the cremation grave 221/51 and the skeletal grave 223/51, a small cluster located at the edge of the cemetery. Due to the presence of the cremation burial, which location was respected when skeletal graves were dug, this cluster is considered to be the oldest group of burials at this cemetery (Galuška 1999, 102).²⁶ Relics furnishing the graves 223/51 (Fig. 19; Hrubý 1955, 524, 525; Kouřil 2005, fig. 9: 3; 2014, 311, 374) and 224/51 are almost emblematic examples of items constituting the earliest wave of the Carolingian imports to Moravia and include spurs with side rivets (both graves), a sword of the H-type (an early type), U-shaped fittings decorated with a simple plant ornament made still with the chip-carving technique, a buckle with a rectangular frame, fittings in a shape of an elongated plate, roof-like in intersection (grave 223/51). Beginnings of mass import (and presumably also imitation) of the Carolingian items to the areas of Moravia and western Slovakia we can trace back to the second

decade of the 9th century at the earliest (Robak 2013, 43, 193, 194, 209).

This chronology is a consequence of the fact that in Moravia and western Slovakia, besides a few examples (Robak 2015), there are virtually no imports of Western European items of the early Carolingian type dating back to the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century. An important observation in this context is particularly the lack of this category of items in assemblages and complete sets typical for this period, for example spurs with a set of fittings, complete belt fittings sets, etc. In a case of so early and intense wave of the Carolingian imports we should expect a series of relics (unnecessarily from graves, but, for example, from courtyards of hillforts) comparable with relics that served as a basis for distinguishing the so called older phase of the Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon, the IV phase of development of the so called north-western circle, according to J. Kleemann (2002), and the III phase of the so called southern circle including mainly Bavaria, according to R. Pöllath (2002). Both these units of periodization are dated generally back to 770/780–810 (Fig. 20).

On the other hand the equipment of the oldest skeletal graves from Moravia, including also the grave 224/51, identified as a warrior burial (or containing components characteristic for warriors' attire) and delineating the first clear wave of the

²⁶ A cremation graveyard from the turn of the 8th and the 9th century was destroyed by the skeletal cemetery from the 9th century – the first half of the 10th century (Galuška 2013, 203, 204). Only six graves preserved.

Carolingian imports in Moravia and western Slovakia (from where a series of loose and settlement finds is known) could be compared only with relics serving as a basis for definition of the younger section of the Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon (Fig. 20) and subsequent phases of chronologies provided by both abovementioned researches (respectively: Kleemann's V and Pöllath's IV phase, dating back to about 810 and 840). This means that the oldest wave of the Carolingian import had to get to Moravia already when items of the early Carolingian type were out of use – since the wave did not contain them. Because nowadays it is assumed that the turning point indicating significant stylistic changes in the Carolingian craft (discontinuation of usage of items decorated with the so called Tassilo Chalice Style, presence of items manifesting the so called transition phase, popularity of floral motifs) falls on the end of the first quarter of the 9th century (*Wamers 1994a*, 36), thus the intense inflow the Carolingian imports to Moravia and Western Slovakia (and consequently also the process of imitation) had to take place afterwards. This does not exclude, of course, a possibility that stylistically and typologically older Carolingian items were incidentally imported to that area. This assumption is confirmed by archaeological sources, particularly more recent finds from the area of the Bohemian Basin (*Profantová 2016; Robak 2015*). It is difficult, however, to talk here about a 'wave of imports' and intense cultural influences from the west prior to the end of the first quarter of the 9th century. The first two decades of the 9th century in the area of northern parts of the middle Danube basin are characterised by the continuation of the cultural model characteristic for the second half of the 8th century, at least in the sphere concerning components of warriors' attire, weaponry and equipment.

Strap fitting set

Originally the set contained 11 various bronze, gilded, and mostly damaged components (Fig. 1: 1–11; *Fettich 1937*, pl. XCVII; XCVIII), some of them were later used to supplement two broken cross fittings. Currently the set includes 7 items, some filled with plastic mass. These items undoubtedly

constitute an assemblage. Plates of fittings are rectangular and are decorated with nearly identical ornament, clearly resembling faces. The image of faces is, however, made relatively schematically, somewhere even illegibly and differs from one fitting to another.²⁷ In the case of the above mentioned fittings from the 'Blatnica deposit' it is thus difficult to compare the motif with the one decorating the sword from the same collection. Similarly, the rest of the ornament is not very clear and it is impossible to determine, whether it indeed presents human beings. *N. Fettich (1937, 265)* sees there a silhouette sitting on an animal, the triumphant Dionysus, *J. Cincik (1947, 225, 226)* describes it as a prayer motif with raised hands and links it with the 'Daniel with lions' motif, while *K. Benda (1963, 214)* sees there only a mask and considers 'hands' as fragments of the floral ornament. The motif repeats on each plate. Additionally, the cross fittings contain the 'mask' motif in the middle of their pyramid-like centre. Slightly diagonal edges of the fittings are decorated with an ornament resembling oak leaves, but it is not very clear and thus it is difficult to identify it unambiguously.²⁸ Frames of loops are decorated with a wreath of trefoil palmettes.

Depending on the interpretation, the paths along which sources of the motif could be traced differed – the effects of these researches, however, still remain highly unsatisfactory. Since for years no one managed to identify clearly the main decorative motif used on fittings from the 'Blatnica deposit' (researchers are not even certain, what motif it exactly is²⁹), the stylistics and therefore also chronological identification need to be supported by other data acquired during various and extensive analyses.

Both the form and the type of fittings leave no doubts that these are fittings of the 'Carolingian type', similarly as hundreds of other known from the Western, Central and Southern European areas that in the 9th century remained under strong cultural and political influences of the Carolingian state. The time, when fittings from this set were made seems to be confirmed by their rectangular shape, nearly absent in the stylistics of strap fittings of the early Carolingian type dated back to the second half of the 8th century and still used in the

²⁷ Some motifs resemble more, for example, an ornament decorating quasi-rivets on a fitting with neck from Zemianske Podhradie (*Kolník 1999, 228*) that in the literature is often considered as a 'stylised mask' (e.g. *Ungermaier 2011a, 584*), although a more careful analysis of a greater number of fittings allows concluding that in the case of the fitting from Zemianske Podhradie and the entire group of similar fittings it is rather a geometrical motif (*Robak 2013, 181; fig. 44*).

²⁸ In the publication by *N. Fettich (1937, pl. XCVII–XCIX)* we can find very legible photographs of these items. The comparison with drawings, often reprinted, as for example in the publication by *J. Hampel (1905, III, pl. 321)* clearly indicates that these drawings were idealised and did not exactly correspond to the actual appearance of fittings.

²⁹ In my opinion the raised 'hands' are components of a floral ornament on the edge, because the silhouette on the side with rivets has no 'hands'. I, for example, can distinguish there a four-legged animal lying on its side with curled legs and a head *en face*.

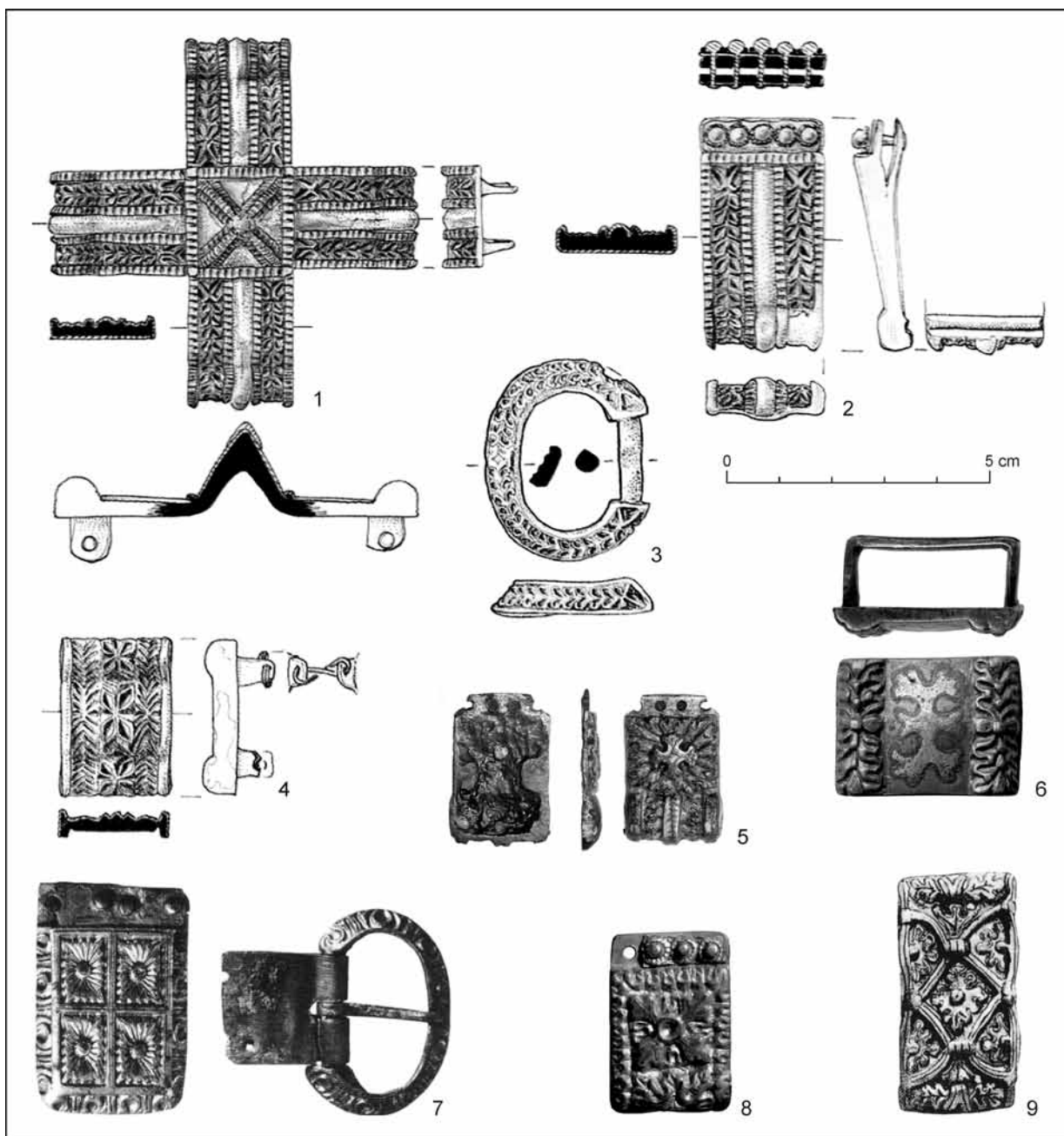


Fig. 21. Carolingian-type rectangular strap fittings. 1–3 – Gradišče above Bašelj; 4 – Ljubična above Zbelovska Gora (*Knjific 2007*); 5 – Torksey (Portable Antiquities Scheme/British Museum); 6 – Roermond (*Zuyderwyk/Besteman 2010*); 7 – Balladoole (*Wilson 2008*); 8 – Duesminde (*Wamers 2005b*); 9 – Haithabu (*Werner 1969*).

first third of the 9th century. Although rectangular strap end fittings decorated with the Tassilo Chalice Style represent a relatively extensive collection, their shape was rather a consequence of a technical procedure of placing rivets at the corners, which in effect gave fittings the shape similar to a rectangle (see Fig. 27: 1; *Robak 2015*). Additionally, characteristic features of these items include corrugated edges. It is not impossible, however, that this method could be used rather to standardise the aesthetics of the

early Carolingian fitting sets than to achieve this particular shape of strap fittings deliberately. Aside from these items, other contemporary rectangular fittings, that could be dated back to the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century, decorated in other than Tassilo Chalice Style, possibly with very few exceptions, are generally rare. There are no such fittings among finds attributed to the early phase of the Biskupija-Crkvina (ca. 790–820) or among contemporary archaeological assemblages

from Western Europe. In a case of loose finds from Western Europe, British Isles and Scandinavia, there are no rectangular fittings decorated with the ornament of hooked volutes, characteristic for the so called transitional phase between the early and late Carolingian stylistics, dated back to the beginning of the 9th century. Furthermore, rectangular fittings decorated with the early floral ornament made with the chip-carving technique are also rare, although it is possible to indicate a small group of such fittings. In Western Europe rectangular strap end fittings, without loops and corrugated edges, are not present in the material until the first quarter of the 9th century, when the floral motifs became more popular. But the time of their dissemination started even later, about the half of the 9th century and their greatest popularity came in the second half of the 9th century (Robak 2013, 69–72, 75, 76).

The closest typological analogy for the fittings from the 'Blatnica deposit' is a cross fitting from Gradišče above Bašelj in Slovenia (Fig. 21: 1; *Knjifc* 2007, fig. 2: 1). This fitting is made from bronze and gilded, and then additionally decorated with a silver plated centre. Floral motifs depicted on the fitting in a form of two lines are similar to motifs decorating edges of the 'Blatnica' fittings. Its centre, reinforced with a cross rib, is also formed nearly identically as in the case of 'Blatnica' fittings. The assemblage from Gradišče includes also a strap end fitting and a D-shaped buckle decorated with a floral ornament (Fig. 21: 2, 3; *Knjifc* 2007, fig. 2: 2, 3). The form of the fitting from Gradišče, particularly its bolded, cylindrical endings, allows attributing it to the group of fittings finished with a cylindrical edge. In this group we should mention fittings from Torksey (Fig. 21: 5; *Robak* 2014, pl. CV: 1), Ljubična above Zbelovska Gora (Fig. 21: 4; *Knjifc* 2007, fig. 2: 11) and Nitra (Fig. 22: 1; *Bednár* 2001, fig. 3: 2), and particularly fittings from sword sets from Marsum (*Wamers* 2005b, 120–122), Île de Groix (*Müller-Wille* 1978, 53, fig. 7: 2, 3) and Loon (*Roes* 1958). All these fittings should be dated back to the second half of the 9th century, and at the earliest to its half.³⁰

The fittings from Blatnica, although also rectangular, have slightly faceted edges covered with an ornament. A similar stylistic technique was noticed on a fitting from Balladoole on the Isle of Man, found in a Viking grave and dated back to the half of the 9th century (Fig. 21: 7; *Wilson* 2008, 42, 43). This fitting is shaped nearly identically as plates of fittings from the 'Blatnica deposit'. A similar form is characteristic also for four strap end fittings from

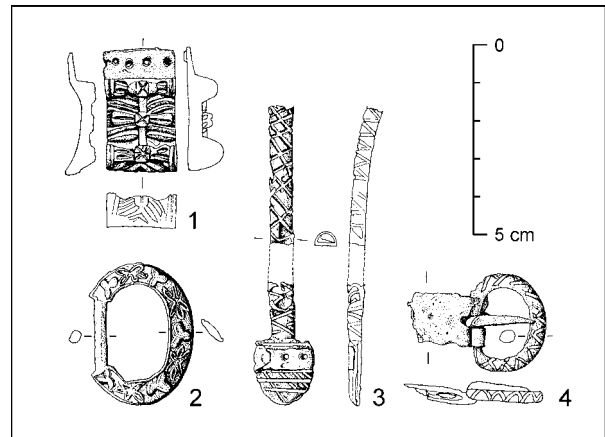


Fig. 22. Nitra-Castle, grave 1/94 (*Bednár* 2001).

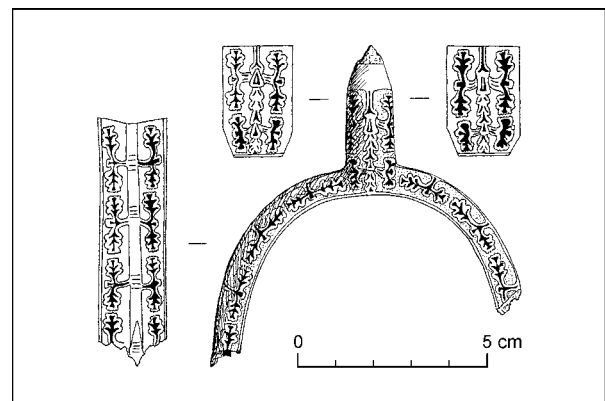


Fig. 23. Bacharach. Fragment of the spur. (*Werner* 1969).

the Duesminde deposit. The ornament, however, differs, although in both cases it represents different forms of the late Carolingian plant style.

The similarity to the ornament resembling oak leaves decorating edges of 'fittings from Blatnica' is, however, manifested by a spur fragment from Bacharach (Fig. 23; *Werner* 1969, 500, 501) made with the niello technique. This item is also one of typical examples of plant ornaments based on a stem motif, in this case, with acanthus leaves, and could be dated to the middle of the 9th century (*Wamers* 2005b, 60, 61). Similarly decorated edges appear also on a rectangular plates from Haithabu (Fig. 21: 9; *Capelle* 1974, fig. 12; *Werner* 1969, pl. 25: c), which ornament represents one of emblematic examples of the mature Carolingian plant ornamentation. The acanthus ornament resembling oak leaves can be found on one of rectangular

³⁰ Š. *Ungerman* (2011b, 588–592) links this shape of a fitting with the Marsum type of sword sets he distinguished, but, as shown by archaeological finds, it was applied also in other types of fittings (*Robak* 2013, 75), which presumably was a consequence of a fashion for cylindrical, thickened edges.

