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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF NITRA

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## Nitra – A Cradle of Our History

There are not many towns in Slovakia than Nitra – the town lying in a sharp bend of the River Nitra at a border of Danubian Lowland and western foothills of Tribeč Mountain Range – the town which people subconsciously identify with ancient history of Slovakia. The town which became part of historical awareness of the Slovaks, the Slovak Roma or Jerusalem, a symbol of famous times of Prince Pribina or Svätopluk's Great Moravia in time of its utmost expansion when part of the most powerful state formation in Middle Danubian Area. The unique combination of geographical and climate conditions together with fertile land, water abounding in fish and woods in game formed the suitable conditions for the first settlers to settle down. Their presence is documented by both countless archaeological findings and precious historical sources.

In the past, significant position of Nitra Town reflected in declaring the urban conservation areas and zones. In 1961, Nitra Castle was declared the listed building, in 1981, Upper Town the urban conservation area and finally, in 1991, Lower Town the listed conservation zone with limited conservation sector. Unfortunately, today there is the suggestion to reduce conservation area.



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF NITRA**



**Golden Cap of Monomach, as it is called, dating to the half of the 11th century from Ivanka pri Nitre**

Nevertheless, history of our ancestors at this site had started much earlier. Artifacts from Nitra-Čermán Borough are from a settlement dating back to Early Stone Age – Palaeolithic, and are the first artifacts on our territory dated using a radio-carbon method (23 000 years). In Nitra-Krškany Borough, research of one of the first and the most important burial sites dating to Late Stone Age in the Central Europe was conducted. The important archaeological discoveries in Lužianky were inspiration to name one of the Lengyel culture Stage of Late Neolithic as the Lužianky group.

Prehistoric settlement in Nitra culminates for the first time in Early Bronze Age. Based on concentration and significance of the burial sites dating to this period, one of the important cultures typical for skeleton burials of dead in crouched position is called the Nitra culture.

At the end of the Bronze Age and during the Early Iron Age, the massive ancient settlements lined dense network of settlements in the lowland (Zobor, Žibrica).

Importance of Nitra area in the last four centuries before the turn of the centuries, i.e. in the Late Iron Age (periods of Celtic and Dacian settlements) is defined by a specific kind of coins called Nitra type by

the experts. They are the silver tetradrachms weighting around 10 grams. Stylized images of animals – horses, dogs, boars together with stylized inscriptions are typical. They imitate Roman coins.

Very dense population is recorded in the first centuries AD during the Roman times and Migration Period. At that time, the German tribes would settle here. The left bank of the River Nitra was literally sprinkled with one-room dwellings and outbuildings. Their traces have been discovered at foot of Zobor Hill continued to Chrenová and Janíkovce Boroughs then further on to the south of Nitra Town.

In Nitra-Párovské Háje, due to construction of several branches of transit gas pipeline, the biggest settlement in Slovakia dating to Migration Period – numbers of dwellings, pottery kilns, workshops with evidence of jewellery production, and etc. was discovered and inspected.

Interest in this literally blessed land had not stopped later either. At the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries our ancestors arrived, the earliest tribes of Slavs. Since then, Nitra has been populated continuously until present day. Slavs – Slavic people – later the Slovaks set their indelible mark on this land.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Nitra flourished with the largest concentration of the Great Moravian settlements within Slovakia. Besides the ones clearly documented – Castle Hill, Na Vírku, the settlements on Lupka and Martin Hill were very probably occupied by Slavs. The forts on Zobor Hill are also supposed to be used, however, only few indications suggest a settlement on Borina. The settlements would be protected by massive earthen ramparts often combined with walls made of stones and various wooden constructions. Individual settlements had probably different functions – organization-administrative centres or handicraft centres which could have been also used as protective shelters during unrest periods. One of them, the most probably the fort on Castle Hill, Svätopluk would use to rule during the Rastislav's reign ("regnum Zuentibaldi").

The settlements are not the only ones to recognise a significant position of Nitra in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. On the territory clearly bigger than

## **NITRA – A CRADLE OF OUR HISTORY**

actual Old Town, i.e. an area spreading from the Castle to Krškany Borough a wide network of smaller dwellings would stand. Another network of dwellings would be on the left bank terrace on Nitra – Dražovce to Janíkovce line. Giving that period, Nitra must have been one of the largest settlement centres in the Central Europe and with little exaggeration we can talk on urban character. Its remains are almost daily uncovered at various sites – Šindolka, foothill of Zobor, Svätopluk's Square, Town Marketplace, Dolné Krškany Borough, etc.

