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HILLFORT IN DIVINKA IN NW SLOVAKIA¹

Hillfort in Divinka is located in the mountainous region of north-western Slovakia. It is known in literature since the 18th century. First archaeological excavations were concluded in the 70's of 20th century. Since the year 2013, modern systematic research of fortification system is concluded. Hillfort was built during the Bronze Age (Lusatian culture), after which it was settled in the Iron Age (Púchov culture) and at last by Slavic population in the Great Moravian Period (9th–10th century).

Site consists of three separated parts: peak area with acropolis and suburbium, all of them fortified by own walls. Whole complex occupies area of 12 ha. Excavations were concluded in six places with focus on wood-earth ramparts. This paper presents the basic overview of the excavated terrain situations, their dating and recovered artefacts. More detailed description is provided for the fortification of acropolis, based on the older research, but in scope of the revision ditch.

Key words: North-western Slovakia, hillfort, Lusatian culture, Púchov culture, Great Moravian Period

Area of today's Slovakia is very geomorphologic diverse terrain, in the eastern – western line is the division between two significant units, Pannonian lowland and Western Carpathian Mountains. Around 44% of territory of Slovak Republic is covered by mountainous regions with specific environmental attributes, dividing it from the lowlands (Fecko 2016). Mountain terrain is archaeologically much less researched, compared with the foothills and mostly the plains. This state is the result of subjective and objective reasons. As for the subjective reasons, only few archaeologists yet focused their scientific work on the physically very demanding excavations in mountain terrains, also visible is the lack of big research projects containing the issue of mountainous areas and last, but not least, understaffed and underfunded local museums. For the objective reasons, with comparison to the lowlands, mountains are much scarcely settled and archaeological structures and objects are far harder to recognize in the brash sediments in the mountain river valleys, than in the arid thick loess. Archaeological research is mostly focused on the hillforts, with their ramparts usually easily recognizable in the hard and forested terrain.

Region of north-western Slovakia is not exemption to these rules, with basic communications being river Váh and its right tributary Kysuca. In this part of the Váh valley, there are Bytča and Žilina basins, encircled by the mountains. In the point of their contact, on the right bank of the river Váh, Veľký vrch (Eng. Big hill) rises above the village Divinka, from which is possible to monitor both these basins (Fig. 1). From the surrounding terrain, the hill is separated by the valley of small stream Divina in the north and east, flat mountain saddle in the west, and in the south, its steep slopes fall to the river Váh. Thanks to this very good strategic and inaccessible position, people of the past built here fortified hilltop settlement – hillfort (Fig. 2).

This 12 ha huge site contains of three functional parts. In the south-western slope it is the narrow peak area, 20 – 85 m wide and more than 420 m long. Smallest area is the acropolis, with dimensions of 60 m to 148 m, surrounding the highest point of the hill in the north-western part of the hillfort. North-eastern hillside is the area of trapezoid suburbium, with hu-

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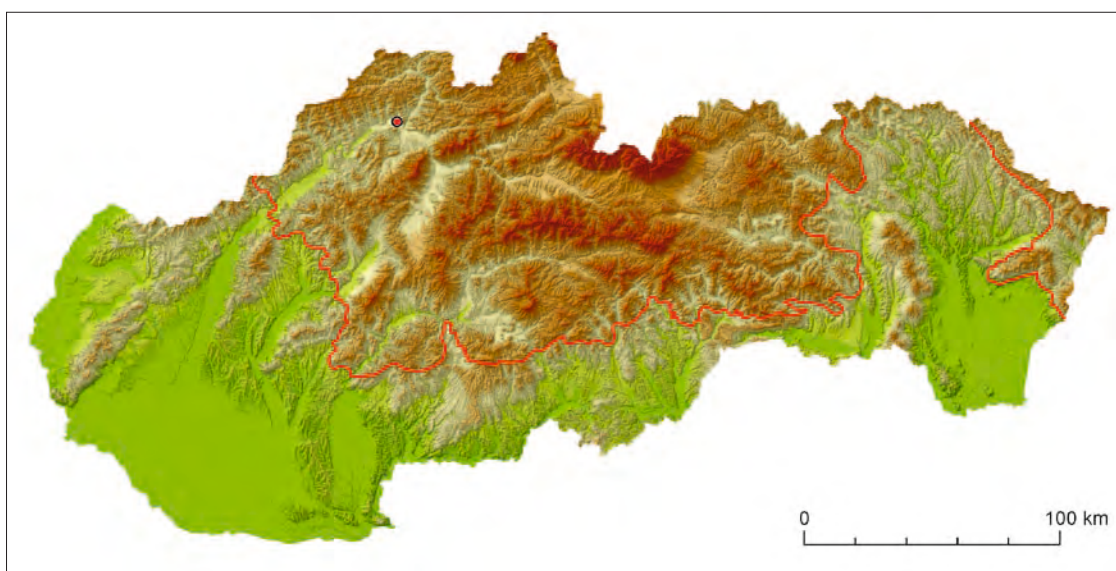