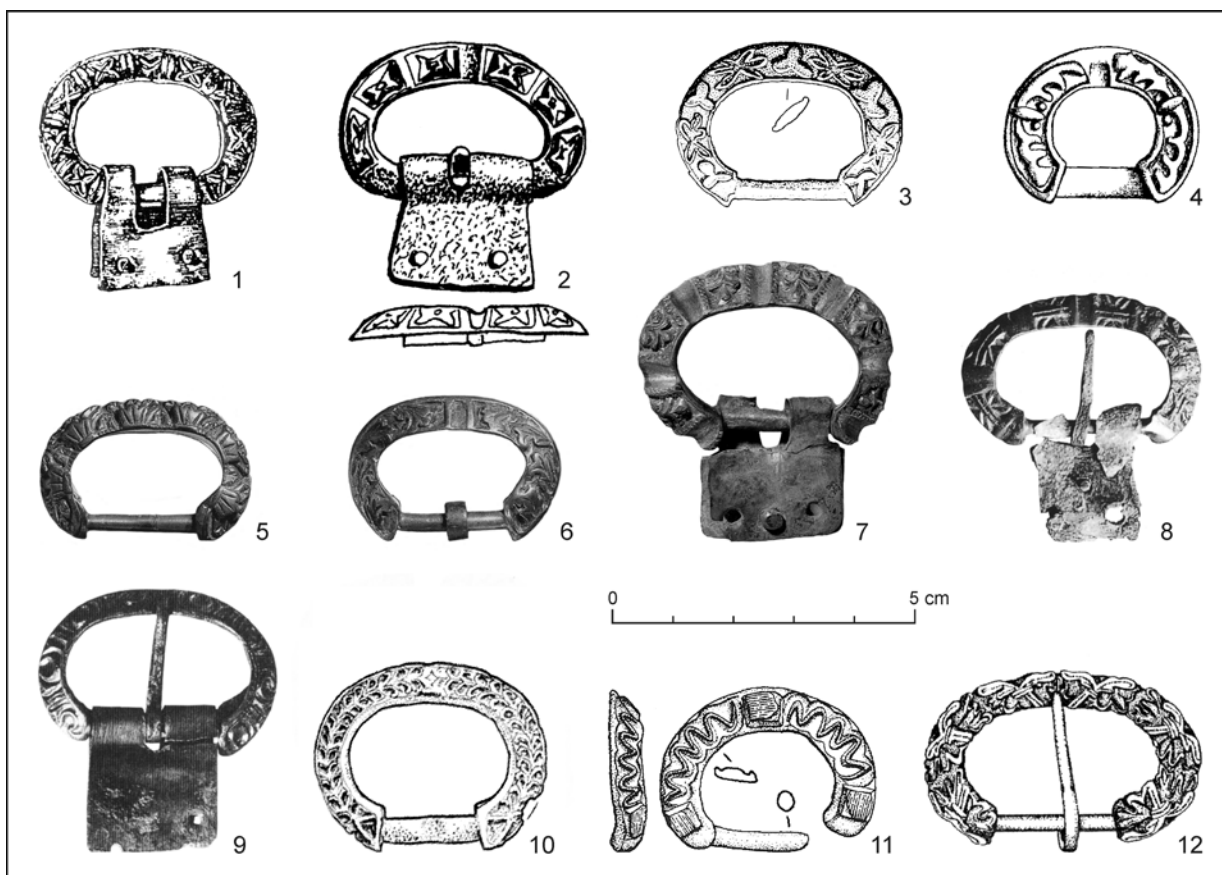


Fig. 24. Carolingian-type D-shaped buckles. 1 – Mikulčice, grave 50/VI (*Profantová/Kavánová 2003*); 2 – Biskupija-Crkvina, grave 89 (*Jelovina 1986*); 3 – Nitra-Castle, grave 1/94 (*Bednár 2001*); 4 – Vrads (*Fraenkel-Schoorl 1978*); 5–7 – Duesminde (*Wamers 2005b*); 8 – Birka, grave 750 (*Arbman 1937*); 9 – Balladoole, grave (*Wilson 2008*); 10 – Gradišče above Bašelj (*Knific 2007*); 11 – Bojná-Valy (*Janošik/Pieta 2007*); 12 – Kolín, grave (*Košta/Lutovský 2014*).

strap end fittings found in a deposit from Duesminde dated back to the second third of the 9th century (Fig. 21: 8; *Wamers 2005b*, 135) and a loop from a deposit from Roermond (Fig. 21: 6; *Zuyderwyk/Besteman 2010*, Pl. 10: 18) dated back to a period of approximately 854–864 (*Zuyderwyk/Besteman 2010*, 84–87).

It is also worth spending some time considering the shape of loops of neck fittings. Fittings from the Blatnica deposit are the only known specimens of neck and loop fittings, where loops were clearly made using a mould previously used to produce buckles. This can be evidenced by a thin, circular in cross-section lower part of a frame that is redundant in neck fittings. None of the other 116 fittings of this type from the entire Europe applies this solution (*Robak 2014*, 12–14). On the reverse of the 'Blatnica' fittings it is clearly visible that plates of those fittings, as well as their necks and loops were made separately and subsequently soldered (Fig. 2: 10, 11; *Fettich 1937*, pl. XCVIII: 10, 11). This minor, but very important observation allows comparing loops of 'Blatnica' fittings with a relatively large set of buckles accompanying various fittings of the Carolingian type.

Casted, decorated buckles of a similar type, D-shaped or more oval, with obliquely formed frame are characteristic mainly for the late Carolingian products, dated back to the second third of the 9th century (*Robak 2013*, 88, 89). D-shaped buckles are, of course, present also in the early Carolingian period, but differ from younger analogues in terms of both shape and ornament (see Fig. 12: 1; 13: 8; 14: 7). In the period, when the Carolingian plant style dominated (2nd and 3rd third of the 9th century) D-shaped buckles were a basic type of buckles used in strap fitting sets. The standard form included buckles with a frame oblique in cross-section and decorated with a segmented plant ornament or motifs based on the cross.

While decorations on plates of the 'Blatnica' fittings have virtually no stylistic analogies, then for the buckles themselves we can indicate a very large group of analogous and, what is more important, well dated items. Among these analogues we should indicate particularly a set of buckles from the Duesminde deposit, one of which is decorated with an ornament resembling three-toed palmettes (Fig. 24: 5–7; *Wamers 2005b*, 136). Similar forms of buckles,

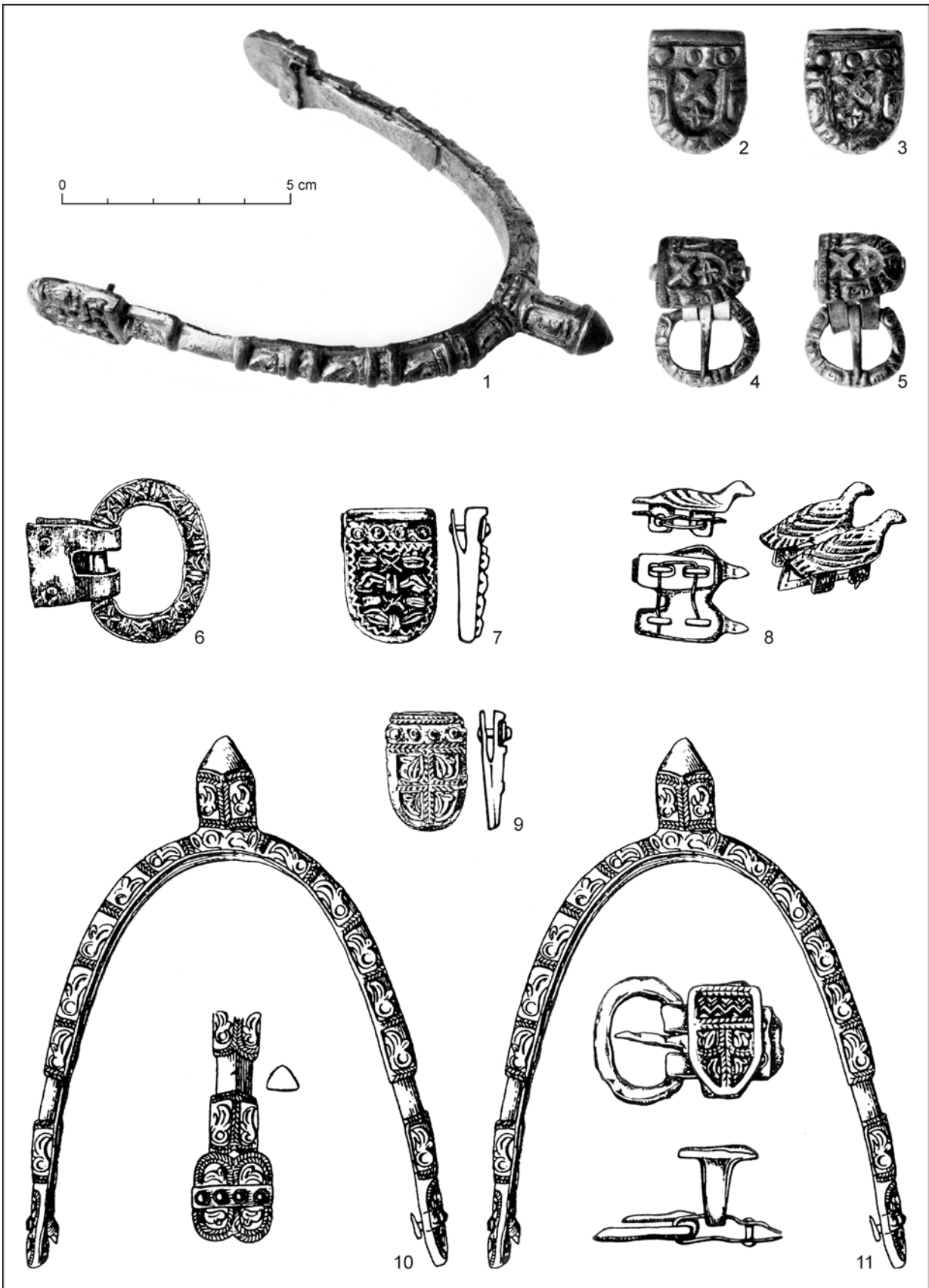


Fig. 25. 1–5 – Mikulčice, grave 44/II (Kouřil 2014); 6–11 – Mikulčice, grave 50/VI (Profantová/Kavánová 2003).

decorated with the typical late Carolingian acanthus motif are known from sets of fittings from Kolín (Fig. 24: 12; *Košta/Lutovský 2014*, pl. 3: 4), Vrads (Fig. 24: 4; *Fraenkel-Schoorl 1978*, 382), and Gradišče above Bašelj (Fig. 24: 10; *Knific 2007*, fig. 1: 3). This group includes also: a buckle decorated with a plant motif from the grave 1/94 from Nitra-Castle (Fig. 24: 3; *Bednár 2001*, fig. 3: 1) dated back to the middle of the 9th century, a buckle from the grave 750 in Birka (Fig. 24: 8; *Arbman 1937*, pl. 47: 3) and a buckle from the already mentioned grave from Balladoole (Fig. 24: 9; *Wilson 2008*, 42, 43). Paradoxically this group



Fig. 26. Duesminde. Broken part of the fitting with neck and loop (*Wamers 2005b*).

includes also buckles from graves 44/II and 50/VI in Mikulčice (Fig. 24: 2; 25: 2, 3; *Robak 2014*, pl. XXI: 1b; XXV: 1a), the very same assemblages that formed one of the pillars of the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice horizon' theory (*Poulik 1963*, 42, 43), but nowadays stratigraphically dated back to the last quarter of the 9th century (*Košta 2008*, 288; *Měřínský 2011*, 368, 369), as well as a series of other finds from Mikulčice (*Kouřil 2014*, nr. 147, 181, 189, 190). The motif of three-toed palmette can be traced also on a series of other fittings decorated with a plant style (*Panum-Baastrup 2013*, pl. 1: 1, 3; *Wamers 2005b*, 133). Furthermore, it should be noted that the only fragment of a fitting with a neck and a loop³¹ decorated with a plant style known from territories of Western Europe comes from the Duesminde deposit (Fig. 26; *Wamers 2005b*, 133).

As we can see, therefore, the 'Blatnica' fittings lack any stylistic features allowing placing their production at the turn of the 8th and 9th century or even in the first third of the 9th century. At the end of the 8th century and at the beginning of the 9th century the Carolingian fittings were dominated by those with narrow, elongated forms, often ended with a knob and plates of other types of fittings were usually fastened using eyelets placed at the edges (see: *Knific 2007*, fig. 1: 4; *Werner 1961*, pl. 1: 2).

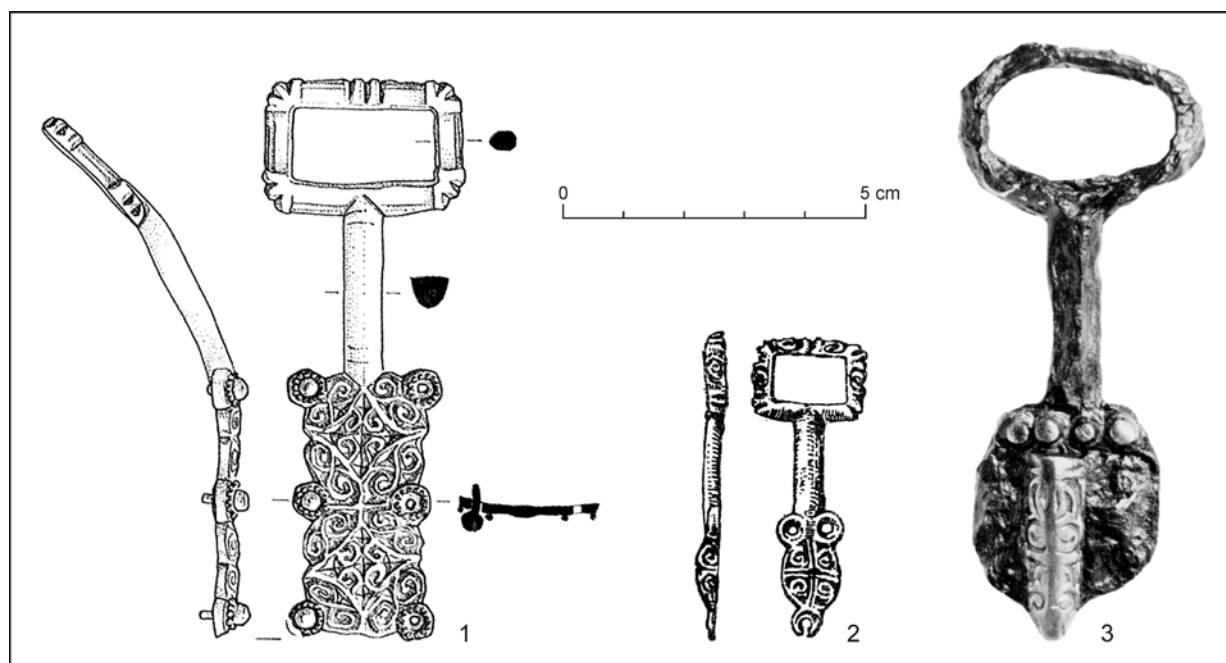


Fig. 27. Fittings with neck and loop decorated with chip-carving technique. 1 – Gradišče above Bašelj (*Knific 2007*); 2 – Dunaújváros (*Bóna 1971*); 3 – Saane (*Degen 1964*).

³¹ The fitting from Duesminde (Fig. 26) published as a buckle, in fact cannot be a buckle, because it has no frame for a spike. On the contrary, there is a fragment of neck that was used to attach an eyelet, when the fitting was remodelled into a pendant.

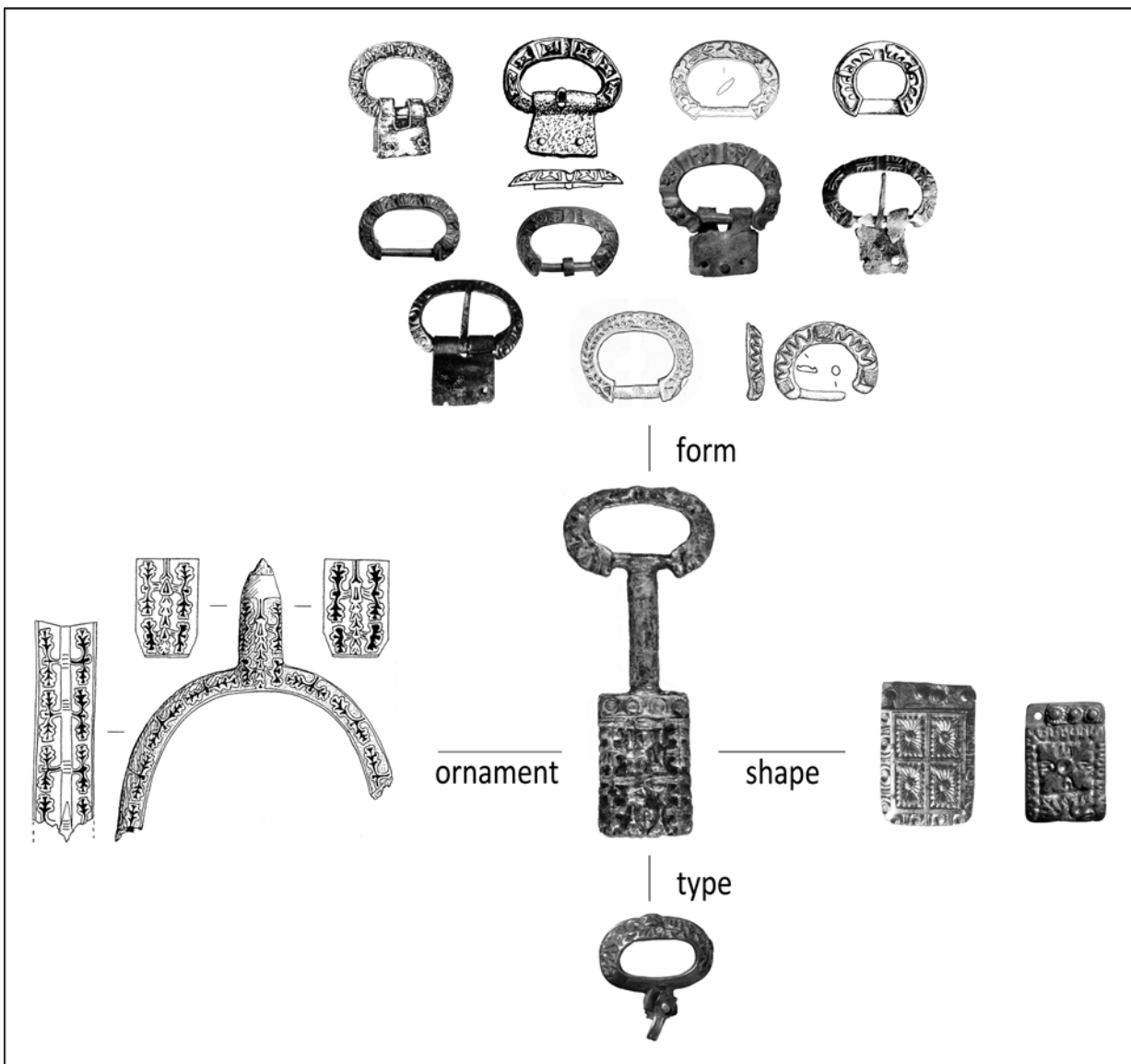


Fig. 28. Stylistic-typological connections of the fitting with neck and loop from the 'Blatnica deposit'.

Most of the frames of moulded decorated buckles belonging to sets of relics assigned to warrior's attire (belt fittings, spur sets) and decorated with the Tassilo Chalice Style or other styles linked with it, are decorated with protrusions and corrugations typical for the early Carolingian period. This applies both to D-shaped forms and more popular in that time rectangular buckles (see: Fig. 12: 1; 13: 2, 7; 14: 7, 9). Buckles with a rectangular frame along with trapezoidal forms generally dominated in assemblages dated back to the entire first half of the 9th century, including those decorated with early forms of the plant ornamentation (Fig. 19: 5; Robak 2013, 87, 88; tab. 1; Wamers 1994b, 20). Furthermore, this applies also to the stylistics of contemporary fittings with neck (Fig. 27). The 'Blatnica' fittings manifest,

however, significant convergence with the stylistics of Carolingian fittings dated roughly back to the middle of the 9th century. This applies particularly to the rectangular form of fittings and the decoration of loops modelled on buckles (Fig. 28). Regardless of whether the 'Blatnica' fittings are local or imported products, they had to be created after the period of domination of the Tassilo Chalice Style and the geometrical ornamentation related to it, that is in a time, when the late Carolingian plant ornamentation in its full-blown form was commonly used.

Contrary to the hypotheses of K. Wachowski (1992), so far there is no evidence whatsoever confirming that cross fittings were part of any type of sword sets of the Carolingian type. This applies both to the western European sets and their va-

riants known only from the eastern periphery of the Empire (today Moravia, Slovakia, Slovenia). Despite the enormous number of finds of cross fittings, none of them was discovered together with a sword set, which could indicate some kind of relation between these two types of items. What is more, none of cross fittings in these areas was ever found in a grave, what generally brings into question their function as an alleged part of the attire. Most likely the 'Blatnica' set, similarly as sets coming from Pobedim (*Bialeková 1977*, fig. 21), Gradišče above Bašelj (Fig. 21: 1–3) and San Vincenzo al Volturno (*Mitchell 1994*) is a remnant of a set of horse tack decorations.

