

UHERSKÉ HRADIŠTĚ-SADY  
500 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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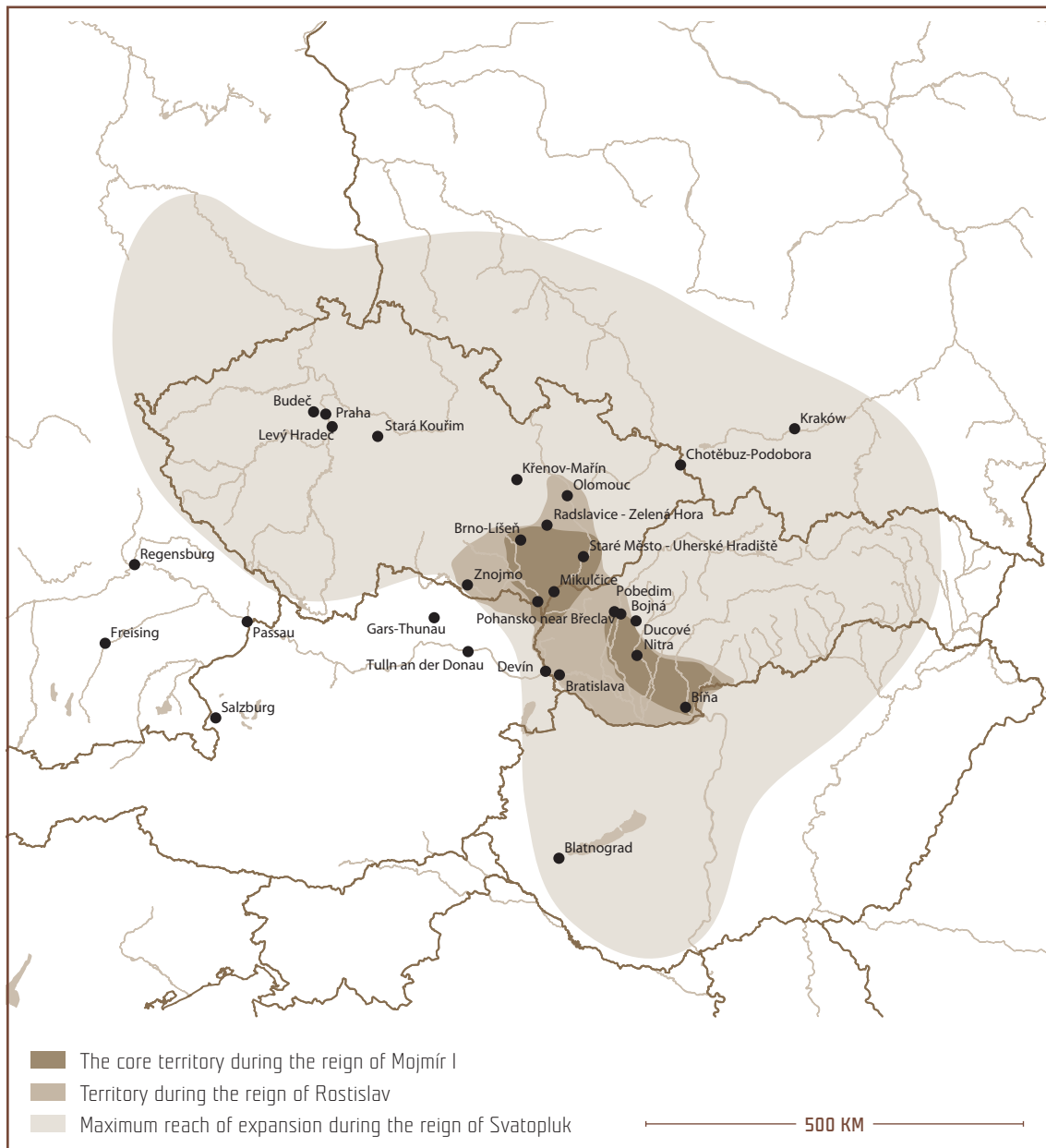
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## INTRODUCTION