Fig. 1 Map of Slovakia with marked borderline of mountainous regions (according Fecko 2016) and the location of Divinka (illustrations made by authors unless otherwise stated)

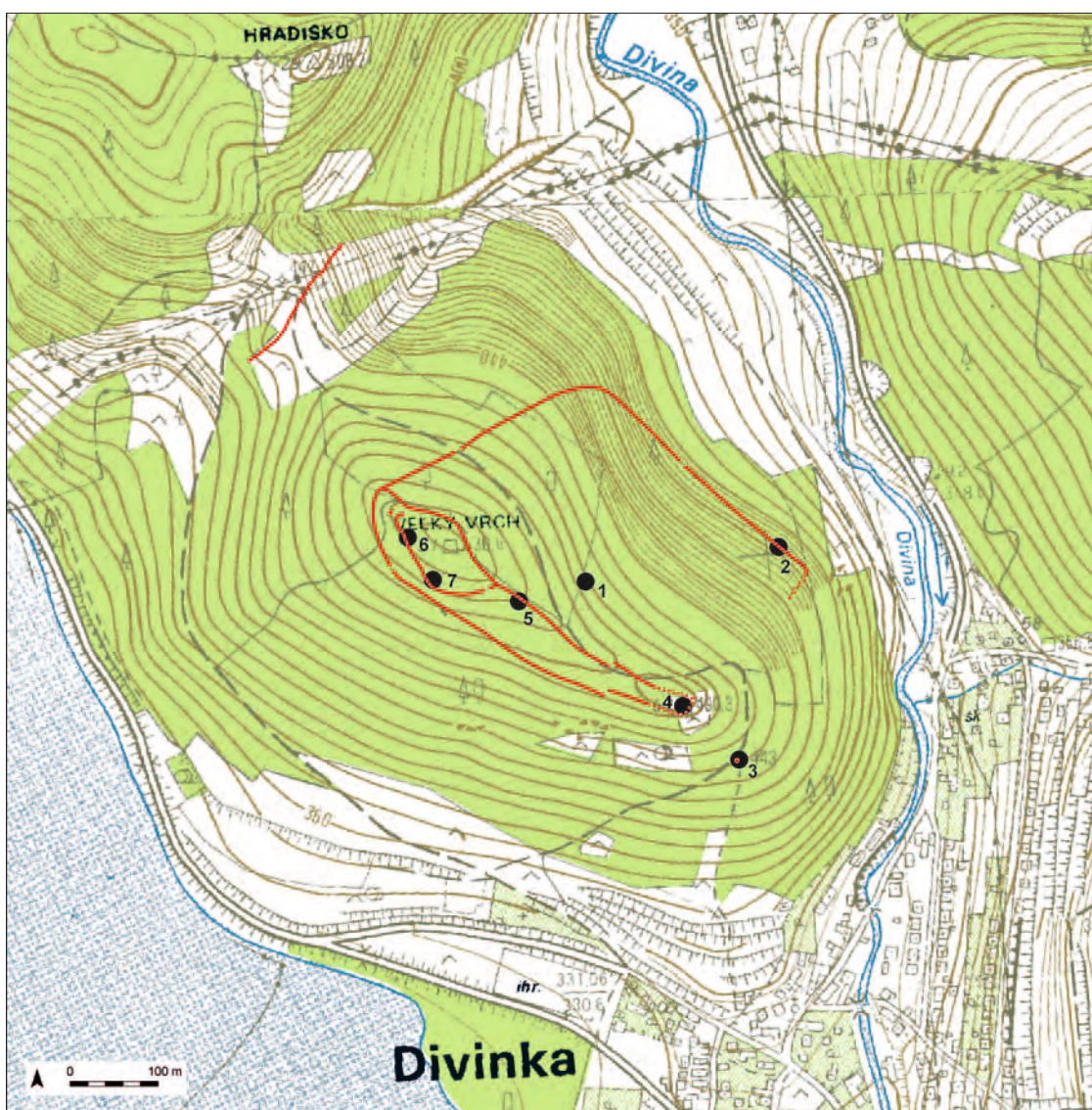


Fig. 2 Divinka, hillfort Velký vrch with marked locations of archaeological ditches: 1 – Koleso; 2 – Holý prieloh; 3 – Veľké Salašky; 4 – Malý vrch; 5 – central part of the peak area; 6, 7 – acropolis

ge dimensions of approximately 240 x 430 m. The hillfort is fortified by huge ramparts that are missing only in the eastern side of the suburbium which is inaccessible due to the steep slope ending by a stony reef (Fig. 3). It is possible to assume, that this part of the suburbium was protected by a light wooden fortification that did not leave traces in the terrain. Similar situation can be found on the easternmost part of the peak part. Its longitudinal platform called Malý vrch (Eng. Little hill) is from three sides ended by a rocky cliffs (Fig. 4). Western side of the hill is divided from the flat mountain saddle by a rampart, closing the entrance from the river Váh valley.



Fig. 3 Divinka. View of the stony reef under the suburbium on the eastern side of the hill. Photography from the 50's of the 20th century, today the part is covered by wood (personal archive of Jozef Jaroš)