Other components

Among relics allegedly acquired from baron Révay together with fittings sets there were also a winged spearhead (Fig. 29: 1), plate spur (Fig. 6), second broken spur (Fig. 29: 2), bearded axe (Fig. 29: 3; *Szóke 2014*, fig. 6), and a stirrup (Fig. 29: 4; *Lehoczky 1913*, 252). All these items have a wide chronology, but because they are commonly linked with the 'Blatnica burial', this very fact seemed to constitute a sufficient basis for establishing (unfortunately often uncritically) their chronology. There is, however, no reliable source of information confirming circumstances of their acquisition, not to mention their actual origins (*Szóke 2014*, 17). The set commonly referred to as coming from Blatnica should also be extended by two missing spurs, stirrup and arrowheads.

The spearhead from the 'Blatnica deposit' was recently discussed by *M. Husár* (2006, 54; 2014, 33–36), who considers it a part of equipment of a burial mound. Leaving, however, aside this controversial 'burial' issue that unfortunately is used as a justification for further chronological conclusions, we should admit that the typology of the spearhead itself allows dating it only roughly to the first half of the 8th century – first half of the 9th century, with a period of greatest popularity mainly in the second half of the 8th century. Spearheads of this type are found in all European territories that once were under the Carolingian influences (*Eichert/Mehofer/Baier 2011*, 145–147; *Szameit 1987*, 167–170; *Westphal 2002*, 257).

The set contains one significantly younger item, namely the plate spur with a heart-shaped plate (Fig. 6). What is characteristic for this type of spurs is the fact that they occur almost exclusively in areas of today Moravia, Western Slovakia and eastern Austria. They have already been subjected to analyses many times (*Kavánová 1976*, 46–50; *Klanica 2006*, 53–55; *Ruttikay, A. 1976*, 347, 348). All specimens of this type of spurs were made of iron and most of

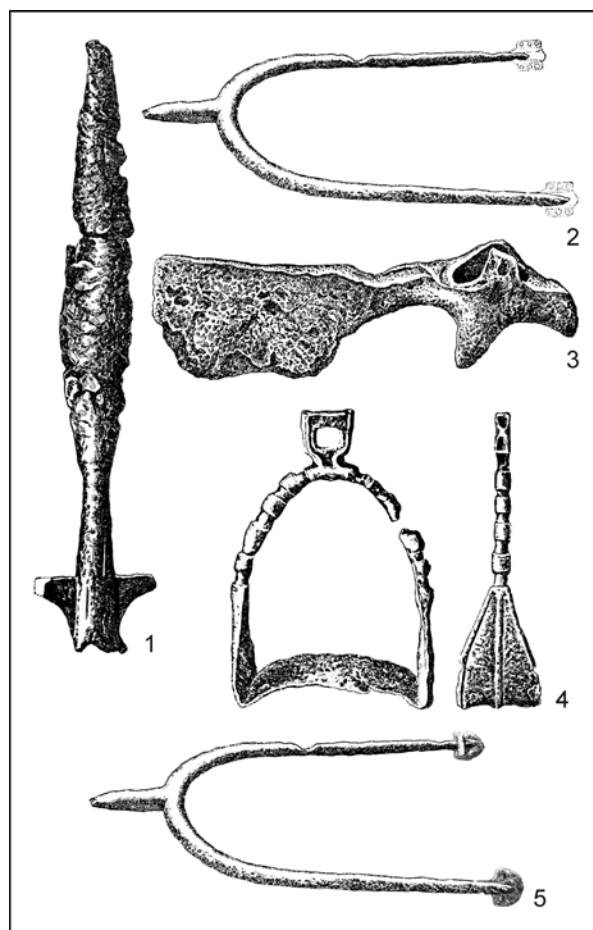


Fig. 29. The 'Blatnica deposit'. 1 – winged spearhead; 2 – spur with broken ends; 3 – bearded axe; 4 – stirrup (*Lehoczky 1913*); 5 – possible reconstruction of the arms of spur. Without scale.

them seem to be relatively coarse, which suggests that they could serve as a simplified version of spurs with side rivets (the so called Biskupija-Crkvina type). Only a few specimens have decorated arms or rowels. Generally, these spurs in graves are accompanied only by buckles and loops, without any strap end fittings. Sometimes there are no metal fasteners at all, which seems to confirm the hypothesis that these spurs were products for the poorer (*Robak 2013*, 32, 33). A little stylistic variability significantly hampers dating of this type of spurs. Furthermore, as it was observed by *A. Ruttikay* (1976, 348), in case of items very simple in terms of technology and ornamentation, we even cannot use the length of a rowel as a feature indicating a relative chronology within a given type. Finally, the absence of similar forms among western European and south-Slavic relics makes the comparison of these spurs with better dated assemblages impossible.

What, then, can we say about these relics? It seems that we should consider spurs with heart-shaped

plates as emerged in the first half of the 9th century and this chronology is generally accepted by researchers (Bialeková 1977, 138; Galuška 2012, 98; Hrubý 1955, 188–190; Klanica 2006, 55; Ruttkay, A. 1976, 348). The oldest assemblages containing this type of spurs could be dated to the turn of the first and second quarters of the 9th century (Robak 2013, 33). Spurs with heart-shaped plates were still used throughout the 9th century and are found with sets of fittings decorated with various ornamentation motifs. The period of the largest production took place in the third third of the 9th century (Kouřil 2010, 245, 246). Stratigraphically burials from Břeclav-Pohansko containing few sets of such spurs could be dated to the second half of the 9th century (Kalousek 1971, 67, 68; 100, 101). These spurs were also found at the cemetery in Ducové (Ruttkay, A. 1976, 348) dated to the second half of the 9th century and the beginning of the 10th century, and the cemetery in Prušánky 2, in a grave that based on stratigraphy could also be assigned to the 10th century (Unger-*man* 2007, 42, footnote 71). According to A. Ruttkay, who reached his conclusions based on analyses of relics from Ducové, the period, when this type of spurs was used ended in about the middle of the 10th century (Ruttkay, A. 1976, 348). Similarly as in the case of other types used in that time, rowels and arms gradually elongated. Although, relying on this information we could indicate typologically younger specimens, spurs with heart-shaped plates found without other components constituting an assemblage are rather chronologically insensitive items that could be only roughly dated back to the 9th century.

In the case of the second spur, we know even less. It is uncertain to which type the spur transferred in 1880 should be assigned, because it has broken arms (Fig. 3: 5). In the first publication of this item³² (Lehoczky 1913, 252) the spur is reconstructed as a spur with side rivets (Fig. 29: 2) and this is how it is cited. But with an exactly equal probability it could be a spur with a heart-shaped plate (Fig. 29: 5).

The bearded axe (*bradatica*) is also a very popular type of axes in the area of the entire Carpathian Basin. A significant accumulation is registered mainly in the area of Moravia and today Lower Austria and Slovakia (Friesinger 1972, fig 1), although occasionally they appear also in the area of today Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Poland, and even Russia and Albania (Dostál 1966, 70). These axes were subjected to numerous analyses (Bartošková 1986, 79; Dostál 1966, 69–71; Friesinger 1972, 46, 47;

Hrubý 1955, 168–173; Poulík 1948, 33–35; Ruttkay, A. 1976, 306–308). In more recent studies researchers (e.g. Tomka 2000, 196, 197) rightly point out that there are no sufficient grounds to believe that bearded axes had appeared for the first time as early as the second half of the 8th century, as it used to be suggested following J. Poulík. On the contrary, it should rather be suggested that they first emerged at the end of the 8th century or the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries. The oldest, well dated assemblages containing bearded axes should be connected with a burial from Medvedička containing a sword of the special type 1 and a fitting decorated with the Tassilo Chalice Style (Vinski 1977–1978, 178, 181–184, pl. XVII: 3) and a grave 223/51 from Staré Město (Fig. 19: 8; Hrubý 1955, 524, pl. 80: 2). Bearded axes ceased to be used with the end of the Great Moravian culture, most probably around the half of the 10th century (Kotowicz 2009, 388). Currently we have no means to establish a relative chronology of individual types of bearded axes.

Finally, the stirrup assigned to the 'Blatnica deposit' (Fig. 29: 4) also belongs to a popular type with a long chronology covering generally the entire 9th century and the beginning of the 10th century. Due to the rarity of other than late Avar stirrups in burials dated to the 9th century, the chronology of this type³³ relies only on settlement finds and deposits of iron items (Bartošková 1986, 83; Pleterski 1987, 248–253). Stirrups of a similar type are known from numerous Great Moravian sites (Měchurová 1983, 70, 71) but also from the territory of today Slovenia (Karo 2004, 169).

CHRONOLOGY OF THE COLLECTION

The problem with the chronology of the Blatnica collection stems from the fact that a large group of researchers accept the assumption that this deposit constitutes a coherent set, most likely equipment of a grave (e.g. Benda 1963, 199, 216; Beranová/Lutovský 2009, 152; Bialeková 1979, 97; Eisner 1952, 324; 328; Garam 2000, 144; Husár 2014, 33; Justová 1977, 498; Szóke 2014, 18; Šalkovský 2011, 41; Štefanovičová 2005, 265; Zábojník 2009, 80), although there is no source information confirming this. And what is more, almost all these researchers admit that this theory could not be unequivocally demonstrated. The fact, however, that the collection is considered to form an assemblage, force them also to admit that the items

³² Recently: Szóke 2014, Fig. 6, although the way the photo was taken makes specifying the type impossible.

³³ Type 2 according to Š. Karo (2004, 167–169), type I.2 according to A. Ruttkay (1976, 353, 354), type I.2 according to Z. Měchurová (1983, 70, 71).

it contained are to some extent contemporaneous or at least chronologically close enough that it was possible to complete such a collection during time of their primary usage.³⁴

The only (partial) analysis so far dedicated to the Blatnica deposit remains, unfortunately, the paper by K. Benda from 1963.³⁵ In that paper the Author discussed only the 'Carolingian' part of the collection, believing it to be partially of local production (a set with cross fittings) and partially an import (the sword with the sword set). At the same time he ignores other parts of equipment and weaponry, although he still considers them as an integral component of the assemblage (Benda 1963, 200). Summarising, K. Benda concluded that the grave of a 'nobleman from Blatnica' should be dated to about the year 800.

A paper written earlier than the one by Benda, the one by J. Cincík (1947) was gradually condemned to oblivion. This study was mentioned only by A. Ruttkay in his short characteristics of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon (Ruttkay, A. 1994, 109). K. Wachowski (1989) does not mention this article a word in his summarising discussion dedicated to the Blatnica finds and the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon. Detailed analysis, however, of the paper by J. Cincík can surprise a reader with the accuracy of claims provided there. He dated the Blatnica deposit to the years 850–890 (Cincík 1947, 229).

As it is clear from the analysis provided in this paper, the chronology of components assigned to the 'Blatnica deposit' covers couple hundreds of years (Fig. 30). In a 'broad' version this includes a period from the beginning of the 8th century (the spearhead) to the middle of the 10th century, when the sword, spurs and the axe were no longer in use. It should be noted, however, that the period of popularity of the majority of these items fell on the second half of the 9th century. The methodology of dating the assemblages *terminus post quem* describes the youngest item. In the case of the Blatnica collection it would be the set of fittings including cross fittings that in terms of stylistics and typology should be dated not earlier than the beginning of the second third of the 9th century, and most likely

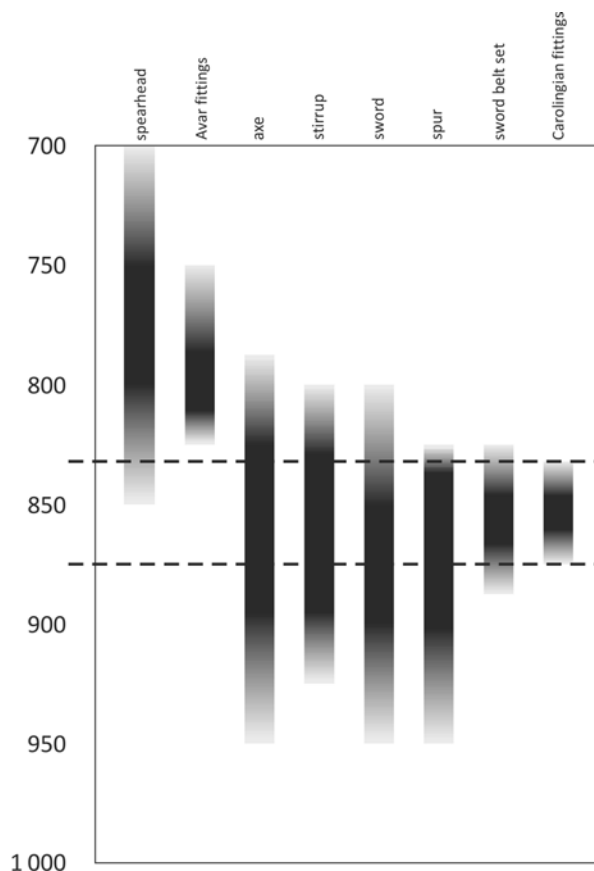


Fig. 30. The chronology of the items from 'Blatnica deposit'. Dashed lines indicate the period when youngest items were used.

around the mid-9th century. Only slightly older is the sword set that could be dated back to the turn of the first and the second quarters of the 9th century at the earliest. Theoretically, therefore, this collection could have been completed and deposited as hypothetical assemblage not earlier than the middle third of the 9th century, (winged spearheads of the type II could still have been used). Even more probable, however, in this case would be then the second half of the 9th century most of these items had their *heyday* (Fig. 30). In each version of the chronology the collection of Avar fittings seems to

³⁴ See: K. Wachowski (1989, 210), who considers the 'Blatnica collection' a hoard and thus also a kind of an assemblage.

³⁵ It was made in rather specific circumstances, namely during the celebration of 1100 anniversary of the arrival of Cyril and Methodius to the Great Moravia, similarly as nearly all 'basic' works underlying the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept. The 50's and 60's of the 20th century was a special period, when many very intense studies on the Great Moravia were performed. As J. Macháček (2012, 776, 777) claims: "Jedním z důvodů byla snaha prezentovat kulturní vyspělost Slovanů v reakci na ideologii nacismu s jejím adorováním německé, resp. germánské kultury a podceňováním všech ostatních. Studium Velké Moravy bylo zasazeno do kontextu marxistické teorie a historického materialismu. Zdůrazňoval se feudální charakter velkomoravského státu a třídní rozdělení tehdejší společnosti. Velkoplošné terénní výzkumy hlavních velkomoravských center v Mikulčicích, Starém Městě a na Pohansku měl za úkol tyto závěry podepřít." ["One of the main reasons was an attempt to depict the Slavic culture as already mature in response to the Nazi ideology and its admiration for the German or Germanic culture whilst depreciating all other cultures. Studies on Great Moravia were placed within the framework of the Marxist theory of historical materialism. The feudal character of the Great Moravian state and its class divisions were stressed. Large field studies performed at main centres of Great Moravia – Mikulčice, Staré Město and Pohansko – were designed to give credence to these theories."]

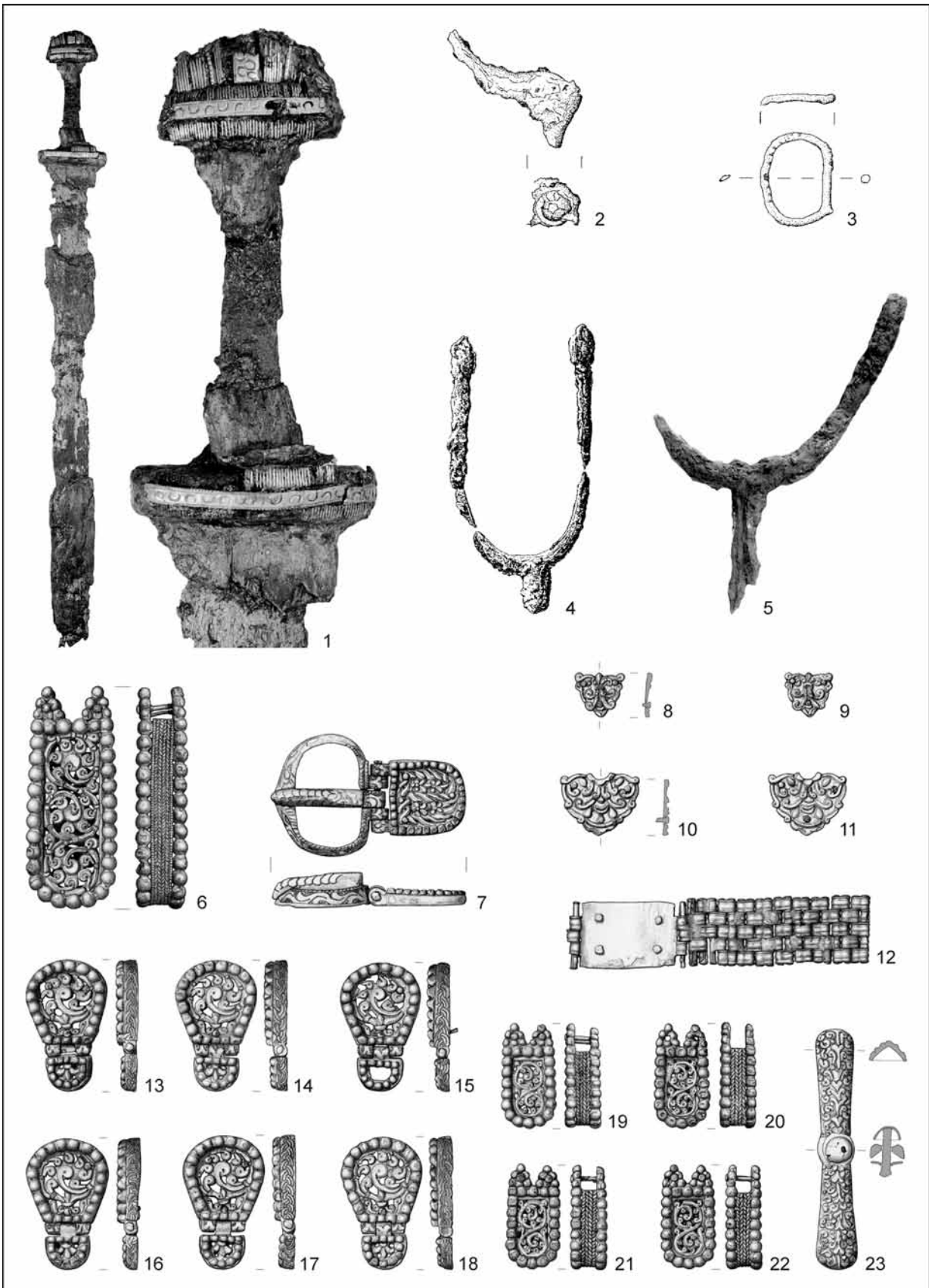


Fig. 31. Hohenberg, grave (Nowotny 2008). Without scale.

be archaic and incongruous. So there remains an open question whether this collection could have the slightest chance to become an assemblage? Is it indeed justified to treat it as an archaeological assemblage with all the resulting consequences?