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The town of Uherské Hradiště lies in the east of the Czech Republic, in Moravia, around 70 km to the east of Brno. A number of remarkable archaeological sites have been discovered on its soil in the past. The most significant of these are found in the southeast of the town in the district known as Sady, also known as Derfle by the local population. The subject of this book is an important site from the Early Middle Ages situated in the locality known today as the “Saint Methodius Height”. Other names are, however, also still used for this place, such as the “Sady Promontory”, the “Sady Height”, the “Metropolitan Height” and the rather puzzling “Sady by Uherské Hradiště”. All these names represent one and the same locality with remnants of an important sacral site whose beginnings date back to the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth century and whose end is placed at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The Uherské Hradiště–Sady site is situated on the plateau of an elevated promontory at an altitude of 204 to 207 metres above sea level that comprises part of the Luhačovice Hills. The promontory protrudes sharply into the floodplain of the River Morava lying around 30 to 40 metres below. In the Early and High Middle Ages the promontory was surrounded on three sides by the River Olšava, which in the year 1078 was described as “ferocious”. The promontory offered an extremely good view of the surrounding area near and far at the time, and continues to do so today. In the ninth century, the large agglomeration and centre of power comprised of Staré Město–Uherské Hradiště – the Great Moravian Veligrad – extended along both banks of the River Morava at a distance of around two kilometres in the west to north-west direction, in part on the floodplain, in part on two elevated promontories (*Hrubý 1965, Galuška 2001*). The Chřiby Hills, the range of mountains separating the central Morava Basin from the Brno and Kroměříž regions, extend further into the distance on the western horizon. The flat floodplain of the River Morava, with many remnants of early medieval settlements and burial grounds, lies to the north and south. Only to the east, in the direction of the White Carpathians, was the view from the Sady Promontory restricted, being obscured by the western slopes of the Luhačovice Hills. The sacral site in Uherské Hradiště–Sady was evidently established and continued to develop in a dominant location in the central Morava Basin with a commanding view of the surrounding area, while itself being clearly visible and unmistakable from a great distance.

Another significant factor, in addition to its highly advantageous location, was the fact that important communications intersected in the Sady Promontory area in the Early Middle Ages, including two routes or branches of the transcontinental Amber Road connecting the shores of the Baltic Sea to the north with the Adriatic Sea to the south. The first and primary route led from Aquileia on the Adriatic coast along the eastern slopes of the Alps to the confluence of the Danube and the Morava, from where it headed along the River Morava to the north to what are now the towns of Uherské Hradiště and Staré Město. It then continued to Czech and Polish Silesia and finally along the Vistula and the Odra to the Baltic. The second side route of the Amber Road headed upstream from the Danube along the River Váh roughly to what is today Nové Město nad Váhom in western Slovakia, where it turned abruptly to the left, to the west and the White Carpathians. It crossed this mountain range through mountain passes and then travelled along the River Olšava to reach the promontory in Uherské Hradiště–Sady where it joined the main branch of the Amber Road. The two routes then headed as one from the promontory to the power agglomeration of Staré Město–Uherské Hradiště – the Veligrad. The sacral site in Uherské Hradiště–Sady was, therefore, established and continued to develop not merely in a strategically highly advantageous location, but also in the immediate vicinity of one of the most important centres of Great Moravia. It may not have been an integral part of this centre, but its location and importance certainly meant that it belonged to it (*Galuska 1996, 1998*). The expert community became aware of Uherské Hradiště–Sady and the “Saint Methodius Height” as a significant archaeological site from the Early Middle Ages in the 1960s – the “golden age” of the archaeological discovery of Great Moravia. Everything began with the soil breaking performed in 1958 that struck the upper layer of skeletal graves on the promontory, parts of which suddenly found themselves on the surface and were revealed to the eyes of the archaeologists in the form of human bones. Fragments of mortar and building materials indicating the presence of early medieval architecture, in addition to a burial ground, were also uncovered in the topsoil. Archaeological excavations led by Vilém Hrubý and Věra Hochmanová–Vávrová, both from the Moravian Museum



Central Europe showing the Principality of the Moravians under Mojmir I and Rostislav, and Great Moravia under Svatopluk I. After Poláček et al. 2020, Fig. 1.