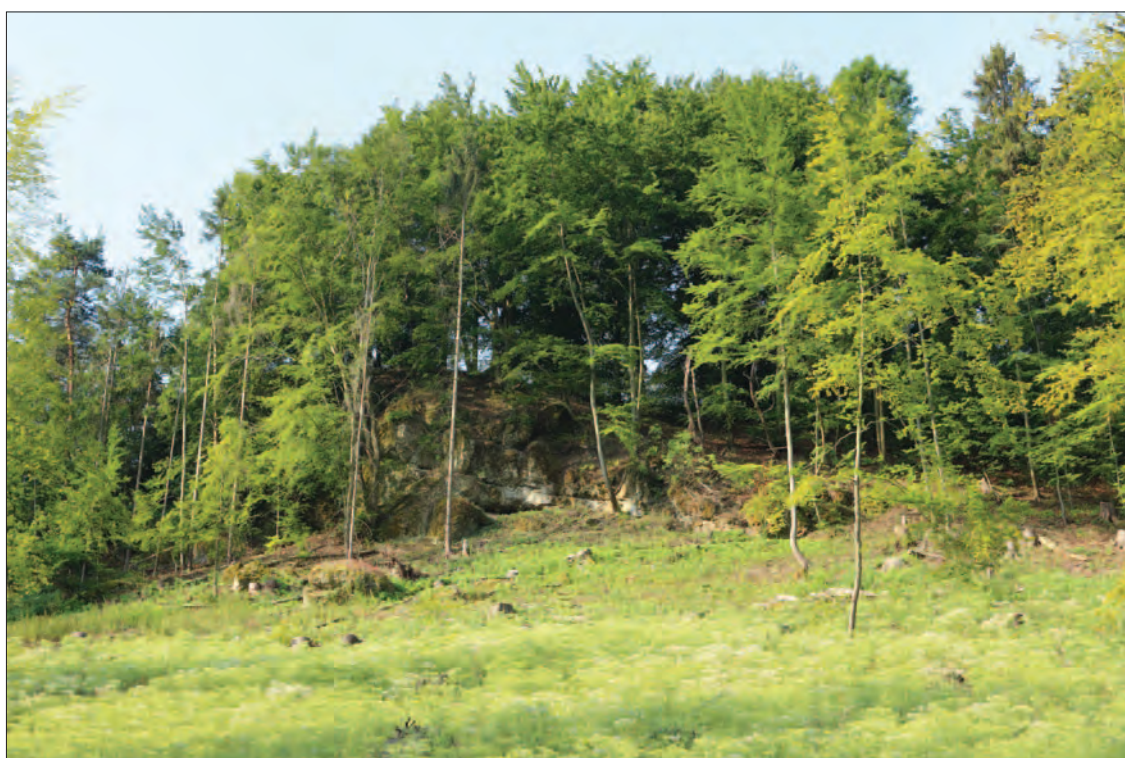


Fig. 4 Divinka. View of the Malý vrch from the suburbium

Vague mention of the hillfort in Divinka can be found in literature from the first half of the 18th century (Bel 2011: 171), its composition and artefacts from it were for the first time described by the end of the 19th century (Lombardini 1885: 526–527). Beginnings of the modern archaeological research are bound with the name of Anton Petrovský-Šichman who made a survey, created map of the hillfort and published his observations in the 50's of the 20th century (Petrovský-Šichman: 1957; 1960).

First scientific excavations of Veľký vrch were conducted by Jozef Moravčík (Museum of Považie) and Karol Pieta (Archaeological Institute of SAS) during years 1972 – 1973. Excavations were conducted due planned opening of a quarry, even though the locality was registered as national monument since 1969. Most drastic changes to the area of hillfort and the fortifications were made in the year 1971, when the geological survey was conducted. Bulldozers damaged the historical communications, ramparts and gates and the survey ditches scarred the area of the site.

Brief report from this phase of excavations was published by Moravčík (1978; 1980: 19, 30, 31). According to his writings, the hillfort was built or renewed in three historical ages. It was founded in the Late Bronze Age by the peoples of the Lusatian culture, who settled here until the Hallstatt Age. During the La Tène Period, the hill was again settled by the Púchov culture and lastly by the Slavs during the Great Moravian Period.

For more than three decades, the hillfort is pillaged by illegal treasure hunters with metal detectors. Many solitary items come from these illegal activities, but also five iron hoards from the Great Moravian Period. Three out of them are already published (Turčan 2012: 25–26, pl. LXIX; Majerčíková 2013; Fusek 2017). Extensive robbing of the locality was one of the impulses for renewing the excavations at Veľký vrch. Archaeologists from the Archaeological Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences in Nitra (G. Fusek, M. Holeščák) and Považie Museum in Žilina (A. Slaná, Z. Staneková) are