Why not a grave?

Analysing the collection K. Benda (1963) did everything to confirm the dating of the 'group of Blatnica relics' to the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries as it had been suggested earlier by J. Eisner (1952, 328), although he, without any justification, introduced an even more specific date, namely precisely the year 800. He applied the same artifice, or rather repeated the argumentation of Eisner (1952, 325, 328) the aim of which was to convince readers that the Blatnica collection is in fact an assemblage coming from a grave (Benda 1963, 199, 200). He tried to achieve this comparing the alleged burial equipment with graves from Hohenberg, Krungl, the alleged nobleman burial from Malý Čepčín and equally enigmatic finds from Žabokreky. Stating that 'the collection must be a burial assemblage, because nothing else it can be' K. Benda (1963, 199, 200) simply terrorises readers from the very first passages of his study.³⁶

Most of researchers even peripherally discussing the issue of the 'Blatnica deposit' consider items included in it as equipment of a nobleman burial, although, as it was already indicated we cannot resolve, which parts of the deposit could have come from it. There is no information confirming circumstances of discovery and even the oldest records concerning the collection are in many fragments contradictory. Unfortunately these contradictions were, over the years, consistently ignored. If, therefore, we cannot confirm the information about the grave from Blatnica (or presumably some other location), let us at least try to confront this hypothesis with available archaeological data.

Even if the alleged burial equipment was to be composed of the part of the collection donated by baron Révay that in the literature is commonly considered as an assemblage, any attempts to find chronological or territorial analogies for a burial containing (in a maximum version) the untypical for the region Carolingian sword of the D type, incomplete Carolingian sword set, incomplete and severely damaged Carolingian set of horse tack

fittings, parts of several incomplete sets of the late Avar type, four spurs (including at least two mismatched), stirrup, arrowheads, bearded axe and the Carolingian spearhead with wings would prove to be barren. In case of assemblages crucial for dating is the youngest element, and thus the entire set could not have been buried earlier than at the beginning of the second third of the 9th century – this is the conclusion we reach analysing the set of bronze horse tack fittings. This undermines the entire, meticulously woven chronological concept introduced by K. Benda and consequently repeated by many after him. Nowhere, throughout the territories of former Great Moravia we could find even a similar burial with corresponding equipment dated back to the 9th century. The rite used in the Great Moravian culture never included deposition of components of a horse tack into graves. As we have already noticed such graves did not contain even cross fittings. Only occasionally, burials dated to the 9th century contain stirrups (Budinský-Krička 1959, 71; pl. XX: 13). What should further strikes us in this collection is a tremendous dissonance between the fabulously decorated sword with sword set fittings and the most coarse iron spurs (as if was not enough, there are four of them, although this is not an argument disproving the 'burial hypothesis' as there are known burials with four spurs, for example from Staré Město³⁷). It is not, however, comprehensible, why such lavishly equipped grave should include also individual fittings from several dilapidated Avar fitting sets, which both primary and secondary function is even difficult to determine.

Interpreting burials from Hohenberg (Fig. 31; Fischbach 1897; Nowotny 2008) and Krungl (Fig. 32; Breibert 2011; Fischbach 1894, 359, 360) as analogies, as it was done by J. Eisner, K. Benda or A. Točík (1963, 607) also has no grounds anymore. Equipment of these graves included complete sets of the late Avar belt fittings accompanied by western weaponry (weapon and spurs). The phenomenon of such graves is a consequence of a specific cultural situation in the 8th and at the beginning of the 9th century in the Eastern Alpine borderland of Bavaria and the Avar Khaganate inhabited by the Slavs (Eichert 2010, 160–164; 2012, 209–211, 310, 311; 2013; Eichert/Mehofer/Baier 2011, 149, 150; Szameit 1991; 2000, 523, 534). And the situation in the mid-9th century or even earlier in the area of Turiec was certainly different.

K. Benda (1963, 199), possibly following N. Fettich (1937, 263), refers to the grave from Hohenberg as

³⁶ K. Benda did not mind the fact that J. Eisner (1952, 328), to whom he generally refers, dates the alleged grave from Žabokreky to the 2nd half of the 9th century. What he focuses on is only the information supporting and making more probable his own hypothesis that the sword, bearded axe and the spur must constitute grave equipment.

³⁷ Hrubý 1955, 381, 473.

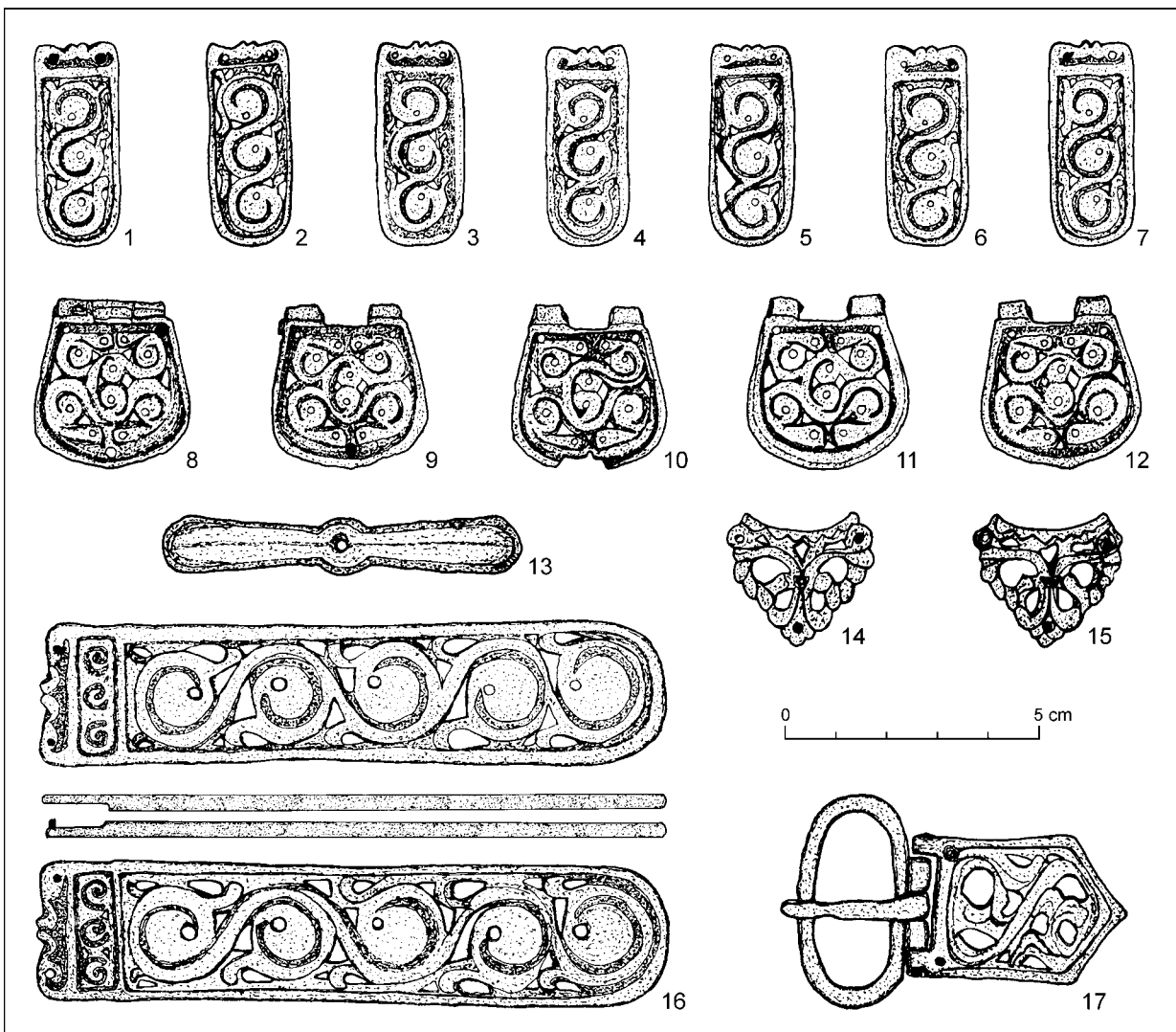


Fig. 32. Krungl, grave (Breibert 2011).

an example of a burial with the abundant 'Avar-Carolingian' equipment. He needs this argument to support a very specific historical concept that will be discussed below (see paragraph 4). As can be seen, these two collections – graves from Hohenberg and 'Blatnica deposit' – have not much in common and could not be compared, mainly due to chronological issues. The grave from Hohenberg included an early Carolingian, lavishly decorated sword of the Mannheim type, which chronology does not raise any controversies and a set of late Avar belt fittings of the Mediterranean type that match one other (Nowotny 2008; Szente 2013, 318). The entire collection without any significant doubts is dated to the second half of the 8th century, respectively the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries and clearly constitutes an assemblage (similarly as the already

mentioned grave from Krungl). On the contrary, the equipment of the 'Blatnica deposit' is incomplete, mismatched and some of items are doubled. Several thousands of early medieval burials from the outside of the Khaganate dated back to the 9th century that we today know from the territories of Moravia and Slovakia, including in this number also burial mounds (e.g. Skalica, Krasňany) include no such sets as those coming allegedly from Blatnica or Čepčín. Only occasionally such burials contains single, often damaged Avar fittings used as strap end fittings or decorations, clearly deprived of their original context.³⁸ The areas of today southern Moravia or southern Slovakia sets of Avar fittings occur in burials only at skeletal or bi-rite cemeteries culturally belonging to the territories of the Avar Khaganate (Galuška 2013, 53–76, 85).

³⁸ Mikulčice, grave 108/II; grave 821; Modrá, grave 22; Staré Město, grave 291/AZ; 307/AZ.

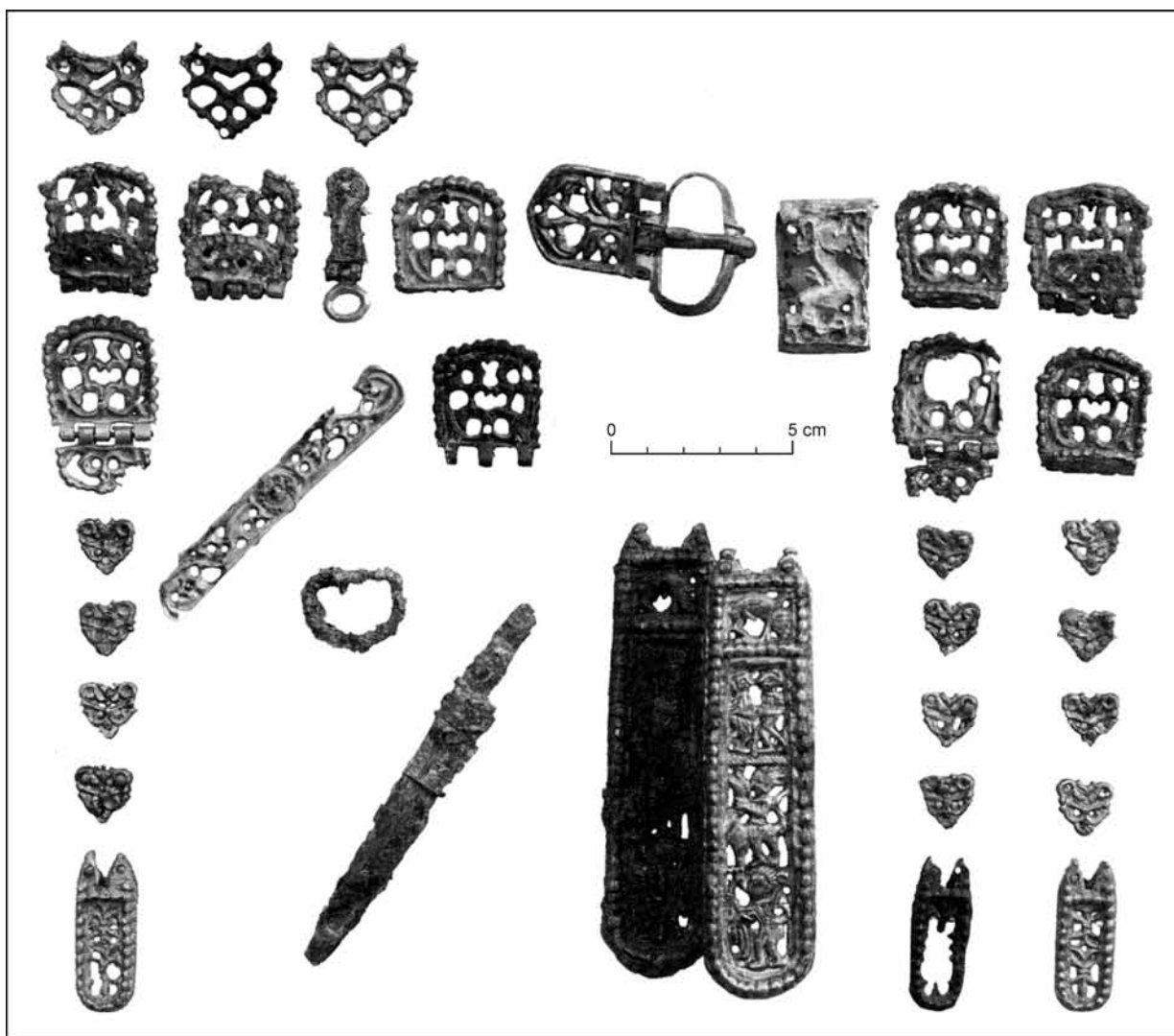


Fig. 33. Dolní Dunajovice, grave 7 (Galuška 2013).

If, therefore, the hypothetical ‘nobleman from Blatnica’, allegedly buried around the year 800 indeed wore a belt of the Avar type, then we should expect finding the entire set of fittings, similar to the one known from Dolní Dunajovice (Fig. 33; Galuška 2013, 71, fig. 48; Klanica 1972, 13–17) but not a collection of miscellaneous items. Taking into account what we already know about the beginnings of the skeletal rite in Moravia and Slovakia in the 9th century, I would venture a hypothesis that the Slavic skeletal grave from the turn of the 8th and 9th century in the Turiec Valley is an utter impossibility, because this rite was adopted in these areas together with Christianity, that is, at best, at the beginning of the second quarter of the 9th century. If, however, the hypothetical grave, as suggested by dating of the youngest components, were younger

than the turn of the 8th and 9th century and came, for example, from the second third of the 9th century (what would coincide with the skeletal rite), then its equipment would be inconsistent with any standards describing skeletal (even elite) burials from that time.

Nothing seems to prove the hypothesis that the Turiec Valley in the 8th or 9th century was a cultural rarity (a hypothesis of a single occurrence is, unfortunately, unfalsifiable), it would be thus difficult to find any analogy confirming accuracy of the hypotheses claiming that the collection constitutes equipment of a burial. In any case, these hypotheses do not stand the confrontation with the source analysis. Although all items belonging to the ‘Blatnica deposit’ could easily be used in the 9th century in the Turiec Valley³⁹ (and even in

³⁹ Although the D type sword would be a unique specimen.

the entire Carpathian Basin), then its deposition in an assemblage such as a grave seems highly unlikely.

The hypothesis about some horizon of burial mounds dated to the period of the collapse of the Khaganate containing mixed Avar-Carolingian equipment and linked with areas located to the north of the Khaganate borders, although based on poor evidence, is still present in the literature (e.g. Szőke 2014, 17). So far, this phenomenon assigned to the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century was confirmed only in Eastern Alpine areas. In the case of the territories of Moravia and Slovakia located outside the Khaganate, we deal exclusively with burials dated to the 9th century containing only single late Avar fittings.

What about a hoard then?

In his paper published in 1989 K. Wachowski suggested that the 'Blatnica deposit' is not equipment of a grave, but rather a hoard consisted, in this particular case, of iron and bronze items. The reason for putting such hypothesis was an assumption that the set with the cross fitting is a sword set, which in turn would mean that the grave contained three such sets and that definitely would be an exaggeration. The Author, however, never questioned contents of the collection, similarly as he did not provide any arguments strengthening his hypothesis.

Accepting the already determined chronology of the 'Blatnica deposit', we should indicate its deposition as about mid-9th century or its second third at the earliest. The difficulty with confirming the hypothesis of the iron and bronze deposit in the described collection arises from the lack of chronological and territorial analogies for the proposed content of the collection. From the territories of Moravia and Slovakia we know a relatively small number of deposits containing Avar bronze and iron items, including stirrups (Bartošková 1986, 13–16; 33–36) dated, however, based on their composition to the second half of the 8th century, respectively to the beginning of the 9th century. It would be futile, however, to look among these finds for a sword or a winged spearhead. What is more, swords and winged spearheads, besides single finds, are never present in iron hoards (not only those dated to the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries) in the entire Slavic Territories. Finally, even in those rare cases swords nowhere coincide with elements of a horse tack (Curta 1997, 226; 2011, 311). Thus it seems doubtful that the collection of items such as the 'Blatnica deposit' could have been an early medieval hoard.

Summary

In the 'Blatnica collection' we clearly distinguish three subsets, although of course this partition is obviously artificial and drawn only for the purposes of this analysis. The 'Avar' part includes a bunch of fittings, which typology, chronology and cultural origins raise no major doubts. The 'Carolingian' part contains both strap fitting sets and the sword that shows, however, strong connections with Scandinavia. Other, identifiable elements, such as spurs, the spearhead, stirrup and the bearded axe are items typical for the weaponry and attire of a warrior in the 9th century in the Carpathian Basin and the Eastern Alps. Labelling them as 'Great Moravian', however, would be a misuse of that term, because they have analogies also in archaeological contexts not identified with this culture.

Let us, for a moment, consider only those relics which origins raise no serious doubts or are significantly easier to establish. No typological and stylistic analyses could indicate where the fittings of the 'Carolingian type' included in the 'Blatnica deposit' come from. In the case of strap fittings casted in bronze, inlaid with silver or copper, most of them are unique specimens, often custom-made. Given the general European 'fashion' modelled on the attire of Carolingian knights, it is difficult to determine, whether a given product was produced in Western Europe or is a local imitation or even maybe was created by a locally working western craftsman. Unless we find somewhere fittings similar to those from Blatnica, distinction between Western European (or, more broadly, non-Slavic) imports and local products is often impossible. This is precisely the case of the 'Carolingian' part of the 'Blatnica deposit': the analysis of formal features of fittings from Blatnica and other similar items suggests that their prototypes should be searched among the late Carolingian artefacts dated, at the earliest, to the second third of the 9th century.

The Scandinavian trail appears regularly in the oldest Czech and Slovak literature only to be deliberately and consistently ignored. This situation was, it seems, strongly influenced by the authority of J. Eisner (1952, 326, 327; Poulik 1963, 45). Rather inaccurate comparison of N. Fettich (1937, 265–279) announced with his conception of inflow of Vikings to the Carpathian Basin were vigorously criticised by J. Eisner. This in turn contributed to abandoning any research leading in this direction, what can be confirmed by reluctant statements made by J. Poulik (1963, 45). It is also possible, what many researchers admitted after years, that this was the aftermath of the growing spirit of nationalism requiring rejec-

ting 'germanophilic' conceptions (*Klanica* 2006, 63; *Macháček* 2012, 776, 777; *Třeštík* 1995, 91, 92).