The oldest recorded church in Nitra was consecrated by Salzburg Archbishop Adalram around 828. This Bishop accompanied Bavarian king Louis the German on a military campaign against Bulgarians who conquered part of Transdanubia the previous year. The evidence on the church consecration is given in a document On the Conversion of the Bavarians and Carantanians (to Christianity) written around 871. We have no written record on what church it might have been. Original tendencies to relate either so called Pribina's Church or a church discovered on Martin Hill to the Church of St. Emeram at Nitra Castle had no real foundations. Latest archaeological studies indicate the church most probable location at Nitra Castle at site of a palace or the Lower Church. The fact that the church was dedicated to St. Emeram and this patrocinium has not changed to this day supports the idea that the church built by Pribina was set on the Castle Hill.

In 863, Constantine and Method arrived in the Great Moravian Empire. In 869, the Method was ordained Archbishop by the Pope. The letter from Pope Hadrián "Gloria in excelsis" dating from 869 says that Method's archdiocese should include the Principalities of Rastislav, Svätopluk and Kocel. In 880, Pope John VIII established bishopric in Nitra and ordained the first Nitra Bishop Viching, originally Benedictine monk in a document "Industriae Tuae" on Svätopluk's request. In 899, when the Great Moravian Prince Mojmir II (894 – 906) was on top of his power, the Great Moravian Church got a new archbishop and three bishops reporting to him. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the bishopric was likely to decline, however, under King Coloman I (1095 – 1116), it was very probably renewed. Surely, it reflected the internal political situation in Hungary where Nitra maintained significant political, economic and cultural position.

During a period of bishopric restoration, archidiaconates were likely to be established within Nitra See – Nitra, Hronský Beňadik and Trenčín.

Fate of Nitra surroundings after the Great Moravia decline in the 10<sup>th</sup> century has not been reliably clarified to this day. It must be pointed out that in Nitra and its proximate surroundings several burial sites had been continuously functioning since the Great Moravian Period and none of the settlements shows any violent destructive horizon. This allows us to assume that Hungarian penetration into this area was not forcible but gradual, and the Great Moravia decay did not automatically mean complete destruction of Principality of Nitra. Nitra Town had not lost its importance, on contrary, after the Hungarian Kingdom is formed in the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries it had played an essential role. Since 1048, Nitra became an appanage principality, one of the seat of one third of the kingdom ("tertia pars regni"), whose princes were serious candidates to the Hungarian throne. Nitra Duchy in period of its ultimate expansion already included 15 comitatus and lasted for almost 120 years.





*Did  
you know  
that first farmers  
arrived to our  
territory in Late  
Stone Age –  
Neolithic?*



## Nitra – Čermán, Nitra – Horné Krškany Boroughs

Early Stone Age – Palaeolithic represents both the oldest and the longest period in mankind history. Its essential part is biologic and social development of human being starting with the forms which preceded Family Homo to the present Homo sapiens sapiens. Mid Palaeolithic (250 000 – 40 000 BC) introduces Neanderthal (Homo sapiens neanderthalensis) population expansion. Indications of its presence come from Nitra-Horné Krškany Borough, where stone tools close to artefacts of Mousterien Culture have been discovered. Late Palaeolithic (40 000 – 9 000 BC) originally and expressly related to a supporter of new archaeological cultures, a modern Homo sapiens – Homo sapiens sapiens. Population concentrated significantly in Nitra surroundings, at premises of former Nitra brickworks, in Čermán Borough, in a cave below Nitra Castle where the stone tools old 30 000 years were discovered, also in Horné Krškany Borough at Toboľa (Katrúša) Hill and in Dražovce.

## Nitra, Priemyselná Street – First Farmers on Nitra Territory

### LATE STONE AGE – NEOLITHIC

Presence of the oldest farmer communities in Europe as well as in Slovakia goes back to the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC when our territory entered the period called Late Stone Age. Development of production economy along with systematic cultural crop growing and domestic animal breeding, introduced itself in building the permanent dwellings, starting the pottery, weaving, production of stone tools and new ritual practices and society organization. The settlements of the first farmers were discovered in Nitra, Štúrova Street and Dolné Krškany Borough. More populated dwellings date from period of a culture with young linear ceramics and Želiezovce Culture, documented at the settlements at Chrenová Borough, Mikov dvor, Veľké Janíkovce and Dolné Krškany Boroughs. The latest research confirmed their presence at the centre of the town at Mostná and Mlynská Streets.

Of unique European importance is a burial site under research in 1964 – 1965 in Horné Krškany Borough at Priemyselná Street. Members of socially insignificantly differentiated community were buried there. Burials of non-cremated bodies prevailed and the bodies were usually in crouched position on the left side. Food, decorations and stone tools in the graves bear testimony to afterlife faith. Graves of men with Spondylus ornaments or stone tools suggest their higher rank in the society, e.g. in production.