cooperating on this excavation since the year 2013. Archaeological research was focused mostly on the fortifications of the three main parts of the hillfort (Fig. 2). The project is not yet fully finished, and therefore only preliminary results are presented, with exclusion of the acropolis, which excavations were concluded in the year 2015 and therefore more detailed description can be provided.

KOLESO

Positioned on the very steep slope of the suburbium called Koleso was found a couple of pottery shards, in the soil between the roots of a fallen tree. On this place, small ditch was dug, that proven the presence of thick layer filled by the Lusatian culture pottery and animal bones. The place where they were found indicates that they were not in a primary, but in a secondary or even tertiary position. They could have gotten here naturally, by falling or being flushed down the slope, from under the rampart dividing the peak area from the suburbium. It also cannot be excluded, that they have been thrown away as the trash from the inhabited part of the hill because of the hygienic reasons.

HOLÝ PRIELOH

Lowest point of the suburbium on the location Holý prieloh is in a form of a slightly downhill platform. Ditch in this area cut through the rampart and adjacent part of the hillfort area. No settlement objects were unearthed, only indication of living activities was a thin layer that included bits of burned clay, coals, not dated pottery shard and fragment of unidentifiable iron item. Research, however, proved that there were two destroyed ramparts in superposition. Inner wooden construction of the older rampart cannot be characterised in details, but to the presence of building chambers points the different stone-soil filling of the rampart mass. There were no coals or artefacts that could clarify the date when this older rampart was built. This wall was rebuilt, on the top of the older rampart was built 4m wide new wall, after its levelling. Inside its' mass were found the charred beams of the chamber inner construction (Fig. 5). It's building was dated by the radiocarbon method to the younger phase of the Great Moravian Period (Fusek 2017: 41).