As was already noted by A. Nadolski (1954, 33), the Scandinavians had their significant share in the import of swords, and possibly also other Western European products to Central Europe. Given the fact that the export of weaponry by the Franks to the Slavs and Avars was prohibited, the industrious Scandinavians probably took over this branch of trade and gradually even became monopolists (*Łosiński* 2008, 153). It is also likely that the weapons (their blades) were not produced in Scandinavia at all. The Scandinavians, as was hypothesised by J. Cincík (1947, 206) mostly only rimmed the blades previously carved in the Frankish workshops. In the case of swords of the D type according to Petersen, including the Blatnica specimen, we should also take into account that they could be produced in various parts of Europe, which may be hinted by a diverse ornamentation of these swords (*Kazakievicius* 1996, 129). While currently there is a general consensus that the sword from the 'Blatnica deposit', or actually its hilt, has Scandinavian connections, which in the light of a series of similar relics cannot be concealed any longer, even if the actual place where it was produced still raises some controversies (*Marek* 2004, 29, 30), then in the case of the bronze fittings set researchers focused mainly on stressing its local, Slavic origins. This claim was supported rather with relying on authorities and emphatic opinions (see *Benda* 1963, 215, 216) than actual archaeological sources that could not confirm it and thus were ignored. This situation resulted in a methodological crisis depriving the younger generation of researchers of a possibility to refer to a relatively extensive series of relics, not necessarily of the Scandinavian, but precisely of the Carolingian origins, imported by the Scandinavians (to the Scandinavia itself). Contrary to intuitions, this assumption does not prove the hypothesis that the Vikings mediated the import of items included in the 'Blatnica deposit', but only highlights those features of these relics that can be considered specific to the continental craft. If these comparisons were possible, it would become clear that 'Blatnica items' are stylistically coherent with Carolingian relics found, among others, in the Scandinavia – but the possible role of the Vikings in the import of these

items would be secondary and of minor importance as we would be able to trace their primary origins.

In the light of the present knowledge, the criticism of the analysis by K. Benda (1963) and pointing out his not very accurate comparisons, analogies, as well as his historical, geographical and stylistic acrobatics or contradictions in his own argumentation⁴⁰, would be today useless. While the first sentence of his work: "*The so called Blatnica finds from the late Avar times*" could be considered as an introduction to the analysis, then the assertion: "*it seems to me that dating of the stylistically heterogeneous finds relies on dating its local, that is the late Avar, part*" (and several similar statements) placed already at the second page of the paper proves that K. Benda uses a dogma instead of research and that the entire paper is merely a redundant adornment covering more or less reasonable arguments supporting the theory of J. Eisner (1952, 320–333), namely that crafts in the area of Moravia and Slovakia at the turn of the 8th and the 9th century evolved as a combination of the Avar and Carolingian traditions. He evokes this assertion repeatedly to cover obvious facts that falsified the paradigm he applied.⁴¹ This also allows him criticising, among others, J. Cincík⁴² (including *ad personam* arguments), who had the audacity to date the sword from Blatnica back to the mid-9th century. From the perspective of methodology of archaeological research this basically disqualifies his work, because if the Author considered the collection an assemblage (and he informs us about this already at the very first page of his paper), then he should also assume (or at least pretend that he assumes) that he dates the youngest item. On the contrary, K. Benda thrust all elements of the chronology broader than the turn of the 8th and the 9th century, even those apparently younger (which he must be aware of, as it is clear from his own analysis) into the frames delineated by the chronology of the late Avar fittings. At best he blatantly ignores them stating, more or less, that it does not matter whether these items are younger, because still the chronology is determined by the Avar part (*Benda* 1963, 212). The paper written by K. Benda remains, unfortunately, widely cited work not only in its part containing the source information (which seems to be understandable), but what is worse also the entire theoretical construction proposed by the Author

⁴⁰ This was also highlighted by K. Wachowski (1989; 1992, 104).

⁴¹ Particularly p. 211, 212.

⁴² During the so called First Slovak Republic (Slovakia between 1939 and 1945) J. Cincík (1908–1992), a Slovak painter, sculptor, art history professor and an archaeologist was an active intellectual and a leading employee of many scientific and cultural institutions. In March 1945 together with a group of other Slovak intellectuals, later considered by the communist government of Czechoslovakia as collaborators, he immigrated through Germany to the USA, where he continued his studies dedicated to the Slovak culture.

is often blindly duplicated and thus automatically any component of the 'Blatnica deposit' is fitted into the chronology of the alleged grave suggested by K. Benda.

Certainly it is not excluded that some parts of the 'Blatnica deposit' were actually found together, but relying on the available data it is impossible to indicate which (if any) and thus such deliberations become meaningless. For on what grounds could we recognise which of the relics donated by Révay came from a grave? But it is already too late, since from the bundle of heterogeneous items researchers selected only those they considered matching. This choice, however, is inconsistent with the data that now, after over a hundred years of studies we possess.

In my opinion the 'Blatnica grave' with unbelievably lavish and mismatched equipment was an artificial creation – either carelessly by baron Révay himself, from whom director F. Pulszky wheedled some more interesting finds, or by the researchers eager for success. Possibly the baron himself heard of the excavations of V. Groó from 1872 (the Blatnica collection seems to be remarkably similar to the alleged equipment of the grave from Čepčín) and envied him the local fame and interest of scientists from Budapest, for whom the collection proved to be a titbit. Last but not least he could see in the collection his opportunity to benefit and enrich the Hungarian culture. And thus, intentionally or not, the story began living its own life. If someone still desires to treat the collection of items referred to as the 'Blatnica deposit' as an assemblage (and most of all a burial completely unusual for the time and place), should present something more of an argument than only a hundred year old, vague piece of information to support his claims. And finally we should ask ourselves: if today we were to acquire such collection from an amateur collector, would we really take his assertions that it comes from a grave for granted?

BLATNICA-MIKULČICE HORIZONT – A BRIEF HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The bronze set of Carolingian fittings together with components of the late Avar belt fittings set and the sword from Blatnica were for the Czechoslovak archaeologist J. Eisner (1952, 320–333) one of cornerstones for construction of the entire theory of development of the Slavic craft at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries, often characterised as a continuation of the late Avar casting tradition on the Slavic foundations but with strong influences of the Carolingian craft (see Eisner 1949, 41; 1952,

328). This theory has affected the development of the early medieval archaeology in the former Czechoslovakia evolving into the concept of the so called Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon and in a broader perspective it became one of crucial components of the still applied, not only by Czech and Slovak scientists, but also those from other parts of Europe, chronological system (Bialeková 1980b; Dostál 1966, 89–91).

We owe the creation of the concept preserved in the literature as the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon to J. Poulík (1963, 43–45), who synchronised finds of gilded bronze spurs and sets of their buckles with graves no. 44 and 50 in Mikulčice (referred to as the 'Mikulčice style') with relics coming from Blatnica (analogically termed the 'Blatnica style' or the 'group of relics from Blatnica'). At the same time he claimed that although these two styles differ, in fact are examples of a similar phenomenon of local craft production relying on Avar traditions but with Carolingian influences. Looking for a definition of this phenomenon in his paper being an extension, but with essentially different tone, of an earlier paper (Poulík 1948, 296–299), one would be disappointed. This is rather a combination of vague stipulations and observations, sometimes completely unintelligible and mostly obsolete today. But of course problems with justification of this concept became clear already at the very beginning (see Ungerman 2011b, 135; Wachowski 1989, 210, 214, 215). There were also few unfortunate mistakes with far-reaching consequences (see Chorvátová 2004, 228). Still, however, the theory was commonly accepted by researchers (e.g. Košta/Lutovský 2014, 131).

In the absence of other comparative material, even J. Eisner (1949; 1952) and following him also other leading Czechoslovak archaeologists – for example A. Točík (1963), J. Poulík (1963) and of course already mentioned K. Benda (1963) – looked for analogies of the groups of items they described and associated with the culture of Slavs inhabiting the middle Danube Basin in the 8th and 9th century among the early Carolingian and the late Avar relics. Positive, in their opinion, results of these researches supported also by historical sources inclined them to conclude that the relics in question should be dated to around 800 or more broadly, as in the case of Mikulčice, to the first half of the 9th century. The impression, however, that the authors deliberately looked only for arguments confirming their hypothesis (although they never stated this *expressis verbis*) seems to be inevitable. Of course, J. Poulík noticed methodological problems with synchronisation of the early Carolingian loop spurs with plate spurs from Mikulčice, considering the latter

as a continuation of the tradition of bronze casted spurs with decorated arms, but still dates he suggested for this group of items, and indirectly for the entire 'horizon' of finds, are only slightly younger, namely around the year 825 (*Pouлік 1963, 44*).

The undisputable originator of the entire confusion with the concept underlying the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' seems to be J. Eisner, whose authority other scientists did not dare to oppose, among them for example A. Točík (1963), K. Benda (who however sometimes refers to the paper by J. Cincík (1947) presenting completely different position), or J. Pouлік. It was particularly visible in the case of J. Pouлік (see the difference between *Pouлік 1948, 296–298* and *1963, 43–45* – partially the text is the same, but its meaning seems to be completely different), who as analogies to the fittings from Mikulčice cites typical late Avar items found in the cemetery in Birka together with their dating, only to reject them decidedly and insist, following J. Eisner, on the development of an 'old local tradition' (*Pouлік 1963, 45*). Pouлік abandons his earlier beliefs (1957, 298), built upon the work of J. Cincík (1947, 229), establishing the chronology of both the sword from Blatnica and items from the grave no. 44 from Mikulčice to around 840–870, which paradoxically from a today's perspective could be regarded as correct, although routes that guided J. Cincík towards it today are certainly not accurate.

The conflation 'Blatnica-Mikulčice' was introduced to the literature most likely by B. Dostál, although it would be difficult to point him as a single author.⁴³ In 1964 B. Dostál presented a concept of periodization of the Great Moravian history (*Dostál 1965, 361, 362*). The term 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' with a reference to J. Pouлік (1963), who, however, never used it himself, appears as a description of the period covering the first half of the 9th century and its characteristic items made in a style named, following Pouлік, 'Mikulčice style' (mask motif, palmettes, punching, engraved prayers' silhouettes, etc.). In addition to items from Blatnica the set included also finds characteristic for the earliest phase of Carolingian imports to Dalmatia (the so called Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon) mentioned also by A. Točík (1963, 603, 607). This characteristic was later repeated by B. Dostál in his monumental work of 1966 (*Dostál 1966, 89*) cemen-

ting thus the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept and its chronology. The name 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' as a description of a stylistic orientation bounding items previously determined separately as 'Mikulčice' or 'Blatnica'style' (*Benda 1963, 216; Pouлік 1963, 42, 45; Točík 1963, 603, 604*) was used also by D. Bialeková in her paper of 1965 (1965, 532, 533), although in this case the Author noticed that the entire theoretical construction is precarious, since the iron items discovered in Pobedim, except for formal analogies (similar set of fittings), had nothing in common with the set of relics described by J. Eisner, K. Benda and J. Pouлік. Due to the lack of other possibilities, however, it was necessary to refer to the sources available at that time and the conclusions drawn by J. Eisner, K. Benda, B. Dostál and J. Pouлік seemed to be coherent. Bialeková needed, however, to cope with inconsistency of several relics and thus she introduced a younger phase of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon characterised by a lack of 'Avar components' and production of simplified iron ornaments, genetically following their bronze predecessors. Thanks to this solution she incidentally extended the 'content' of the horizon, previously clearly restricted to casted bronzes (*Dostál 1965, 362; 1966, 89; Eisner 1952, 323; Pouлік 1963, 43*) and relying on conclusions and theories available at that time she provided foundations for the future chronological construction (*Bialeková 1979; 1980a; 1980b, 213–221*) that with only minor modifications is used until today (e.g. *Petrinec 2006, 25; 2009, 176, 177; Šalkovský 2011, 77–79*).

J. Justová (1977, 498, 499) wrote explicitly about the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon even earlier than D. Bialeková published her most significant papers concerning this issue, although the definition of this phenomenon that she used is so broad that generally allows including virtually any item (except for women ornaments) and particularly any decorated fitting that would appear in the context of relics dated back to the 9th century (for examples see *Ungerma 2005, 707*). This publication was a turning point, because earlier the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon covered only items described as bronzes made in the 'syncretic style' (that is mixed 'Avar-Carolingian' style) and the debate was focused on a relatively small group of finds from Mikulčice and Blatnica.

⁴³ I use the term 'most likely', because today this cannot be assessed with certainty. *Dostál 1965* is the oldest publication (the volume published after the exhibition and conference that took place in the autumn of 1963) that I was able to identify actually using the term 'Blatnica-Mikulčice'. The author of the expression remains, unfortunately, unknown to this day. Possibly the term emerged during some discussions of a group of contemporary researchers. My conversations with Dr. D. Bialeková entitle me to believe that the expression "had been already present in the professional Czech and Slovak scientific language (archaeological slang)" when she published her paper of 1965 and that she was not an author of the term. In a slightly modified form (Mikulčice-Blatnica art circle) it can be found in works of A. Točík (1963, 604). This is the very first use of this expression I was able to identify so far.

A short, but comprehensive summary of the entire already developed and complete concept was provided by N. Profantová in 1989. Uncritical and automatic⁴⁴ evolution of the theory based on fallacious foundations arising from an original methodological error (and possibly some 'non-scientific' desires to prove an older chronology than indicated by sources) together with the adoption of scientifically unjustified dating had fatal consequences for the chronology of the Early Middle Ages in the Middle Danube Basin. This is particularly important for the discussion about the chronology of Great Moravia (for examples see: *Dresler 2011, 179; Ungerman 2011b, 138–140*) and more broadly of the entire Early Middle Ages in the Slavic territories⁴⁵, including also Polish lands (e.g. *Zoll-Adamikowa 1998, 94; Třeštík 1997, 76*). Since that time, basically any reference to items assigned to the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon automatically dated a site, and then, as a chain reaction, every item discovered at this site to the first third of the 9th century, even at a cost of 'compressing' or shifting the chronology to that period (*Košta 2008, footnote 7*).⁴⁶ Such dating, obviously, was later transferred to other sites with similar, even non-metal items (e.g. *Dostál 1993; Profantová 1989; 1995, 100; 1997, 86*). There were also absurd situations, when early dating of the site and items supposedly confirmed each other (*Klanica 2006, 33*). The greatest issue, however, that arose from this situation is the fact that chronology of individual sites, assigned based on the dating of items found there to the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon period is still applied (e.g. *Hanuliak 2004, 36, 37; Hulínek/Čajka 2004, 81–85*).

Eventually, although late, researchers started to notice the vastness of accumulating problems (*Bialeková 2012, 67; Hanuliak 2004, 32; Chorvátová 2004; Janošik/Pieta 2007, 141; Klanica 2006, 33, 49, 52; Košta 2008; Macháček/Dresler/Rybníček 2013; Měřínský 2006, 204; Ungerman 2011b, 138–140*). But the concept of 'relics belonging to the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' itself, the power of arguments often defended as fiercely as axioms and finally the chronology of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon still exist in the literature and are doing pretty well (see recently: *Beranová/Lutovský 2009; Bilogrivić 2009, 143, 144*⁴⁷; *Bubeník 2006, 23–25; Dresler 2011, 24, 144; Kavánová 2012, 182; Klanica 2006, 33; Měřínský 2006, 176–238; 2011, 247; Milošević 2012, 205; Petrinec 2006, 25, 26; 2009, 176–183; 152; Šalkovský 2011, 79; Štefanovičová 2012, 318, 319; Třeštík 2001, 110*). As *B. Dostál (1977–1978, 130)* wrote already in 1977, possibly noticing weaknesses of the construction to which development he himself contributed significantly: "revision would mean the collapse of the entire chronological system of Great Moravian relic". Presumably the situation is even worse, because as it stems from the analysis of Croatian studies, it would be detrimental not only to the chronology of the Great Moravian relics, but also those for which they served as a reference point (e.g. *Bilogrivić 2009; Milošević 2012; Petrinec 2009*). The system, despite desperate attempts (*Klanica 2006, 32, 33; Šalkovský 2011, 77; 2015, 102, 103*) does not stand the confrontation with sources, particularly when supported by scientific methods of dating (e.g. *Henning/Ruttkay, M. 2011; Macháček/Dresler/Rybníček 2013*). Respectively, also the chronology of its foundations perishes (*Chorvátová*

⁴⁴ The inconsistency of the foundation provided by J. Eisner, J. Poulík and K. Benda, on which the entire Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon theory has been built, was pointed out by K. Wachowski (1989; 1992, 104, 105). His objections, however, remained unnoticed. Similarly as objections raised by J. Cincik (1947) and T. Capelle (1968), who never even suggested such early dates for the Carolingian items from Blatnica.

⁴⁵ The issue concerns particularly the chronology of the skeletal rite in Moravia and Western Slovakia. The series of burials considered previously as early and supporting hypotheses about the beginning of the skeletal rite at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries (*Hanuliak 2004, 35, 36; Klanica 1990*) in the light of the findings presented here receive a significantly younger chronology. This applies particularly to the so called flagship sites, such as Závada (*Bialeková 1979*) or Čakajovce (*Hanuliak/Rejholcová 1999; Rejholcová 1995a; 1995b*), where graves containing equipment in the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice style' and plate spurs were discovered. Because the issue is weighty and complex, it could not, for obvious reasons, be addressed in this paper fully. It seems, however, that the theory indicating that the shift from the crematory to the skeletal rite took place at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries in Moravia and Slovakia requires new approach and re-evaluation relying on new chronological foundations.

⁴⁶ If an Avar fitting was found at a site or in an assemblage, it served as an additional chronological 'reinforcement' (e.g. *Profantová 1989, 607* – where the grave no. 22 from Modrá and the grave no. 1205 from Ducové were described as 'pre-Blatnica-Mikulčice' in the chronological sense).

⁴⁷ G. Bilogrivić (2009), following M. Petrinec (2006, 26) synchronises the Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon with the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon and thus dates Croatian (sic!) swords of the K type according to Petersen linking them directly with the swords of the K type from Moravia assigned to the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon. Consequently he concluded (*Bilogrivić 2009, 144*) that "this confirms the early chronology of the swords of the K type from Dalmatia that prove to be one of the oldest swords of the K type whatsoever". This vividly shows how this axiom was applied and how it led to vicious circles in scientific reasoning, when the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon served as a reference point for dating the Biskupija-Crkvina Horizon.

2004, 228⁴⁸; Košta 2008; Ungerman 2011b). So maybe, after all, it is the time to face the facts and prepare ourselves for the inevitable revision of the paradigm that no longer can be sustained.