in Brno, began at the locality the following year – 1959. They were already well known for their important discoveries of Great Moravian churches in Staré Město and Modrá u Velehradu (*Hrubý 1955, Hrubý et al. 1955*). The excavations continued in Uherské Hradiště–Sady until 1965, and the entire expanse of the Sady site had been completely investigated by the time they ended. Remains of unique sacral architecture of a complex and previously unknown ground plan were discovered, along with a burial ground with almost a thousand skeletal graves, relics of a settlement comprised of the lower parts of houses and pavements, a system of stakes from a large wooden palace-like structure, and the mortar floor of a rotunda. Remnants of workshop buildings accompanied by evidence of specialised production connected with building work, e.g. production of baked roof coverings of an ancient nature and stone building parts, were also uncovered. The findings made in the context of field situations, in particular grave situations, suggested that they did not come from a single time period, but could be incorporated into a broader longer-lasting historical era encompassing the time of Great Moravia, i.e. the ninth century to the first half of the tenth century, the subsequent short transitional post-Great Moravian period and the following Late Hillfort Period, i.e. the second half of the tenth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century.




The Great Moravian agglomeration of Staré Město - Uherské Hradiště in the ninth century showing the sacral site in Uherské Hradiště-Sady on the Saint Methodius Height, number 5. After Poláček *et al.* 2020, Fig. 46.

The first expert assessments and interpretations of the whole finding situation, written both by its discoverer Vilém Hrubý and by other archaeologists, historians and architects, were not long in coming (Hrubý 1965, 101–103, 202–206, 1965a, 37–62, 1970, 95–102, 1971, 87–96, see Galuška 1996, 23–29 for an overview of older literature). These works, however, mostly considered older findings from the Great Moravian period, while younger findings were presented only in connection with the question as to when the sacral site in Sady came to a definitive end. A number of material studies of a high standard and one monograph were produced in the course of time, though these considered the importance of Uherské Hradiště-Sady only in connection with the Great Moravian period. With a few exceptions, findings from the remaining three hundred years or so in the existence of the Sady locality still awaited processing. The most significant of these

exceptions was an extensive study by numismatist Jiří Sejbal on findings of coins from the eleventh and twelfth centuries made in Sady, with an introduction by Vilém Hrubý (*Sejbal 1986*, 98–183), later supplemented by a number of new perspectives and observations (*Šmerda 1996*, *Videman – Paukert 2009*). Uherské Hradiště–Sady became famous in this way as an important sacral centre of Great Moravia, often associated with the administrative centre of Methodius’ Archbishopric of Moravia, though it was almost completely forgotten by the expert community and the general public as the largest church necropolis in Moravia from the tenth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century. The expert literature did, it’s true, remember the role of the sacral centre in Sady in the period following the fall of Great Moravia occasionally, though “findings from the post-Great Moravian and Late Hillfort age remain, as a whole, unevaluated” (e.g. *Kouřil – Měřínský 1996*, 111–119, *Měřínský 1997*, 87, *Procházka 2005*, 206–213, *Ungerma 2010*, 221). When we addressed the tasks facing the Moravian Museum as a research organisation in 2015, we decided for this reason to consider this longstanding problem in a comprehensive and ongoing manner. This work began with the summarisation of the state of the knowledge and the stipulation of goals along with the introduction of a number of new research approaches (*Galuška et al. 2018*, 99–114). Initially, merely the processing and assessment of findings from the period from the second half of the tenth century to the first half of the thirteenth century were considered, primarily findings of graves, items found in graves and skeletal remains, in view of the fact that findings from the Great Moravian age had already been the subject of the monograph entitled “Uherské Hradiště–Sady. The Christian Centre of the Great Moravian Empire” (*Galuška 1996*). It turned out, however – particularly with a view to the application of new research approaches and methods and in view of the fact that more than twenty-five years had passed since the processing of “Great Moravian Sady” – that it would be more appropriate to evaluate findings from both chronological horizons as a single entity, i.e. in a comprehensive manner. The book “Uherské Hradiště–Sady. 500 Years of Christianity in Central Europe. I. Catalogue of the Burial Ground. Graves from the Ninth Century to the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century” (Brno 2018), whose authors are Luděk Galuška, Věra Hochmanová-Vávrová, Vilém Hrubý and Jiří Mitáček (*Galuška et al. 2018a*), was produced for this reason as a strong material foundation. The book contains a complete listing of all graves and finds divided into two chronologically different sets. The first considerably smaller set numbering 87 graves belongs to the Great Moravian period or the Middle Hillfort age, i.e. from the ninth century to the middle of the tenth century. The second and much larger set contains 871 graves that belong to the Late Hillfort age, i.e. they come from the second half of the tenth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century. We have fully accepted this division, performed by Vilém Hrubý and Věra Hochmanová-Vávrová at the time of their field excavations, in the aforementioned catalogue of all the graves at the Sady necropolis (*Galuška et al. 2018a*) and it is also observed in the archaeological analysis of the burial ground presented, although correction in respect of certain graves has not been ruled out (see below). The settlement-burial ground conditions at the locality are presented concisely in introduction to each section of the book (section A for the Great Moravian period, section B for the post-Great Moravian and Late Hillfort period) with a particular view to sacral buildings (A. I. and B. I.). One reason for this is the fact that a not insignificant number of graves that exhibit a certain relationship to these structures were found in the interiors of these buildings. These church graves are indicated with the word “interior” in the book. In the further assessment, graves not found in church buildings, which we consider “exterior” graves, are considered separately (A. II. and B. II.). We use the following new designation of graves created for the purposes of the catalogue of all graves for the sake of clearer orientation at the burial ground (*Galuška et al. 2018a*): graves in the first set, Great Moravia, are indicated with the letters VM, while graves in the second set, Late Hillfort, are indicated with the letters MH. The numbers following the letters VM and MH are serial numbers in ascending order of the graves in the individual sets (e.g. VM 5 is the fifth grave in the Great Moravia set, MH 10 is the tenth grave in the Late Hillfort set). The numbers after the hyphen divided into two parts by a slash indicate the order in which the graves were uncovered in individual years of the excavations regardless of their assignment to sets (e.g. VM 3 – 12/59 was the twelfth grave found in 1959, though it is the third in the set of Great Moravian graves, while grave MH 10 – 13/59 was the thirteenth grave found in 1959, though the tenth in the set of Late Hillfort graves, and so on (cf. *Galuška 1996*, *Galuška et al. 2018a*).