Fig. 5 Divinka, suburbium, location Holý prieloh. Prepared log beam from the construction of the chamber of the younger rampart

VELKÉ SALAŠKY

On the entrance path from the valley of the river Váh, called Veľké Salašky, can be found conical earth-rock mound with diameter of approx. 9 m that we consider to be the foundations of destructed wooden building which defended the gate to the hillfort. Destruction layers of this object were covering the path with the bedrock surface. Mound was damaged at the beginning of the 20th century by a dug-out shepherd shelter. The path was approximately 2 m wide, lined by the pole holes on the side of the mound. On the other side, the path is cut in the bedrock with carved niches (Fig. 6), probably also used for securing the vertical poles. We assume that this was the remains of the gate construction. Dating of this situation was possible by the radiocarbon analysis of the seven samples from the charred wood. Youngest were the results from the pole holes, according to which the building is dated to the 9th century. Results of the samples from the destruction layers points to the fact, that for the building were used even two hundred years old oaks and pines. During the research season of 2017, iron barbed arrowhead with socket, typical for Early Medieval Period, right above the path level. Other chronologically sensitive items were not discovered. The excavations of this part are not yet concluded.



Fig. 6 Divinka, suburbium, location Veľké Salašky. Entry path with cut bedrock and niches for poles of the gate construction

MALÝ VRCH

At the far end of the platform of Malý vrch, building of touristic watchtower was preceded by rescue excavations. Bedrock was found right under the thin surface layer. Except the pottery shards, no other traces of historic human activities were discovered. The pottery can be mostly aligned with the Lusatian culture, younger, LaTène or Early Medieval shards are scarce. On the top of Malý vrch was also excavated terrain depression that was interpreted as remains of German army bunker from the final stages of the Second World War.

CENTRAL PART OF THE PEAK AREA

Wall dividing the peak area and the suburbium was cut approximately in the middle of its length. Two phased building of the rampart was identified, similar to the Holý prieloh in the suburbium. Older rampart, laying on the bedrock, contained huge amount of the Lusatian culture pottery. Radiocarbon analysis dates this rampart to the 10th century BC. This situation points out to the fact, that the fortification was built while the hill was already settled for longer amount of time, otherwise there wouldn't be so many shards inside the filling of the rampart. Before the building of the younger rampart, the old one was levelled and the new, slightly narrower rampart was built on the top of it. In the very thin layer of cut bedrock in between them, the convex-concave tanged arrowhead dated to the Early Medieval Period was found. Both ramparts had similar building structure, consisting of the two stone walls on inner and outer side, with the space between them filled with stones and soil. No inner wooden construction was recognized up to this point.

Research on the peak area was not focused only at the rampart; adjacent part of the settlement was also excavated. The surface settlement layer consisted of soil mixed with a huge amount of stones and included the majority of the finds, probably in the secondary position. Number of the unearthed shards and fragment of a bronze sickle belong to the Lusa-

tian culture. Considerably rare was pottery of the Púchov culture. Most of the finds comes from the Early Medieval Period, represented by a huge amount of pottery fragments, but also small tools or everyday items like knives, scissors, awls, nails or bucket reinforcements. For the dating in the younger Great Moravian Period speaks the artefacts indicating the presence of higher social structures – spur and a fitting with neck (Fusek, in print: fig. 10).

Opposite to the Malý vrch, this area contained also dugout objects of the Lusatian culture. From the Great Moravian Period is most important the stone foundation of the wooden building, in which interior was found both stator and rotor of the mill, most probably in primary position (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7 Divinka, central part of the peak area. Great Moravian Period stone mill in primary position

ACROPOLIS

Excavations of 1972 – 1973 were made exclusively at this part of the hillfort. Rescue excavations were, however, abruptly stopped due to the results of this survey which pointed out that the exploitation of this hill would not be profitable. The archaeological survey was unfortunately unfinished, since there was no time to conclude the digging, document the situations or even fill the holes due to stopped funding of one more excavation season. Fortunately, the diary of excavation, some plans and the material still exists as well as the memory of the researchers, and by putting the pieces of the jigsaw together, it is possible to summarize the results of these excavations.