Studies on the issue are even more difficult as the term 'Blatnica-Mikulčice' is given more than one meaning. It can refer to:

1. the period of time (e.g. *Bialeková 1980a; 1980b; 1984, 36; Dostál 1965, 362*);
2. the period when some specific cultural phenomena occurred, generally described as the 'socio-economic transformations of the Slavic culture in the Middle Danube Basin' (e.g. *Bialeková 1980b; 1984, 33; 1996, 251, 252; Wachowski 1989, 218*);
3. Sometimes it is applied as a merely technical term referring to the stylistics or methods of production and decoration of some items (e.g. *Beranová/Lutovský 2009, 152; Bialeková 1965, 532, 533; 1985; 2002, 97; Měřínský 2006, 238; Petrínek 2009, 177–183; Poulík 1963, 42–44; Profantová/Kavánová 2003, 256; Šalkovský 2011, 77–79*) and, as the theory matured, also to specific categories of items (e.g. *Bialeková 1984, 98, 99; 1996, 254; 2002, 97; Bláha 1998, 139; 2001, 52; Dostál 1977–1978, 118; Galuška 1997, 80; Hanuliak/Kuzma/Šalkovský 1993, 88; Michálek/Lutovský 2000, 224*);
4. it describes co-occurrence of items made in different stylistics, mainly the late Avar and Carolingian (including both the Tassilo Chalice Style and the 'Carolingian Renaissance'), but also the Scandinavian relics (e.g. *Beranová/Lutovský 2009, 151, 152; Bialeková 1979, 94; 1996, 251, 252; Měřínský 2006, 176–238; Petrínek 2009, 177–183; Profantová 1997, 85; Wachowski 1989, 218*).

As if that was not enough the matter is further complicated by the fact that some researchers use the term 'Blatnica style' when defining stylistics of the late Avar relics decorated with plant motifs on a punched background (e.g. *Petrínek 2006; 2009; Simoni 1986*). K. Wachowski (1989, 218), in turn, departs from this tradition and uses the term 'Blatnica type' to describe late Avar products "made in a traditional casting technique and decorated exclusively with a plant motif".

The Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept was also applied in various chronological systems used for the history of the Slavs inhabiting the areas of Moravia and Slovakia in the Early Middle Ages (*Bialeková 1980b, 219; Dostál 1966, 89–91*). The separation of this period was of course linked with the conviction that the above described phenomena took place at

the beginning of the 9th century, respectively in its first half (around 800–830/850). But this supposition cannot be sustained anymore. Interestingly, as was rightly pointed out by Š. Ungerman (2011b, 138), the authors of the concept never claimed that items characteristic for the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon were used exclusively in this period of time. But this led to an absurd situation, when all items meeting, according to a given researcher, never clearly defined requirements of the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice style'⁴⁹ were automatically 'thrown' into the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' (e.g. *Klanica 1973, fig. 1; Princová-Justová 1997, 105; Profantová/Kavánová 2003, 335; Rejholcová 1995a, 53*). This in turn meant that they were dated back to the first third of the 9th century, at best its first half, and thus the entire second half of the 9th century and the beginning of the 10th century were utterly deprived of archaeological relics associated generally with the weaponry, and with the warrior attire in particular (see *Poulík 1963, 43, 44; 1985, 29*; and critically: *Ungerman 2005, 707*). By the way, given the political and military activity of the Moravians in the second half of the 9th century (*Ruttikay, A. 1982, 165–167; 2002, 107, 108, fig. 2*) that would be highly improbable and difficult to sustain, which certainly had to be noticed with time. The more recent literature mentions rather the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon relics 'burning out' in the second half of the 9th century than 'being secondary used' (e.g. *Beranová/Lutovský 2009, 152; Janošik/Pieta 2007, 141; Měřínský 2006, 195; 204; 231, 232; 238; Šalkovský 2011, 77*).

It seems that the most reasonable solution would be simply to abandon the terminology that causes so many troubles. The commitment to the term 'Blatnica-Mikulčice' caused a paradoxical situation, namely that relics supposedly characterising a restricted time horizon (between 800 and 830/850) are nowadays broadly dated to the 9th century (Fig. 34). Sometimes they are even present in contexts which chronology is clearly restricted to the second half of the 9th century (e.g. *Rajhradice, Břeclav-Pohansko*). On the other hand, according to the more recent analyses (Fig. 35; *Robak 2013, 208*), the group of relics linked with the weaponry and attire of a warrior characteristic to the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries consists of items that by no means could be included in the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice style', at least as far as it is possible to define features of that style at all.

The current dating of the eponymous assemblages that gave rise to the separation of the so

⁴⁸ This work, similarly as the one by Š. Ungerman (2005) was recently critically commented by L. Galuška (2013, 196–203). Regardless, however, the debate concerning dating of the so called ornaments of the Weligrad type, that is the main subject of these two papers, comments provided by H. Chorvátová about the way how the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon was engineered in the past remain accurate.

⁴⁹ See: *Měřínský 2006, 201*.


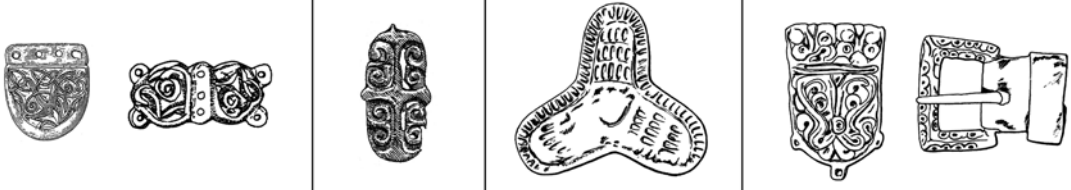



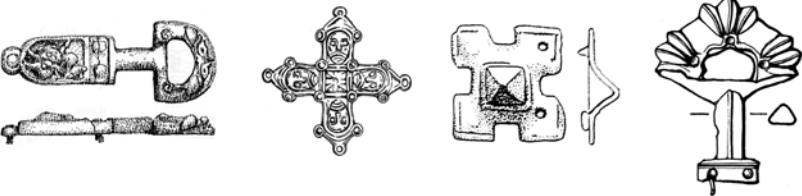

Avar: Late and Decline Avar period items (2 nd half of the 8 th c. - 1 st quarter of the 9 th c.)			
			
Carolingian: The Tassilo Chalice Style (2 nd half of the 8 th c. - 1 st third of the 9 th c.)	Carolingian: transition phase style (beginning of the 9 th c.)	Carolingian: geometric decoration (1 st half of the 9 th c.)	Carolingian: early Plant Style - rich decoration (1 st /2 nd quart. of the 9 th c. - 2 nd quart. of the 9 th c.)
			
Carolingian: early Plant Style - simplified decoration (1 st /2 nd quarter of the 9 th c. - 2 nd quarter of the 9 th c.)			
			
Carolingian: Plant style (about mid. of the 9 th c.)	Great Moravian: cast bronze Carolingian-type items (imports or local imitations) (mid. of the 9 th c. - end of the 9 th c.)		
			
Great Moravian: iron Carolingian-type items (local style) (2 nd half of the 9 th c - beginning of the 10 th c.)			
			
Items dated generally to the 9 th -10 th c.			Items of unclear cultural origin
			

Fig. 34. Relics supposedly characterising the 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' with their proper chronology and stylistics attribution.

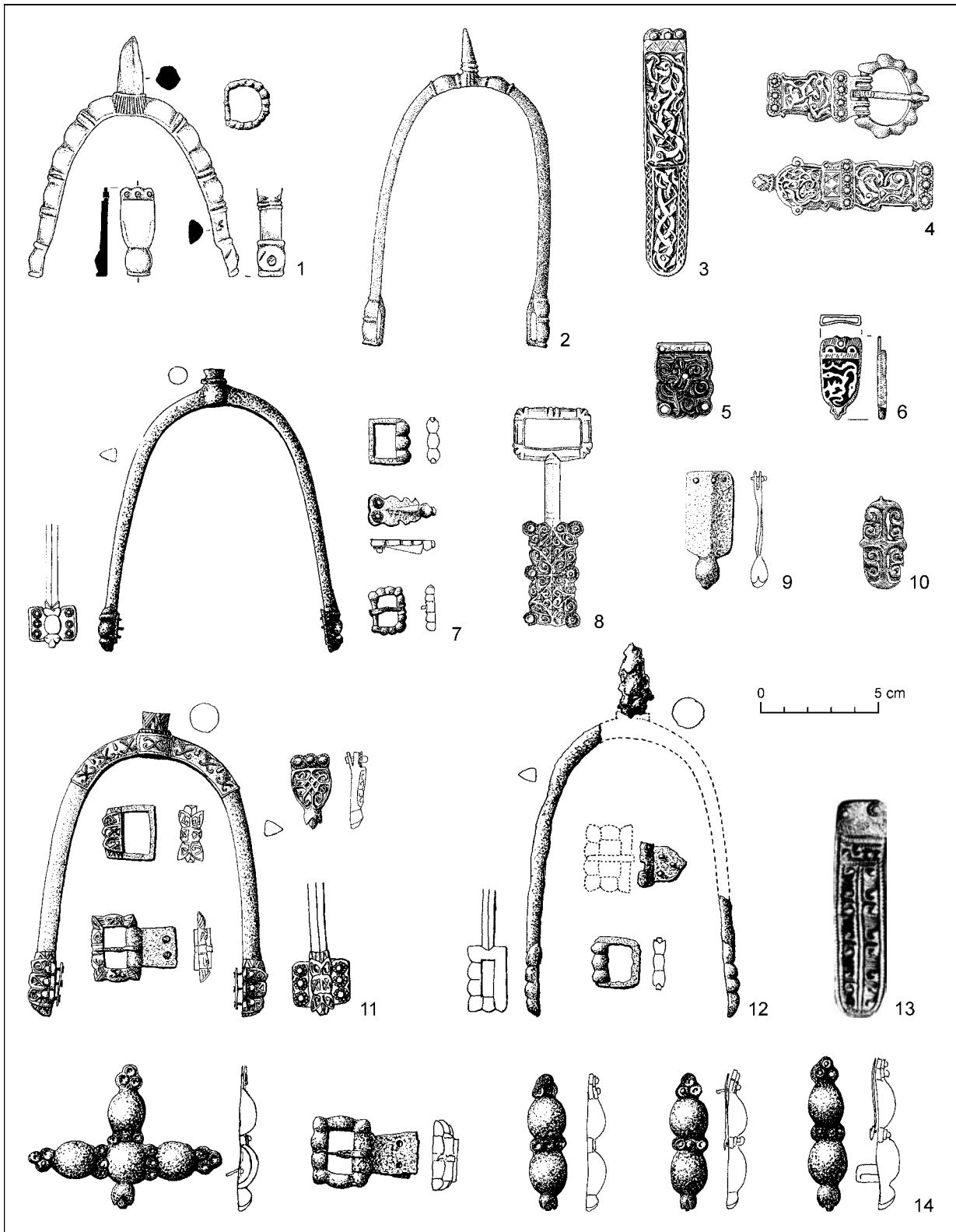


Fig. 35. Items constituting the first wave of the Carolingian imports to the Slavic Territories (ca. 780/790–820/830). 1 – Gojače-Boršt, grave 5 (Werner 1960–1961); 2 – Gornji Vrbljani (Jurčević 2011); 3 – Medvedička, grave (Vinski 1977–1978); 4 – Mogorjelo, grave (Zekan 1994); 5 – Starigard-Oldenburg (Gabriel 1988); 6 – Petronell (Stadler 1989); 7 – Biskupija-Crkvina, grave 1 (Jelovina 1986); 8 – Gradišče above Bašelj (Knific 2007); 9 – Biskupija-Crkvina, grave 1 (Jelovina 1986); 10 – Mikulčice (Klanica 1965); 11 – Morpoloča, grave B (Jelovina 1986); 12 – Biljane Donje, grave 253 (Jelovina 1986); 13 – Luckenwalde (Werner 1969); 14 – Biskupija-Crkvina, grave 6 (Jelovina 1986).

called 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon', namely the youngest relics coming from the Blatnica deposit to the middle third of the 9th century and the grave 44/II in Mikulčice to the last quarter of the 9th century (Chorvátová 2004, 228; Košta 2008; Robak 2013, 131, 174, 175), makes the term pointless in relation to the chronology traditionally assigned to it (ca. 800–830/850). This period of time, to at least about 820, when the Moravians and their political organisation started to appear consistently in written sources, should be renamed (and the name should gain a new meaning whatever that name could be) or we should admit that the earlier period (the so called pre-Great Moravian period) lasted longer than it was originally believed. Given, however, the current chronology of the entire spectrum of items, decorative motifs together with eponymous assemblages attributed to the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon, we would have to admit that, except for a few relics, the horizon is basically identical as the Great Moravian period (between 820/830 and the beginning of the 10th century). This was already observed by the German researchers (Giesler 1980, 98, ref. 19; Koch, U. 1984, 78), but their hypotheses were rejected (e.g. Bialeková 1985, 136). Interestingly, the fact that the chronology of these relics transgresses frameworks established for the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon was also noticed already at the very beginning by Czechoslovak researchers (Justová 1977, 498, 499) but interpreted as an example of secondary usage (e.g. Bialeková 1996, 254). Therefore the chronology of the Slavs inhabiting territories of today Moravia and Slovakia between the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 10th century, and particularly in respect to the beginning of the 9th century, again requires a serious debate this time, however, supported by archaeological sources. Similarly it is still necessary to develop a comprehensive chronology and terminology based on a complex studies on archaeological assemblages, since, in my opinion, the attempts to extend the term 'older Great Moravian horizon' to the first third of the 9th century (see Bialeková 2012, 67; Měřínský 2006, 201; Ungerman 2011b, 136) do not meet the necessary criteria.⁵⁰

The recent literature often repeats the objection that abandoning the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon, we would mean 'sweeping away' relics from the first half and 'squeezing' them into the second half of the 9th century (Bialeková 2012, 67; Šalkovský 2015, 102, 103). Nothing could be further from the truth! The fact that most (but of course not all) relics traditio-

nally defined as typical for the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon should in fact be dated back to the second or third third of the 9th century, does not necessarily imply that the end of the 8th century or the first third of the 9th century had no material culture. Comparing series of Carolingian relics from assemblages (mostly burials) from Western, Central and Southern Europe and aligning them into horizons (Robak 2013; 2014), we are able to determine which relics were characteristic for a specific period of time. The fact that after demolishing the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon paradigm the history of lands located in the northern part of the Middle Danube Basin at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries (or rather not the history itself but its reflection in the material culture) seems to be less attractive and that along with the paradigm many myths rooted in the contemporary culture and society collapse cannot not serve as a sufficient reason for abandoning the truth, even if it turns out to be a bit disappointing.

Of course it is easy to criticise the concept from the perspective of fifty years of research. The theory of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon was developed on a basis of frail, from our perspective, sources. Necessarily these relics were referred to the comparative material available at that time and researchers often needed to work without access to the foreign literature. The situation was further worsened by the random manner in which the relics from Mikulčice were published from the beginning of the nineties of the previous century. And these were exactly the relics that were invaluable references. Also generations of historians, whose steadfast belief in the existence of the Pribina's principality and the tribal organisation in the area of Western Slovakia in the first third of the 9th century as an opposition to the Moravian principality ruled by Mojmir, are partially to blame (Profantová/Profant 2003, 243–345). These strong convictions stimulated archaeologists to look intensively for material evidences supporting their interpretation of history. But ultimately we can blame only researchers, who despite the accumulation of archaeological sources, chose the easy way of developing the concept relying on a scientific hoax (e.g. Poulík 1985, 23–29). This approach is still evident in many more recent works dedicated to the first half of the 9th century, where we can find uncritical references to the source base created fifty years ago by J. Eisner, J. Poulík, B. Dostál and K. Benda (recently e.g. Jaworski et al. 2012, 41; Milošević 2012, 205; Štefanovičová 2012, 318, 319).

⁵⁰ The opinion together with relevant arguments was presented in: Robak 2013, 191–200; 208–212. The proposal to use the expression 'older Great Moravian Horizon' for the period, when we cannot yet speak about the political organisation created by Mojmir at the turn of the first and the second quarters of the 9th century and which later evolved into the 'Great Moravia' is exaggerated.

BLATNICA-MIKULČICE HORIZON AS THE KUHNIAN PARADIGM

To describe the history of research on the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon we could use an already classic model of the structure of science and the concept of paradigm proposed by T. Kuhn.⁵¹ It seems that the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept meets all necessary requirements to be considered as a paradigm. According to Kuhn a paradigm is “a set of recurrent and of quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications” (Kuhn 1996, 43). A paradigm, in his opinion, is a model of currently applied scientific practices (including some laws, theories, concepts, methods, applications and even technical appliances) arising from some previous scientific achievements, currently accepted by relevant scientific committees, considered correct and used as a basis for further scientific practices providing both various problems to be solved and a set of model solutions. In other words it combines all methodological conditions allowing doing a given science or its branch. In a global scale the concept of paradigm covers all beliefs, values and techniques common to all members of a given community.

In the European archaeology of the Early Middle Ages we can distinguish several such paradigms, for example all chronological systems based on historical events to which archaeological facts are later adjusted. This includes for example a division of history of the Eastern Alpine region into two horizons: pre-Köttlach and Köttlach, traditional understanding of the concept and the chronology of the Great Moravian period, existence of the Nitra principality in the first third of the 9th century, chronology of the horizon of the oldest Carolingian imports to Dalmatia, fall of the Avar culture, but also some commonly accepted ‘anchors’ such as estimated time of transition from cremation to inhumation in Moravia or the time, when the Carolingian animal style declined. Paradigms include also all ‘traditional’ typologies (of spurs, fibulas, earrings, etc.). All these paradigms (as well as many other not mentioned here) facilitate research eliminating the need to start each research from the very beginnings. But there are also dark sides of paradigms as they may give the impression that criticism is redundant (*Profantová/Profant* 2003, 243–245).

According to Kuhn, science develops in cycles, preceded with the pre-science period and then from the normal science relying on some paradigms, its crisis and finally a revolution. After a revolution

we, again, come back to the normal science stage based this time on new paradigms and thus the circle closes. Although the concept of paradigm was intended to reflect development of natural sciences, it could also be useful in humanities, maybe particularly in such a young science as archaeology (*Kristiansen* 2014, 22), which documented evolution we can trace back to the very beginnings, and thus we can trace its development from the pre-science phase and observe emergence of some of the paradigms it uses.

Pre-science

The initial route leading to the development of a paradigm was labelled pre-paradigmatic or pre-science period (*Kuhn* 1996, 37). It is characterised by a series of general and fundamental theories proposed by small, often unrelated or competing scientific communities. These theories are usually speculative in their nature, do not provide detailed scientific explanations (their aim is a debate on principles) and thus they are usually straightforward and understandable even for the laymen interested in the discipline. Each of these groups may refer to different phenomena and this makes comparison of individual theories more difficult. Such theories are usually based on different concepts, explain selected facts giving them different weights (these that each of the theories explains best) and create ad hoc hypotheses. In the case of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon the paradigm was founded by works dedicated to general archaeology of the Slavs inhabiting the Middle Danube Basin in the Early Middle Ages, particularly works of *I. Červinka* (1928), *J. Eisner* (1933; 1947) and *J. Poulík* (1948; 1948–1950). Competing theories were provided then among others by *J. Schráníl* (1928) or, to some extent, *N. Fettich* (1937).