THE SACRAL SITE  
AND BURIAL GROUND  
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INTERIOR GRAVES

## A. THE SACRAL SITE AND BURIAL GROUND AT THE TIME OF GREAT MORAVIA

The most important building standing at the birth of the sacral site in Sady, and thereby the burial ground as well, is the church and its various additions and build-ins performed over the course of time (Hrubý 1965, 202–206, Galuška 1996, 30–75). **The church** originated in the first third of the ninth century during the course of the first phase of construction and its foundations had a fully delineated ground plan in the shape of a cross (Fig. 1). It had two parallel wall footings inside which acted as load-bearing elements for lengthwise interior vaults and a massive quadrangular tower. The church was built of stone and mortar with the use of old baked building materials of ancient Roman origin and their early medieval imitations. The walls were plastered and painted inside and out, the floor was made of poured mortar on stone ballast, and the roof from reused components of baked roof coverings of an ancient nature and contemporary imitations (Hrubý 1970, 95–102). The leaded windows were comprised of panes of glass painted in places with gold foil. A total of eight skeletal graves or remnants of them were uncovered within the area of the church. Half of these were found in the main central area of the church (the nave) and the others in the south corridor between the southern perimeter wall and the southern wall footing.

**The narthex** was built onto the church's western wall after some time had elapsed during the second stage of construction in around the middle of the ninth century. This was a structure with two side entrances and a semi-circular apsidal recess oriented towards the west. Its stone walls were plastered and painted, and the floor was made of stone paving. The ceiling was evidently flat and the roof wooden, perhaps made of shingles. We believe the narthex also acted as a "mausoleum" of some kind, although Vilém Hrubý long considered it to be a second church in Sady. A total of thirteen skeletal graves have been identified within its area, which is a number that has not appeared in any other piece of sacral architecture from the time of Great Moravia. It is highly probable that a smaller freestanding circular structure – **a rotunda** – was built during stage two of construction around 6 or 7 metres to the west on an imaginary centreline running through the church and the narthex. It was 330 cm in diameter, and was built of wood and stone with a poured mortar floor. It is hypothetically considered to have been a baptistery. No graves from the Great Moravia period have been discovered within this area or nearby.