Here, two ditches cut through the rampart which is dividing the acropolis from the rest of the peak area. According to the authors of the excavation two building phases are visible. Older wall made of stones was 4 m wide, covered with thin layer of soil which included pottery shards of the Lusatian Culture. On the top of this layer laid second wall, circa 2 m wide, built assumingly during the Púchov Culture (Fig. 8). The fortification was during this time supported by the houses built right next to it, as is suggested by a massive number of pole holes by the rampart. Importance of this site during the



Fig. 8 Divinka, acropolis. Excavations in 1973. Uncovered rampart structure, with building trench, inner wall and the core (photo by: Jozef Moravčík)

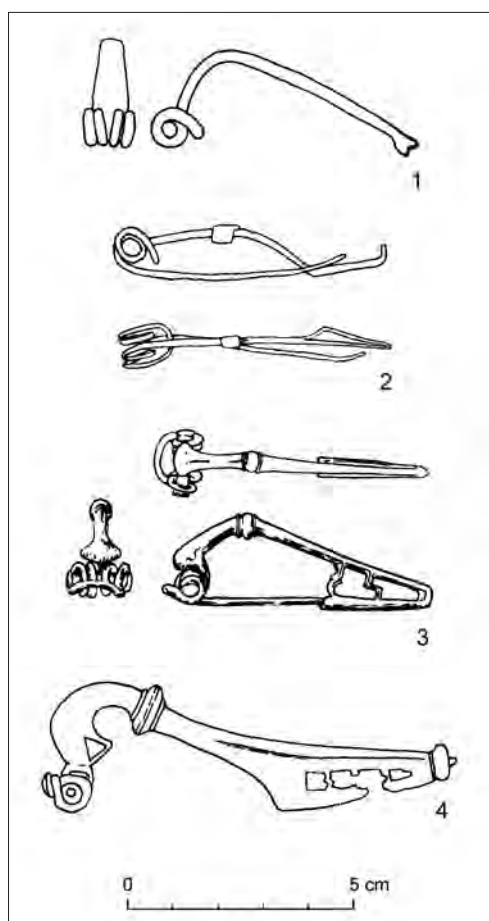


Fig. 9 Divinka, acropolis. Fibulae of the Púchov culture (according Pieta 1982)

La Tène period is documented by the rich finds from these excavations, like fine pottery, fibulas (Fig. 9), but mainly the specific type of the silver coin, named type Divinka (Fig. 10), struck in the years 45 – 35 BC (Kolníková 2000). The settlement was most probably abandoned sometime around the break of the eras, during the second fall horizon of the Púchov Culture, however the exact reason of the ceased existence of this hillfort is not known. Most probable explanation for this phenomenon in the wider area is the movement of the Germanic tribes (Pieta 2008: 58–59, fig. 30). As the finds from this excavations show, the hill was resettled nearly nine centuries later by the Slavs. Even though the Early Medieval phase of the settlement, characteristic by stone foundations of the log houses is visible in the



Fig. 10 Divinka, acropolis. Celtic coin of the Divinka type (without scale)

close vicinity of the acropolis wall, the authors of the excavation does not comment on any building or repair activity of the fortification during this time. Against this notion speaks fragment of Early Medieval spur that was found “in the destruction of the wall”, 5 – 20 cm deep under the soil inside the rampart (Fig. 11: 1). Among other characteristic Great Moravian items can be considered richly decorated bronze ring (Fig. 11: 2), also found close to the rampart.