## Lužianky Borough

In Late Neolithic Period, a unique phenomenon appears on our territory – Lužiansky Group, named after a burial site searched in a position Kajsa. In this period people returned

to hunting, to make better use of it. Thin-walled pottery painted in red and white, and animal statues became typical. Spondylus ornaments become more frequent offerings in the graves. A masterpiece is a necklace with more than 600 pearls.

## Nitra – Janíkovce, Nitra – Mlynárce Boroughs

### LATE STONE AGE – ENEOLITHIC

In the last centuries of the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, Eneolithic Period – Late Stone Age (4 400 – 2 300 BC) – begins. The essential changes happen in development of agricultural communities. Discovery of first metals, copper and gold, new specialised tools, discovery of ploughing tool pulled by cattle provoked the social transformations, such as patriarchy birth and stress put on the social differences. The beginning of Eneolithic Period relates to Lengyel Culture. The most significant in Nitra Region is the settlement in Nitra – Braneckého and Štúrova Streets, where one skeleton grave with two jars has been discovered. More graves were investigated during construction of the Industry Park North in Mlynárce Borough. More frequent are settlements of Ludanice Group discovered at Mikov dvor within Agrokomplex premises and, the latest one were found while building the motorway R1 in Janíkovce; also on Martin Hill, at Čermán and Dolné Krškany Boroughs, Dražovce and Branč. People of Lengyel Culture would build along with large houses also small ones, with one room. After the long thousands years, the people of Ludanic Group decided to settle in caves too and altered the rooms by building the shelters. Together with stone tools, the products made of copper, small chisels and daggers, bracelets and small decorations appeared. Burial equipment of men included vessels, stone tools, Spondylus and rarely copper jewellery. Less frequent were cremation graves. In the following evolution

of Eneolithic Period we record presence of several archaeological cultures and groups. Baden Culture (Horné Krškany, Dolné Krškany, Dražovce, Branč) in the Middle Eneolithic Period and Bošaca Group at the end of Eneolithic Period are the most significant ones. We know them from Nitra-Šindolka Borough and Janíkovce.

## Nitra – Old Town

### EARLY BRONZE AGE

Settlement in Nitra surroundings reaches the first peak in Early Bronze Age. The highest concentration of prehistoric sites is on the present Old Town territory – Castle Hill and Svätopluk's Square, Mostná, Kupecká and Štefániková Streets. Both settlements and burial sites used to be there.

Importance of Bronze Age (2 300 – 700 BC) is in adopting production technologies, processing and use of bronze, the metal, thus intensifying production possibilities of a man.







During Bronze Age, 23 various archaeological cultures differing in expansion, duration, economy and advanced approaches changed on the territory of Slovakia. Agriculture remained the basic source of food. The cattle breeding was developing and a horse became a draught animal. Settlements had changed and beside the lowlands ones, they started to build fortified settlements on elevated and strategically well located sites. Bronze was used to make mainly jewellery and weapons. Amber, gold and faience were trading goods. Typical burials were skeleton ones in crouched position with offerings. The oldest cultural sign of Bronze Age – Nitra Culture concentrates in Nitra and Žitava River basin. Typical is a Bronze jewel in form of a willow leaf. It is recognised especially from burial sites at Čermán and Šindolka Boroughs, Mlynárce, Dolné Krškany, Svätopluk's Square, Selenec, Hrnčiarovce and Branč. People of advanced Maďarovce

Culture settled on Castle Hill and built walled settlement with three moat lines. Lowland settlements would be at Mostná, Kupecká or Štefánikova Streets, Svätopluk's Square and in Kynek Borough. An unfinished copper axe and nozzles made of clay from Kupecká Street and cast moulds from the close Kmeťkova Street showed the local processing of bronze.

In Middle Bronze Age, cultural complex defined by burials under tumuli had spread throughout Europe. A massive settlement was on site in Mostná, Kmeťkova Streets and also at Svätopluk's Square. Development of metallurgy widened the range of produced tools – sickles, chisels, and etc. Tools and decorations made of bones and horns, pottery and stone tools are significantly represented. Economic development heads to gradual social differentiation. Changes in spiritual sphere are documented by bi-ritual cemeteries.