A number of important building works have been placed in the final third stage of construction on the Sady Height dated to the final third of the ninth century. First, a low **brick separating wall** was built in the interior of the western extension – the narthex – in front of the semi-circular apsidal recess. It was 390 cm long and its northern half covered one skeletal grave which had been placed in the interior of the western extension at a previous time. **A grave chamber** with a separate entrance from the east, designed for the burial of an important woman in a coffin with iron fittings, was built onto the north wall of the cruciform church during the final third of the ninth century. The north wall of the chamber also formed the south wall of another extension – the neighbouring **chapel with a semi-circular apse** – which was entered from the western side. Both additions on the north side of the church were built of stone and mortar. The interior of the chapel was plastered and painted, while the floor was originally probably of poured mortar. The graves of two extremely important individuals – men buried in coffins with iron fittings – were buried in the nave of the chapel, which later made it a grave chapel (see below). There are also additional building alterations associated with the church. The first are two groups of stones bonded with mortar located in the corners of its chancel which were possibly supports for a **bench** of some sort. The second are **two low walls**, of which the first was built onto the exterior side of the south wall of the church's chancel and the second onto the eastern outside corner of the church nave. I believe the second of these walls to have acted as reinforcement for the wall in a highly stressed part of the church building. In the case of the first wall, I am inclined to think that it restricted entry from the outer side of the wall to a cavity hewn into the perimeter wall of the church designed for the burial of an extremely important individual.

The set of church buildings comprising the sacral architecture in Sady took on its final appearance following the building works conducted during the third phase of construction in the 870s to 890s (Fig. 2). It was 22.5 metres long – 33 metres with the rotunda – and 16 metres wide in the eastern half on the site of the church, grave chamber and chapel. A log-built **settlement**, which comprised