Revision excavation in the place of an old ditch was concluded in the years 2014 – 2015. The aim was to verify the situation excavated by the previous expedition and to properly document the profile of the rampart which was not done in the past due to already mentioned circumstances. Review ditch was placed on the relict of old excavations; it was 2 m wide, stretching through the whole rampart. Half of the width included the eroded part of the non-covered old ditch, still visible in the terrain, while the second half cut through the intact part of the wall. We were able to localize nearly exact position of the old ditch and the soil deposit that created an artificial plateau right next to the rampart, making an illusion that the wall is much wider at this part. Fortification of the acropolis was situated on strategic position and the builders used natural shape of the hill. The slope was then adjusted and three step-like levels were cut into the bedrock, later used as a foundation for the fortification. Unfortunately, the idea of two phased building of the wall couldn't be verified. The whole rampart in this part consisted mainly of stones, with very little soil between them, which

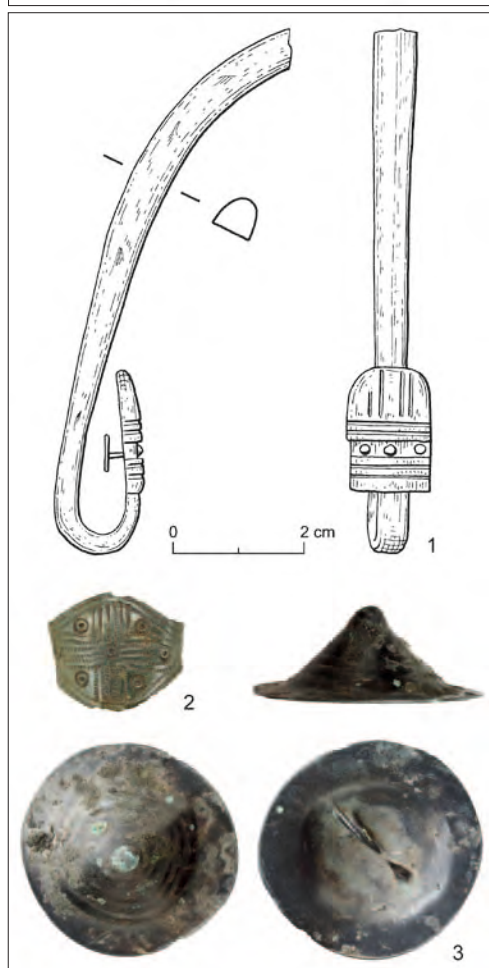


Fig. 11 Divinka, acropolis. 1, 2 – ring and spur of the Great Moravian Period; 3 – conical item of the Lusatian culture

did not offer closer distinguishing of different layers and subsequently of a building process. The stratigraphic units inside and outside the rampart were discerned only by the overall consistence of the stones and just slight differences in the colour which allowed to localize the inner wall, with quite damaged structure similar to the rest of the loosely scattered rocks (Fig. 12). Wall was made out of quadratic or semi-quadratic stones with maximal dimension around 30 – 40 cm. It was positioned less than half of meter from the adjusted slope, making between them ditch-like space. Outer wall was built on the middle of three steps cut into the bedrock and consisted of big flat stone slabs in the base, with smaller quadratic rocks towards the upper part. In front of it, from the outside, lowest step level was a berm, space that except the static function allowed maintenance or repair of a wall. Core of the fortification in between these walls was filled with loosely scattered rocks of various sizes. Remains of the wooden construction mentioned by Moravčík in his excavation diary were not identified. One possible pole hole was discovered from the inner side of the fortification, however without more stratigraphic relations, it's purpose cannot be stated with certainty. When the locality was abandoned and the ramparts were no longer maintained, the construction fell apart. Stones from the walls and the core fell on the berm from the outside and also inside the settlement. There was no possibility to determine, which of the stones were from the wall, and which from the core part. The fallen outside wall most probably ended up on the lower level of the hillfort, since there was only small number of the stones found on the berm, due to the position and steepness of the slope. Whole situation is covered by thick layer of brown colour with huge amount of rocks. It is possible, that this layer is part of the rampart destruction, and the brown colour that differentiates it from the other layers was due to slow contamination by hummus during the years.