The normal (paradigmatic) science

The moment, when most scholars working on a given problem accept a bundle of theories as a basis for further research can be considered as the beginning of a paradigm formation. Its emergence occurs when a theory and an experiment are matched and there are new discoveries that do not stand in contradiction with them. Therefore, as a common point of all above mentioned works of the pre-science phase we could indicate, for example,

⁵¹ T. Kuhn: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. First edition: Chicago 1962. In this paper I have used the Polish edition (*Kuhn* 2001) being a translation of the third English edition (*Kuhn* 1996) and the third English edition itself.

the focus on mixing of the Avar culture (called then 'Keszthely culture') with the Slavic culture and the predominant role of the Slavs, as an ethnic group, in the emergence of the Keszthely culture. It was exactly the time, when archaeologist introduced a still maintained division into early- and middle-hillforts period identified with the Great Moravian state (Eisner 1933, 240) with the year 800 indicated as a turning point. Nearly from the beginning it was highlighted how the Keszthely culture influenced emergence of the Slavic culture of the middle-hillfort period, particularly the continuation of 'craft traditions' and different cultural influences coming in the 8th century from the Carpathian Basin to Moravia and Slovakia (see Poulík 1963, 43). Studies and archaeological finds from the 30's and 40's together with the interpretation of earlier discoveries seemed to confirm this hypothesis. In the case of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon it is possible to determine a moment when foundations of the paradigm were provided with a relatively good precision, namely around 1949–1952, when J. Eisner introduced the term "group of relics from Blatnica" indicating, at the same time, its origins and chronology based on hypotheses of the above mentioned group of scholar and his own (Eisner 1949, 41; 1952, 328).

The history of a normal science usually starts, when a work gaining acceptance of such a numerous group of researchers that they become a majority and gain an actual influence on education of future scientists is published (Sady 2013, 261, 262). Undoubtedly, in our case we can indicate a work 'Devínska Nová Ves' of J. Eisner (1952), where he introduced the concept of 'group of relics from Blatnica' as a turning point. T. Kuhn did not answer directly the question why, at some point there is a consensus in a given scientific circle⁵², he only claimed that if a theory is to be accepted it must be better than the competing ones (more accurate, coherent, simpler or more universal), more efficient in solving 'burning' problems and give a promise of success (Kuhn 1996, 23). The success is understood here not only as a number of (potentially) solved problems, but also as a recognition among the scientific society, which is directly linked with a professional position, sources for funding further researches, publications, etc. At some point we observe a formation of a scientific community bound with joint beliefs and remaining under mutual intellectual influences (an example of the group 'Blatnica-Mikulčice' researchers in 1963) – and as a consequence those who think

differently are eliminated from the 'scientific circulation'. Kuhn did not find an answer to the question why some and not the other issues are labelled as 'acute'. Theoretically, the Kuhnian scientist may define such problems himself and even use them to isolate himself from the society and claims of the laymen (Kuhn 1996, 164).

Let us therefore imagine the conditions necessary to do any science, and particularly historical sciences (keeping in mind their role in the Marxist ideology) under the Central European communism in 50's or 60's of the previous century. If we focus of those historical determinants, we will soon understand, why theories rejecting significant German or Nordic cultural influences on the emergence of the Slavic culture were not only considered socially momentous, but even the only true explanations of the phenomenon (see Benda 1963, 202; Eisner 1949; 1952, 327; Poulík 1948–1950, 9). Other concepts were not allowed to emerge (Nowakowski 1999, 176, 177). It would be a truism to say that the spirit of science (not only archaeology) always follows the intellectual atmosphere of a given period. It is obvious since the spirit itself emerges from the scientific climate among people creating knowledge (see Macháček 2012, 776, 777). The situation perfectly matched the theory of Kuhn: the lack of money for research was probably the smallest problem, when disloyal scientist faced an actual risk of repressions, including being fired or send to occupations other than scientific. We should even say that in this case the paradigm was established not through gaining the recognition of scientific circles, but rather through forcing them to look for arguments supporting once assumed thesis. Of course the theory itself was introduced by archaeologists themselves, but falling on a fertile ground of ideology it could be sure of immediate success already at the start.

For Kuhn, writing from a perspective a Berkeley professor, the science itself has no goal except for the constant growth of efficiency in puzzle-solving (Kuhn 1996, 294, 295). It is simply free. One of the fundamental principles of the scientific life, according to him, is a firm rejection of any references to opinion of the public authorities or acceptance from the general public. He provides no mechanisms of achieving 'consensus' in the science nor indicates a place for critique. What he highlights is a tremendous role of 'scientific authorities' and the so called 'scientific communities' in advocating paradigms⁵³, also at the pre-science stage (Kuhn

⁵² It was answered by P. Feyerabend (1979, 221; Sady 2013, 360, 371, 372, 374).

⁵³ P. Feyerabend expressed much more radical opinions on this matter (see footnote 51) and drew attention to a phenomenon that could be labelled "institutional intimidation".

1985, 319; 1996, 155, 156; 167–169; 177–179). We can therefore assume that those ‘scientific authorities’ determine current needs and indicate directions or even provide general proposals of solutions, usually consistent with their own scientific achievements. If we look at the role J. Eisner or J. Poulík played in the post-war Czechoslovakia and their position in the scientific community, everything becomes much clearer. The ‘proposed’ model could not be rejected. The acceptance of a paradigm forces most of scholars to operate only within the frameworks it delimits and focus mainly on detailing theories it provides. Furthermore, the monopolisation of educational processes by the victorious group secures an unrivalled position of a paradigm and ensures unanimity between older (by seniority or age) and younger researchers (Kuhn 1996, 10, 11). Scholars focus only on facts considered as important within the paradigm and which expands compatibility between theories arising from it (e.g. Bialeková 1965, 531–534; Klanica 1973, 7–9). It is even clearer in a work of K. Benda (1963), who does not make even one step beyond the theory set by J. Eisner, affronting at the same time all competing claims (he uses *ad personam* arguments to discredit them) and those that are particularly inconvenient he ignores. The younger generation of scholars needs no specific knowledge about features of the paradigm that secured its success and relies on models learned during their studies. They are supplied with issues and methods of solving them and their only role is to indicate proper analogies with the ‘standard model’ (in our case the Avar-Slovak craft, syncretic style, etc.) or with some specimen (Kuhn 1985, 412, 424–426, 432; 1996, 45, 46) such as in this case the ‘Blatnica deposit’ or items from graves no. 44, 50 and 100 in Mikulčice. ‘Specimens’ that is specific solutions to particular issues are the essence of a paradigm (Kuhn 1985, 424).

A paradigm itself is imprecise and open. Members of a given community apply some symbolic generalisations considered reliable (e.g. considering development paths of social organisations) that they can accept without any justification or revision during the paradigmatic studies. Researches within a paradigm aim only at detailing phenomena and theories provided earlier by the very same paradigm. The normal science is not characterised by development of new theories, but rather by ‘maintenance works’ or in other words organising facts into previously prepared compartments (Kuhn 1996, 24). But advantages of a paradigm, when successful, are unquestionable – without it a series of detail studies on a given issue or a group of issues would be impossible. Some puzzles, that presumably would

never be studied if not for their role in specifying, evaluating and confirming the paradigm, find accurate solutions (Kuhn 1996, 25–34). Some of them will not be preserved as with time more and more anomalies (facts that were not foreseen by a paradigm) arise.

Anomalies reveal themselves to those scholars, who doing their researches are able to identify discrepancies between their observations and a paradigm. For example, in the already mentioned work of D. Bialeková (1965) the clear lack of stylistic analogies of the series of iron items from Pobedim and ‘the standard specimens’ from Blatnica and Mikulčice seems to be problematic. The Author, however, solves this problem extending the chronological and typological scope of the horizon and style respectively. This is a standard operation in the face of anomalies. In her work of 1977 (Bialeková 1977) this allows her undertaking studies on the typology of iron spurs and sets of fittings from Pobedim that without the adjustment would not fit the frameworks determined by the paradigm – that is they were not made of non-ferrous metals in the so called ‘syncretic style’.

One of characteristic features of a paradigm is that it defies precise definitions. And indeed – the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon theory has never been founded on an analysis of source materials defined in comprehensive categories. Kuhn (1996, 44) states even that ‘the search for a body of rules competent to constitute a given normal research tradition becomes a source of continual and deep frustration’. In this respect the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon concept is almost a model example. Authors often mingled the concept of ‘chronological horizon’ and concepts of ‘style’ or ‘type’ as if they were interchangeable. Initial vagueness of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon allowed including in it every item that could be defined, even in the most general terms, as a combination of the Avar and Western European influences (or even Byzantine, Oriental and Circumpontic) and located in the Slavic environment in the northern part of the Middle Danube Basin. This is particularly clear in the first attempt of formal characteristic of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon presented by J. Justová (1977, 498, 499).

While the work of J. Justová formalised the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon paradigm in its original form, then works of D. Bialeková from the same time (1977; 1979; 1980b) significantly modified it. The paper of J. Justová, similarly as those of D. Bialeková, was published at the time, when doubts concerning correctness of previous paradigmatic solutions had aroused. As an example we can quote here a sword of the X type from a grave no. 23 in

Závada⁵⁴ (*Bialeková* 1979, 99; 1982, 150), which chronology from the very beginning did not match the one of 'Blatnica-Mikulčice' fittings accompanying it or a series of items from Břeclav-Pohansko (*Dostál* 1975, 241) containing items allowing attributing the series to the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon, although the context definitely precluded such attribution. Even earlier, already in 1968 *T. Capelle* (1968, 242) also indicated that dating of some items classified as Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon is definitely too early and too narrow.

A typical reaction of a paradigmatic science in such cases is simply to eliminate anomalies (or rather accept them, since it is impossible to eliminate facts) through expanding a paradigmatic theory so as to match it with observations. This allows further researches without the necessity to develop some new theory from scratch. These characteristic mechanisms, particularly at an initial stage of paradigmatic studies were already applied by *B. Dostál* (1975, 241), who was forced to date items from Břeclav-Pohansko consistent with the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon to the second half of the 9th century, because otherwise the chronological continuity of the site would collapse. He explained this fact stating simply that those items were buried with a significant delay in relation to the time, when they were manufactured. *D. Bialeková* (1979) chose a slightly different way extending the scope of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon by items of the clearly Western European type. In extreme cases, when there is nothing to be done in order to save a paradigm, anomalies are simply ignored. This was exactly a defence mechanism applied by *B. Dostál* (1978–1979, 130) in the already quoted fragment about Břeclav-Pohansko: "If we ignore the possible doubt concerning chronological unambiguousness of cross fittings and fittings with a loop which revision would mean the collapse of the entire chronological system of the Great Moravian relics (...)".

This resistance to changes has of course also some advantages, because it protects a paradigm against reckless rejection when faced with unexpected inaccuracies. It induces scholars to undertake intense studies and look for explanations and possible corrections of a paradigm. This, however, was not exactly the case of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon – for thirty years nothing has been done to overcome this intellectual conservatism, petrifying the paradigm burdened with numerous open questions and still using it as a simplified mecha-

nism facilitating determination of chronologies of archaeological sites and a foundation for various typologies. Similarly as *B. Dostál* ignored this significant anomaly contradicting the paradigm, most of scholars ignored the work of *K. Wachowski* (1989), who indicated numerous inconsistencies and questions concerning foundations of this theory. But even despite these doubts he still accepted a general accuracy of the concept and sought for explanations within the existing paradigm.

The crisis

Emerging anomalies may, or may not, be a source of a crisis, particularly if it is possible to explain them or adjust a paradigm. With time, however, more doubts concerning accuracy of the main hypothesis (*Ungerma* 2011b) arise and finally a paradigm fails solving puzzles that, de facto, it created. Striking examples of such failures within the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon paradigm include the concept of a social and economic boom among the Slavs liberated from the Khaganate, allegedly confirmed by an intense production of the categories of items in question at a series of newly settled hillforts dated back to the first third of the 9th century and determination of the time, when the skeletal rite popularised based on burial complexes containing items counted among examples of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon⁵⁵ (*Dresler* 2011, 179; *Macháček* 2005, 170; 2010, 201; *Ungerma* 2005–2006; 2011a; 2011b). Items supposedly being examples of the 'Slavic syncretism' under more accurate scrutiny prove to have analogies and prototypes among either Avar or Western European products (Fig. 34). There never was such a phenomenon as the 'syncretic style'. The falsification is a consequence not only of a series deepened studies on the issue, particularly on typologies of items (*Kind* 2007; *Košta* 2008; *Košta/Hošek* 2009; *Robak* 2013; 2014; *Ungerma* 2005–2006), but also of application of scientific methods independent from historical researches and provided by natural sciences (*Henning/Ruttkay, M.* 2011; *Macháček/Dresler/Rybníček* 2013). Above all it seems obvious that the crisis is most often caused by problems that have been observed for a long time but consistently ignored (*Dostál* 1978–1979, 130).

In the face of a crisis defenders of the old theory will behave as in the case of anomalies – they will introduce some *ad hoc* refinements and modifica-

⁵⁴ The studies were performed in 1974.

⁵⁵ This includes the 'nobleman grave from Blatnica' – although it has not been found, it still serves as a chronological reference point.

tions in order to eliminate contradictions. Defending their own paradigm these scholars will refer to the paradigm itself, adjusting it to facts, rather than explaining them.⁵⁶ As a result, however, a science ends up in a situation, when facts actually testify against a theory, but old scholars are reluctant to admit it. Furthermore, the multitude of amendments, footnotes and comments makes the rules more and more complex and scholars start to disagree as to the substance of a paradigm. Even the standard solutions of seemingly long solved puzzles begin to be questioned.

Removing only one, but sufficiently substantial brick makes the entire intricate scientific construction unstable (as B. Dostál feared) and thus it collapses as a house of cards or Jenga tower. Suddenly it turns out that hillforts *en masse* dated back to the first third of the 9th century are dated to the second half of the 9th century, namely the period of the actual heyday of the Moravian statehood and its military successes confirmed in sources. On the other hand it immediately violates the hypothesis that the Nitra or 'Turiec' Principality was an important political centre already in the first third of the 9th century. Its territory at that time suddenly becomes deserted, since it seems that there were no great hillforts or cemeteries with burials of the alleged warriors. Abundantly equipped 'elites' and their burials simply disappear from that period. Some of them of course remain, but only in great centres located in Moravia, such as Staré Město or Mikulčice⁵⁷ but still in these burials there are no items dated back to the turn of the 8th and 9th century or the very beginning of the 9th century (Robak 2013, 165, 166). At a later state there emerge a question concerning actual origins of the skeletal rite in Moravia and Western Slovakia, dated previously only based on findings attributed to the Blatnica-Mikulčice style. At the same time various relics considered archaic in their contexts seem to find their proper place.

A crisis loosens a paradigm. In the face of crisis usually several new ideas emerge and standard studies are abandoned in favour of 'extraordinary procedures' (Robak 2013, 191–202; Ungerman 2011b, 144). It is also possible that some older ideas that did not match a paradigm and thus were rejected reappear, but scholars will never abandon a paradigm, if there is no theory accepted by scientific committees sufficiently replacing it at hand. This period usually is filled with stagnation, waiting for

new proposals and fear of too hasty adoption of one of them. Scholars, who are not strongly committed to traditional rules of the normal science more easily diagnose the situation and develop new sets of principles. The main significance of a crisis is that it provides a signal that the right time has come.

A revolution?

Although anomalies constitute emergence of a new theory, it should not result from the old one, but should provide new concepts and the most elementary generalisations (Kuhn 1996, 97, 98, 149, 150). A new science should not be merely a new interpretation, but should change meanings of concepts along with their properties. Replacing the label 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' with 'Early Great Moravian Horizon' or gradual rejuvenation of items (although still labelling them as Blatnica-Mikulčice style), without significant modification of our perceptions of the history of that region would be myopic. It would only empty the first half of the 9th century of relics, despite the fact that certainly some of them were used at that time (similarly as Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon emptied the second half of the 9th century). The very use of the term 'Great Moravian' in any context makes us think about its 'greatness' already at the beginning of the 9th century (also in relation to territories of Western Slovakia). It preserves the vision of the cultural and social boom that resulted in a sudden emergence of tribal territorial organisations (Nitra Principality or Turiec) with their great political and economic centres and a system of hillforts in Western and Central Slovakia allegedly confirming intense cultural contacts with Western Europe already at the end of the 8th century. Still, the vision of the already mature early feudal social organisation with its prince, elites and a team emerging out of a blue immediately after the Avar wars will dominate. We will still be clinging on the year 800 as a magical date, when everything changed. And still historical sources (particularly taking into account that the sources concerning the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries are extremely scarce and leave a lot of space for loose interpretations) will be used to adjust archaeological facts and not as a tool allowing verifying the ultimate correctness of hypotheses

⁵⁶ For example Z. Měřínský (2006, 210) suggested changing the term 'Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon' to the Early Great Moravian Style or Horizon that could comprise items made in the 'syncretic style', those that are clearly of western European origins and finally even some late Avar artefacts becoming obsolete at that time. In fact it changes nothing, but the name.

⁵⁷ Staré Město grave 114/51; grave 190/50; grave 224/51; Modrá grave 22; Mikulčice, grave 380/III; grave 1665.

built upon meticulous and methodical analysis of archaeological sources. Without a radical conceptual change the only difference will be that we will shift some relics between drawers, adjust specifications, inadequate typologies will gain a series of comments and footnotes or possibly we will replace one label with another.

Paradigms are a constitutive component of science (*Kuhn 1996*, 110, 151). Without paradigms a normal science would not emerge, anomalies leading to a crisis and changing a theory would not be detected. Only in this way it is possible to break the vicious circle of arguments of an old paradigm, look at already known facts from a new perspective and make new discoveries. A revolution takes place only, when some new concept, aspiring to become a new paradigm, is already present (although not sufficiently popular yet) and offers (or promises) solutions to problems that caused the crisis of the preceding paradigm.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have tried to describe not only known facts about the collection of bronze and iron items, referred to in the literature as the 'Blatnica deposit', but also the history of researches and the role it played in the development of the Early Middle Ages archaeology. All these became a starting point for more general methodological considerations embedded in the context of the Kuhnian theory of scientific revolutions and the concept of paradigm. The situation of the paradigm discussed here resembles the collapse of the Ptolemaic vision of the cosmos and its gradual loss of position in favour of a newer, although initially less elegant Copernican theory. Today we can conclude that up to a given moment, no one cared which of these two theories is true – at least as long as one of them provided more accurate explanations of astronomical phenomena. For a long time, the more useful theory was the one that eventually proved to be false. But with its deferents and epicycles it became excessively complex and finally ceased to be applicable. This was when the Copernican model humbly entered the stage. Similar doubts were experienced by archaeologists, who struggled with ambiguities arising around the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon, a theory that gradually rather obscured than clarified the history. And yet this paradigm preserved for decades seems to give an impression of intellectual continuity and thus it is so difficult to abandon it for new and still unproven theories, even if the original paradigm itself has already been falsified.

Based on the modern knowledge the hypothesis that all relics once included in the Blatnica collection come from a single assemblage cannot be sustained any longer. Analogously, all those items cannot be in bulk dated back to the beginning of the 9th century. At best we deal here with components of two or three severely damaged assemblages of unknown original composition (which I honestly doubt) and at worst, although more probable, it is only a random collection of artificially related relics. At the current state of research it seems that the earliest phase of Carolingian imports reached Moravia and today Western Slovakia not earlier than at the end of the first quarter of the 9th century. At the end of the 8th century and even in the first third of the 9th century the Carolingian craft could not exert such influence on local workshops that would lead to the development of local stylistics relying on Carolingian prototypes. Besides, the comparison of Carolingian relics coming from Western Europe with those found in Moravia and Western Slovakia clearly shows that from the end of the first quarter of the 9th century at least until the middle of the 9th century we deal solely with imports of original, high quality items (including entire sets) or their direct copies or imitations. The truly 'local stylistics' characterised also by perceptible simplification of motifs and common application of cheaper materials started in Moravia and Western Slovakia only in the second half of the 9th century.