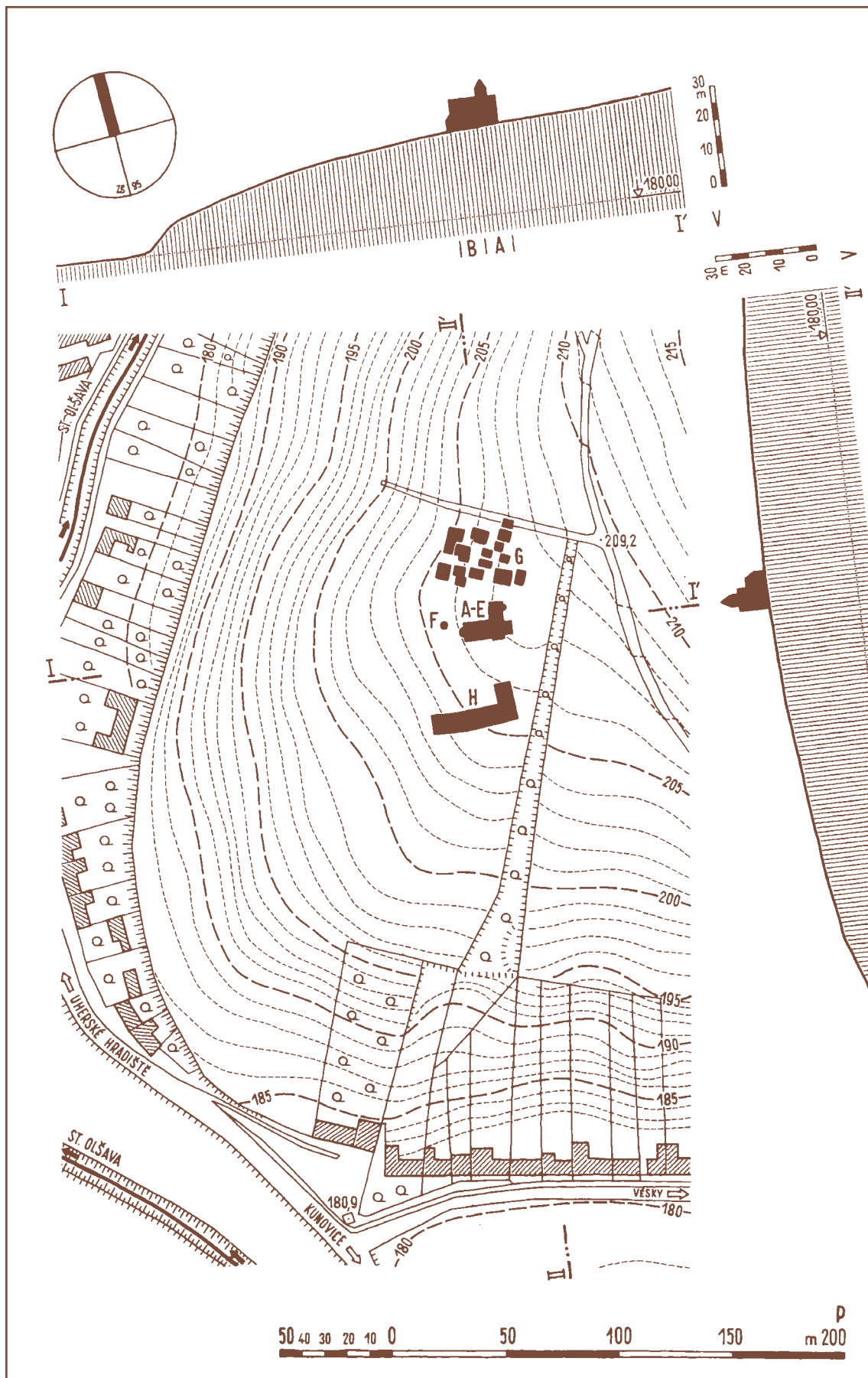


Fig. 1: Uherské Hradiště-Sady. The position of the site showing objects from the time of Great Moravia (A-H) on a contour plan, with two sections (I and II) and their two vertical surfaces (top and right). After Galuška 1996, Galuška et al. 2018a.



Fig. 16: Uherské Hradiště-Sady. Group 1 buttons. 1: grave VM 5 – 16/59, 2: grave VM 7 – 19/59, and 3: grave VM 7 – 19/59. Group 2 buttons. 4: grave VM 3 – 12/59, 5: grave VM 16 – 103/59, and 6: grave VM 21 – 136/59. Group 3 buttons. 7: grave VM 9 – 22/59.

of great honour in the church complex, perhaps the most prestigious place of all, and furthermore in a coffin with iron fittings. No role is played here by any great demonstration of his undoubtedly considerable material wealth. The pair of buttons on the man's posthumous attire play a merely supplementary, rather secondary, role – perhaps expressing his allegiance to the community of free Moravians. We might add that grave VM 3 – 12/59 in Sady was not realised until the final third of the ninth century, at an advanced period in the Great Moravian state, and is one of the most important burials on Moravian territory in the ninth century (*Galuška 1996, 122–125, 2014, 55–56, also Lutovský 1997, 186–187, 2005, 61, Bravermanová – Lutovský 2001, 114–116*).

The second group also includes buttons with a surface covered entirely with granulation. The only interior grave in which they have been found is grave VM 21 – 136/59 (Fig. 16: 5) in the middle of the western extension or narthex (*Galuška et al. 2018a*). It belonged to a child whose surviving skeletal remains were in such a poor condition that it was not possible to determine even the approximate original position of the given buttons. They were silver, lightly gold-plated, with the medium-sized granulation on their surface lying in rings of thin filigree wire. They had band loops. Buttons of the