Ceramic material from the rampart consisted mainly from the shards dated in the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age

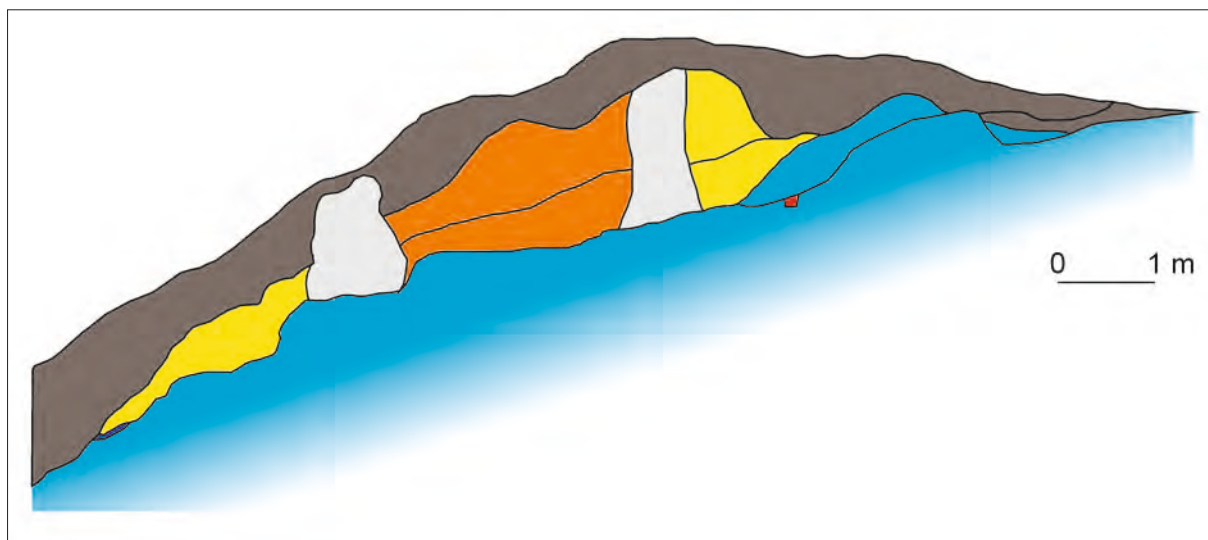


Fig. 12 Divinka, acropolis. Profile of the wall. Brown surface layer covering the whole find situation. Rampart is constructed of the gray walls and orange layers between them. Yellow colour has the destruction layers of the rampart, red marks the position of the pole hole, blue is bedrock

and can be associated with the Lusatian culture. A group of finds dated to the Late Iron Age, to the Púchov culture, comes from the filling of gaps between the stones of the outer wall. The position of some of them points out, that they could have been part of building process, working like wedges to fix the stone slabs in horizontal position. This indicates, that the fortification was built earliest in the Late Iron age, and the soil filling the core part consisted the remains of already existing Lusatian settlement. Small conical bronze item (Fig. 11: 3) found also in the core of the rampart can be dated in the periods of Young or Late Bronze Age, and is often found in the hoards from this time (Salaš 2005: 117). There is no possibility to say, whether the rampart separating the acropolis was already existing in the Bronze Age or not. Compared with the other parts of the hillfort, where the Púchov culture material is very poorly present, the evidence of the high settlement activity at this time at the acropolis is undisputed. According to this and the recent knowledge about the site, we can not exclude, that people of the Púchov culture built the dividing acropolis fortification on larger Lusatian hillfort, as is common practice for this culture (Pieta 2008: 119). We can not tell, however, what happened with the ramparts during the Early Medieval Period that is visible in the settlement structure. It is unfortunate, that the small burned layer, mentioned in the excavation diary by Jozef Moravčík was not identified in the recent excavations. The radiocarbon dating would shed a light on dating of the fortification, which is hard to conclude based on the traditional archaeological methods.

In this short paper, we present basic overview and characteristic of the recent excavations at the hillfort in Divinka. Research project containing this site is not yet concluded, survey of the wider surroundings of the site are planned in addition to the excavations. Vast fond of the artefacts is still waiting for its evaluation, but even now it is possible to see, that this locality is most important hillfort in the region, built and renewed in three historical eras.

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