The best recommendation that could be formulated based on experiences with the development and then conservation of the Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon paradigm is to pay more attention to careful and reliable source analysis of relics using mainly assemblages and already accepted typologies supported with dendrochronological studies and large series of radiocarbon dates instead of providing abstract labels that only obscure the picture although originally they were intended to provide efficient and convenient intellectual shortcuts. With time probably a new theory will emerge and will take over all the functions that Blatnica-Mikulčice Horizon performed, although it may still maintain some of the flaws of its predecessor. Thus the best solution, as usually in archaeology, is to return to unbiased and devoid of prejudices studies on archaeological facts. It seems likely that the facts will defend themselves contrary to artificial theories that require masses of faithful defenders.

As was observed by Max Planck, each new scientific truth does not triumph because it manages to convince opponents and to show them the light, but rather because a new generation of researchers

grows. Reluctance to accept a new paradigm stems not only from concerns about its accuracy, but often from the fear of being rejected or ridiculed by scientific committees. This, however, should never stop researchers from implementing one of the primary goals of science, namely the pursuit of objective truth or, in the absence of unwavering confidence, at least better and more comprehensive explanation of controversial phenomena. Science should rely on facts, not on presumptions, suppositions or purposeful misinterpretations, even if the final result may be a little disappointing. Also in this case some disappointment is to be expected,

when finally it will be recognised that the Blatnica collection could never constitute equipment of a single burial and that its chronology, after a careful analysis, proves to be much broader than it was originally assumed. Accordingly, although the contemporary knowledge seems to refute this long conserved archaeological myth, there is no doubt that all (and each individual) items included in this collection still maintain their source value as extraordinary examples of the Early Medieval craft, but the information we today acquire through them should be read and interpreted differently than a hundred or even fifty years ago.

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Pôvod a kolaps blatnicko-mikulčickej paradigmy

Z b i g n i e w R o b a k

SÚHRN

Príspevok predstavuje súhrn súčasných poznatkov o tzv. „blatnickom depozite“ a jeho jednotlivých zložkách. Rozširuje rad autorových štúdií venovaných najmä pozláteným bronzovým kovaniam. Článok je rozdelený do dvoch hlavných častí: prvá predstavuje sústredený pohľad na problematiku a poskytuje všetky potrebné informácie o každej časti zbierky nálezov z Blatnice spolu s chronologickými a štylistickými závermi. Druhá časť predstavuje širšiu interpretačnú perspektívu, kladúc históriu zbierky a štúdií o nej do metodologického kontextu navrhovaného Thomasom S. Kuhnom. Na báze Kuhnovho modelu vedy a poňatia paradigmy sa analyzovala a potom dekomponovala tzv. koncepcia blatnicko-mikulčického horizontu. Tá sa ukázala byť založená prinajlepšom na nedorozumeniach alebo v najhoršom prípade na výmysle. Podrobná typologická a štylistická analýza predmetov sa stala východiskom pre prehodnotenie ich chronológie a viedla k záveru, že najmladšia časť predmetov zo zbierky nemôže byť staršia ako druhá tretina 9. stor. Zároveň archívny prieskum, ako aj analýza archeologických prameňov vyvracajú argumenty používané na podporu hypotézy, že „blatnická zbierka“ bola pôvodne výbavou veľmožského hrobu. S najväčšou pravdepodobnosťou ide iba o voľnú zbierku nálezov pochádzajúcich z rôznych a doposiaľ neznámych zdrojov, ktoré boli neskôr spolu prenesené do múzea (Magyar Németzi Múzeum Budapešť). Z tohto dôvodu sa zdá rozumné dospieť k záveru, že zdrojová hodnota „blatnickej zbierky“ bola dlhú dobu preceňovaná a v žiadnom prípade by nemala ďalej slúžiť ako chronologické meradlo pre ďalšie archeologické materiály.

V roku 2013 autor vykonal prieskum v Maďarskom národnom múzeu zameraný na overenie informácií uverejnených v rade vedeckých a populárnych štúdií o zložení a pôvode súboru nálezov bežne označovaných ako „poklad“ alebo „výbava hrobu“ z Blatnice. Tieto predmety boli po celé roky predmetom záujmu archeológov a poskytli základy pre konštrukciu mnohých teórií týkajúcich sa vývoja veľkomoravskej kultúry. Za 50 rokov od poslednej analýzy „blatnickej zbierky“ K. Bendu (1963), okolo „blatnických“ pamiatok objavilo sa mnoho teórií a mýtov. Navyše, od samého začiatku informácie týkajúce sa týchto nálezov boli nepresné a často protichodné. Súčasti „blatnickej zbierky“ patria medzi najčastejšie citované nálezy v celej európskej archeologickej literatúre. Popularita tejto kolekcie vychádza predovšetkým zo skutočnosti, že v 50. a 60. rokoch 20. stor. ju českí a slovenskí odborníci využili ako zdrojový základ pre konštrukciu teórie vývoja slovanského remesla na prelome 8. a 9. stor. Toto remeslo sa všeobecne charakterizovalo ako pokračovanie avarských (avarsko-slovanských) kovolejarských tradícií s prispáním dôležitých karolínskych vplyvov (Eisner 1952, 328). Z literatúry je známe označenie „horizont“, resp. „fáza“, prípadne

„štýl Blatnica-Mikulčice“. Autor predloženej štúdie uvádza početné pochybnosti o takmer každej jednotlivéj informácii opisujúcej údajný celok – od jeho počiatkov, cez spôsob, akým bol získaný, po jeho skutočné zloženie a chronológiu jednotlivých nálezov.

V „blatnickej zbierke“ možno jasne rozlíšiť tri podskupiny, aj keď, samozrejme, toto rozdelenie je očividne umelé a vypracované len na účely tejto analýzy. Časť „avarská“ zahŕňa niekoľko kovaní, ktorých typológia, chronológia a kultúrny pôvod nevzbudzujú žiadne zásadné pochybnosti. Ďalej „karolínska“ časť obsahuje dve garnitúry kovaní a meč, ktorý však poukazuje na značné prepojenie so Škandináviou. Ostatné identifikovateľné prvky ako ostrohy, hrot kopije, strmeň a sekera bradatica sú typické predmety výzbroje a výstroja bojovníka v 9. stor. v Karpatskej kotline a v priestore východoalpých údolí. Označovať ich ako „veľkomoravské“ by znamenalo nenáležité použitie tohto pojmu, pretože majú analógie taktiež v archeologických kontextoch, ktoré neboli identifikované s touto kultúrou.

Žiadne typologické a štylistické analýzy nenaznačujú, odkiaľ kovania „karolínskeho typu“ obsiahnuté v „blatnickom súbore“ pochádzajú. V prípade liatych bronzových kovaní, tuzovaných striebrom alebo meďou, je väčšina z nich jedinečným exemplárom, často vyrobeným na zákazku. S ohľadom na všeobecnú európsku „popularitu“ kovaní karolínskeho typu z 9. stor., je ťažké určiť, či bol daný výrobok vyrobený v západnej Európe. Nemožno však vylúčiť, že výrobok predstavuje domácu kópiu, prípadne ide o predmet vytvorený remeselníkom zo západu pracujúcim na našom území. Pokiaľ sa nenájdu kovania podobné tým z Blatnice, rozlišovanie medzi západoeurópskymi (alebo všeobecnejšie neslovanskými) importmi a miestnymi výrobkami je nemožné. To je presne prípad „karolínskej“ zložky „blatnickej zbierky“. Analýza formálnych prvkov kovaní z Blatnice a ďalšie podobné predmety naznačujú, že ich prototypy by sa mali hľadať medzi neskorokarolínskymi artefaktmi najskôr z druhej tretiny 9. stor.

V prípade mečov typu D podľa J. Petersena (vrátane „blatnického“) by sa malo zviať do úvahy, že mohli byť vyrábané v rôznych častiach Európy, čo naznačuje ich rôznorodá výzdoba (Kazakievicius 1996, 129). V súčasnej dobe panuje všeobecná zhoda, že meč z „blatnickej zbierky“, resp. jeho rukoväť, má škandinávске konexie. Tie s ohľadom na rad podobných nálezov z oblasti Škandinávie a východnej Európy nemožno prehliadnuť. Avšak skutočné miesto, kde meč bol vyrobený vyvoláva kontroverzie (Marek 2004, 29, 30). Treba pri tom poznamenať, že škandinávске „prvky“ ohľadom iných predmetov „blatnickej zbierky“ sa pravidelne objavovali už v staršej českej a slovenskej literatúre, lenže boli zámerne a dôsledne ignorované. Dosť nepresné porovnania N. Fetticha (1937, 265–279), prezentované spolu s jeho koncepciou prílevu Vikingov do Karpatskej

kontliny boli výrazne kritizované J. Eisnerom (1952, 327). Táto kritika ako aj autorita J. Eisnera prispeli, ako sa zdá, k rezignácii iných bádateľov viesť akékoľvek bádania, čo môžu potvrdiť napríklad vyhlásenia J. Poulíka (1963, 45) neochotného hľadať v škandinávskom prostredí ďalšie analógie k blatnickým a mikulčickým predmetom. Je tiež možné, čo mnohí vedci uviedli po rokoch, že išlo o následky rastúceho ducha nacionalizmu vyžadujúce zamietnutie „germanofilských“ koncepcií (*Klanica* 2006, 63; *Macháček* 2012, 776, 777; *Třeštík* 1995, 91–92).

V prípade garnitúry bronzových kovaní sa bádatelia zamerali hlavne na zdôraznenie jej miestneho slovanského pôvodu. Takéto tvrdenia boli podporované skôr spoliehaním sa na autority a kategorické vyjadrenia (porovnaj *Benda* 1963, 215, 216). Nevychádzalo sa zo skutočných archeologických prameňov, ktoré by ich nemohli potvrdiť, a preto boli ignorované. Táto situácia spôsobila metodickú krízu, ktorá zbavila mladšiu generáciu bádateľov možnosti odkazovať sa na pomerne rozsiahly rad nálezov. Tie nemuseli byť nevyhnutne škandinávské, ale skôr karolínskeho pôvodu, ktoré dovážali Škandinávci (do Škandinávie). Takýto predpoklad nemal overiť hypotézu, že Vikingovia sprostredkovali dovoz predmetov, ktoré boli súčasťou „blatnickej zbierky“, ale poukazuje iba na tie znaky nálezov, ktoré môžu byť považované za špecifické pre kontinentálne remeslo. Ak by takéto porovnania boli možné, bolo by zrejme, že „blatnické nálezy“ sú štýlovo v súlade s karolínskymi výrobkami nachádzanými, okrem iného, v Škandinávii. Vtedy by bola hypotetická rola Vikingov v dovoze týchto výrobkov sekundárna a menšieho významu, pokiaľ by sme boli schopní sledovať ich primárny pôvod.

Rozhodne nemožno vylúčiť, že niektoré časti „blatnickej zbierky“ sa v skutočnosti vyskytli spoločne, ale spoliehajú sa na dnes dostupné údaje nie je možné uviesť, ktoré (ak vôbec). Preto takéto úvahy strácajú svoj zmysel. Na základe čoho by sme mohli určiť, ktoré z predmetov darovaných barónom Révayom múzeu pochádzali z hrobu? Na podobné úvahy už je príliš neskoro, pretože zo zväzku heterogénnych nálezov výskumníci vybrali len tie, ktoré sami považovali za vyhovujúce. Tento výber je však v rozpore s údajmi, ktoré teraz, po viac ako sto rokoch štúdií, máme k dispozícii.

Podľa autorovho názoru „blatnický hrob“ s neuveriteľne bohatým a nesúrodým vybavením bol umelým výtvorom. Buď bezprostredne samého baróna Révaya, od ktorého riaditeľ F. Pulszky „vymámil“ najzaujímavejšie nálezy, alebo vedcov, ktorí túžili po úspechu. Možno barón sám počul o vykopávkach V. Groóa z roku 1872 („blatnická zbierka“ sa zdá byť pozoruhodne podobnou údajnej výbave hrobu z Malého Čepčina), ktorému závidel miestnu slávu a záujem vedcov z Budapešti. Pre tých bola jeho zbierka chutné sústo. V neposlednom rade videl vo svojej zbierke možnosť prispieť a obohatiť „maďarskú“ kultúru. A teda, či už úmyselne alebo nie, príbeh začal žiť svojím vlastným životom. Ak niekto stále túži brať súbor predmetov označovaných pojmom „blatnická zbierka“ ako nálezový celok, mal by predložiť viac argumentov na podporu svojich tvrdení, než len sto rokov staré nejasné údaje. A napokon sa musíme spýtať: ak by sme dnes získali podobnú zbierku od amatérskeho zberateľa, naozaj by sme mu doslovne verili, že pochádza z hrobu?

V predloženej štúdií sa autor pokúsil opísať nielen známe fakty o súbore bronzových a železných predmetov, uvádzaných v literatúre ako „blatnická zbierka“, ale

aj históriu výskumov a úlohu, ktorú zohrala v rozvoji včasnostredovekej archeológie. Všetko to sa stalo východiskovým bodom pre ďalšie všeobecné metodologické úvahy uvedené v súvislosti s Kuhnovou teóriou vedeckých revolúcií a s jeho pojmom paradigmy. Situácia tu diskutovanej paradigmy sa podobá kolapsu ptolemaiovskej vízie vesmíru a jej postupnej strate postavenia v prospech novej, aj keď spočiatku menej elegantnej Kopernikovej teórie. Dnes môžeme konštatovať, že v istom čase sa nikto nestaral, ktorá z týchto dvoch teórií je pravdivá – aspoň tak dlho, kým novšia z nich nepriniesla presnejšie vysvetlenie astronomických javov. Po dlhú dobu však bola využívaná teória, ktorá sa nakoniec ukázala byť nepravdivou. So svojimi deferentmi a epicyklami sa stala príliš zložitou a nakoniec prestala byť použiteľná. Vtedy vstúpil na javisko Kopernikov model. Podobné pochybnosti boli nesteral u archeológov, ktorí bojovali s nejasnosťami vznikajúcimi okolo „blatnicko-mikulčického horizontu“. Išlo o teóriu, ktorá postupne skôr zakrývala, než objasňovala históriu. A napriek tomu táto paradigma existovala po celé desaťročia a pôsobila dojmom intelektuálnej kontinuity. Preto je také ťažké ponechať ju v prospech nových a ešte nepreukázaných teórií, aj keď práve samotná pôvodná paradigma bola sfalzifikovaná.

Prí súčasnom stave výskumu sa zdá, že najskoršia fáza karolínskych importov dosiahla Moravu a územie dnešného Slovenska nie skôr ako na konci prvej štvrtiny 9. stor. Na konci 8. stor. a ešte v prvej tretine 9. stor. karolínske remeslo nemohlo prejavovať taký vplyv na miestne dielne, ktorý by viedol k rozvoju miestnej štylistiky založenej na karolínskych prototypoch. Okrem toho porovnanie karolínskych nálezov pochádzajúcich zo západnej Európy s tými nájdenými na Morave a dnešnom Slovensku jasne ukazuje, že od konca prvej štvrtiny 9. stor. aspoň od polovice 9. stor. môžeme počítať výhradne s dovozom originálnych, vysoko kvalitných predmetov (vrátane celých garnitúr). Prípadne s ich priamymi kópiami či napodobeninami. Skutočná „miestna štylistika“, charakterizovaná aj viditeľným zjednodušením motívov a bežným použitím lacnejších materiálov sa začala na Morave a na dnešnom území Slovenska až v druhej polovici 9. stor. Na základe moderných vedomostí hypotéza, podľa ktorej všetky nálezy kedysi zahrnuté do „blatnickej zbierky“ pochádzajú z jedného nálezového celku, je neudržateľná. Všetky predmety z nej nemôžu byť spoločne datované do začiatku 9. stor. V najlepšom prípade ide o zložky dvoch alebo troch značne porušených nálezových celkov neznámeho pôvodného zloženia (o čom autor úprimne pochybuje). V najhoršom prípade (prítom pravdepodobnejšom), je to iba náhodná zbierka umelo spojených predmetov.

Najlepším riešením, ktoré by mohlo byť sformulované na základe skúseností s vývojom a potom uchovaním „blatnicko-mikulčickej“ paradigmy je venovať väčšiu pozornosť starostlivej a spoľahlivej analýze zdrojového materiálu. Tú možno podporiť predovšetkým nálezovými celkami a umocniť akceptovaním typologickej podporovanej dendrochronologickými analýzami, doplnenými veľkými sériami rádiouhlíkových dát. Takýto postup môže zamedziť používaniu „abstraktných štítkov“, ktoré len zatemňujú obraz, hoci pôvodne boli určené pre poskytovanie účinnej a pohodlnej intelektuálnej skratky. Existuje nádej, že časom bude vypracovaná nová teória ktorá prevezme všetky funkcie „blatnicko-mikulčickej paradigmy“, hoci aj ona nemusí vylúčiť niektoré z chýb svojho predchodcu.

Najlepším riešením, ako obvykle v archeológii, je vrátiť sa bez predsudkov k nestrannému hodnoteniu archeologických faktov. Zdá sa pravdepodobné, že tie sa budú brániť samy na rozdiel od umelých teórií, ktoré si vyžadujú masy verných obrancov.

Ako poznamenal Max Planck, každá nová vedecká pravda nevífazi iba vtedy, keď sa jej podarí presvedčiť súperov a ukázať im svetlo, ale skôr preto, že vyrastie nová generácia vedcov s ňou oboznámených. Neochota prijať novú paradigmu vyplýva často zo strachu zo zosmiešnenia, či zamietnutia vedeckou pospolitosťou. Tento motív je viac pravdepodobný, než obava o opodstatnenosť predloženého riešenia. To by však nikdy nemalo zastaviť vedcov v ich úsilí dosiahnuť jeden z hlavných cieľov vedy – snahu dopátrať sa objektívnej pravdy, v prípade neexistencie nespochybniteľnej dôvery dospieť aspoň k lepšiemu

a úplnejšiemu vysvetleniu sporných javov. Veda by mala vychádzať z faktov, nie z domnienok, predpokladov alebo účelových interpretácií. A to aj v prípade, že konečný výsledok môže do istej miery sklamať. Aj v tomto prípade musíme očakávať istú dezilúziu, pozostávajúcu z akceptovania faktu, že „blatnická zbierka“ nemohla tvoriť výbavu jedného hrobu. Po dôkladnej analýze sa dá predpokladať, že jej chronologické vymedzenie je oveľa širšie, ako sa pôvodne predpokladalo. Hoci súčasná veda vyvracia dlho konzervovaný archeologický mýtus, niet pochýb, že všetky (aj každý jeden) predmety zahrnuté v tejto zbierke stále udržiujú svoju zdrojovú hodnotu ako mimoriadne príklady včasnostredovekého remesla. Iba informácie, ktoré dnes ich prostredníctvom získavame, je potrebné čítať a interpretovať inak, ako pred sto alebo päťdesiatimi rokmi.