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EXTERIOR GRAVES

## A. II. EXTERIOR GRAVES OUTSIDE GREAT MORAVIAN SACRAL BUILDINGS

A total of 61 graves dated to the older (Great Moravian) phase of burial demarcated by the beginning of the ninth century and the middle of the tenth century have been uncovered in the area around the church buildings at the sacral site in Uherské Hradiště–Sady (*Galuška 1996, Galuška et al. 2018, Galuška et al. 2018a*). Two of these are reverently interred piles of bones coming from originally Great Moravian graves breached or completely destroyed during the digging of the pits of younger graves during the period from the second half of the tenth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century. The remaining 59 graves would seem to be comprised of certain groups or groupings (Fig. 30). The first of these, **Group A**, is situated to the south of the southeast corner of the church nave and to the south of the wall of the chancel. It contained nine graves: VM 15 – 102/59, VM 20 – 130/59, VM 41 – 203/59, VM 42 – 207/59, VM 43 – 209/59, VM 45 – 212/54, VM 46 – 213/50, VM 47 – 214/59 and VM 48 – 215/59. The second **Group B**, with 18 graves, is situated to the south and southwest of the church's western extension or narthex, i.e. to the west of the first group A. These eighteen graves are graves VM 13 – 86/59, VM 23 – 157/59, VM 33 – 184/59, VM 34 – 194/59, VM 37 – 197/59, VM 49 – 82/60, VM 50 – 84/60, VM 51 – 85/50, VM 52 – 86/60, VM 53 – 87/60, VM 54 – 89/60, VM 55 – 101/60, VM 56 – 103/60, VM 57 – 105/60, VM 58 – 119/60, VM 80 – 135/62, VM 81 – 136/62 and VM 86 – 155/62. The third **Group C** is situated to the south of group A and to the east of group B and is comprised of 16 graves: VM 44 – 211/59, VM 63 – 47/61, VM 64 – 48/61, VM 65 – 75/61, VM 66 – 76/61, VM 67 – 78/61, VM 68 – 80/61, VM 75 – 4/62, VM 76 – 127/62, VM 77 – 128/62, VM 78 – 129/62, VM 79 – 131/62, VM 82 – 141/62, VM 83 – 142/62, VM 84 – 144/62 and VM 85 – 146/62. The next group of graves is the smallest, as **Group D** is comprised of just seven graves. It is situated to the east of the cruciform church and to the northeast of the graves in group A, and is comprised of graves VM 40 – 200/59, VM 69 – 115/61, VM 70 – 120/61, VM 71 – 121/61, VM 72 – 122/61, VM 73 – 123/61 and VM 74 – 124/61. The final **Group E** contains 11 graves stretching along the north wall of the grave chapel and to the east of its semi-circular apse: graves VM 8 – 21/59, VM 10 – 23/59, VM 19 – 128/59, VM 35 – 195/59, VM 36 – 196/59, VM 38 – 198/59, VM 39 – 199/59, VM 59 – 128/60, VM 60 – 129/60, VM 61 – 130/60 and VM 62 – 132/60. Interesting spatial relationships appear if we project the positioning of the individual groups of graves onto an overall plan of the sacral centre in Sady at the time of Great Moravia. There are no graves at all in the areas to the west of the grave chapel and to the north of the church's western extension or narthex. This is the result of the fact that the paved path that connected the church, its extensions and the cemetery to the log-built settlement led to this spot. This settlement, located on the other side of a bulwark made of wood and stone, formed the northern part of the church site as a whole. In terms of their function, we can see the areas to the north of the narthex as something of an assembly area for users of the settlement and visitors to the site in front of the entry to the narthex from the north side and as a place from where the grave chapel was entered. The space to the west of the western extension or narthex was another area with no graves. A small rotunda with a poured mortar floor, which is considered to have been a baptistery, stood in the centre of this area. Graves also "avoided" the spaces in front of the other entries or entrances to the buildings of the church complex. The first of these is clearly visible right next to the north wall of the church chancel and the south wall of the apse of the grave chapel, i.e. the area from which the grave chamber with grave VM 4 – 15/59 was entered. Another such area is found in front of the south entry to the western narthex. There is also a conspicuous corridor without graves stretching in the northeast–southwest direction between groups of graves A and C on the east side and group B on the west side. It runs in the direction of the southwest corridor towards the assumed entry to a long wooden palace-like structure. It ends in the northeast direction by the south wall of the cruciform church. It is true that there was no gap in the foundation masonry here, as there was at the other entrances mentioned above, but it is probable that an entryway did exist here through which the users or owners of the wooden palace-like structure entered the main sacral building on the Sady site (the church) after passing through the vacant corridor between the graves. The above indicates that not merely was the group of church buildings built in a planned fashion with a certain aim in mind during the ninth century, but that the placement of graves in the burial ground was also performed deliberately with a view to the layout of secular buildings and the needs of the users of the sacral site.