## Nitra – Zobor and Šindolka

### LATE AND NEW BRONZE AGE

In the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, the south-west Slovakia was integral part of cultural complex of Middle Danubian urnfields. Apart from lowland settlements, the people built upland settlements, cremated dead bodies and built massive chieftain tumuli. In Nitra, there are three known large settlements in the centre enclosed by Mostná, Farská, Kupecká and Štefánikova Streets. Another two are known from Martin Hill and Šindolka, and others were discovered in Horné Krškany Borough and Ivanka pri Nitre. At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, Nitra surroundings were settled by people of Lusation Culture. Such facts are documented in lowland settlements on Šindolka and in town centre in

Mostná Street, also in Lužianky and Janíkovce, as well as at a cremation burial site with urn graves in Mlynárce Borough. Apart from the lowland in River Nitra basin, the people of

*Did you know that in Iron Age so called lunar idols appeared revealing the celestial body cult?*

## THE BRONZE AND IRON AGE



Lusatian Culture also occupied higher situated slopes of Zobor massif, built fortified settlements on Zobor, Lupka and Žibrica. Traces of walls – ramparts are still visible. They served to the inhabitants of surrounding villages as shelters, and could also have management and administrative, economic and cult (religious) functions. During the whole given period (1250 – 750 BC) agriculture prevails, some handicrafts differentiate such as work with wood, bone and horn craft, bronze industrial craft production culminates and the first iron products start to emerge. In patriarchate society, the individual men gradually gain better positions and their leadership document better burial furnishings (weapons, jewellery, clothing ornaments).

The art in Bronze Age was closely related to religious and cult. Religious symbols are hidden in antropomorphic and zoomorphic pots, figural and animal statues and other objects. They document cult of fertility, sun and fire. Together with material, both animal and human offerings were already practised.

## Nitra – Dolné Krškany Borough

### NEW METAL – IRON– EARLY IRON AGE

Early Iron Age – Hallstatt Period (750 – 400 BC) is the final stage of prehistoric period in the Central Europe. Production of iron and use of iron tools and weapons led to revolutionary economic and social changes. Social differentiation is documented in building seats of princes – settlements representing economic prosperity, and large tumuli where notable men were buried together with splendid furnishings. The important features of changes were the contacts with developed south European civilisations, invasions of southeast Nomad ethnics (Cimmerians, Thracian tribes) in the Central Europe. An artistic gem is painted ceramics with applied human or animal figures

serving for ritual purposes. A cult of celestial bodies reveals so called lunar idols. Metal figures of ithyphallic men are the result of contacts of the Central Danubian area with Adriatic and Eastern Alpine regions at times when Kalenderberg Culture flourished in the southwest Slovakia. One such statue comes from Martin Hill in Nitra. More continual population appears only at the end of the Hallstatt Period presented by the people from Vekerzug Group arriving from Upper Tisza Region. Their settlements were discovered at Chrenová, Mikov Dvor and Dolné Krškany Boroughs. At this period, the vessels made on potter's wheel emerge for the first time (Nitra-Martin Hill, Nitra-Dolné Krškany). Number of iron products grows, and discovery of part of bridle from the harness from Dolné Krškany is very precious. Many clay whorls and weights of weaving loom testify to development in production of fabrics.

Did you know that invention of iron led to revolutionary economic and social changes?





## Nitra – Šindolka Borough and Martin Hill

### CELTS IN NITRE

At the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, a new people – Celts – enters the European history; the people who played significant, and from the social and economic development point of view exceptionally positive role in the following four centuries of Late Iron Age, La Tene (400 BC to the turn of centuries). They arrived from their original homeland between the northeast France, Alps and south Czech and took vast areas of Europe starting at British Isles continuing to Turkey. Their presence within the given area is documented by archaeological findings and written sources of ancient historians. Celts are historically the first documented ethnic in the River Nitra basin. In the La Tene Period, distant trade flourished with ancient centres bringing several civilizing conveniences and luxury goods (knowledge of writing, metal vessels and jewellery). Gals (Celts) themselves implemented new, in prehistoric Europe unknown working techniques (potter's wheel, iron processing, millstone, coinage and introduction their own monetary system). Thanks to them the first writing emerges on the Slovak territory – inscription on coins. Some of handicraft segments reached extraordinary high level (smithcraft, artistic craft, pottery, glass production). In differentiated Celtic society next to upper class and warriors, craftsmen and farmers along with slaves lived. Written sources bring testimony on specific class of priests, druids. The highest concentration of the Celtic sites in Nitra and its surroundings dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC (settlements at Šindolka, Mikov dvor, Martin Hill, Párovské Háje, burial grounds on Martin Hill, Chrenová, Lužianky, Mlynárce Boroughs). The high-quality pottery, iron tools and

weapons, light-blue glass and black graphite bracelets, but also bronze and iron foot wheels even metal belts predominate in archaeological findings. Celtic coins are detected.

One of the most significant discoveries of Iron Age comes also from Nitra. In 1961, during excavation works on Martin Hill the coins were discovered at the former Celtic settlement. The biggest surprise was a coin Aes grave – a Roman Republican coin made of copper almost quarter of kilogram in weight. Cast (not coined) of copper weighting 1 pound with a diameter of 6,2 cm! A relatively worn obverse depicts double bearded head of a Roman God Janus - a ruler of Earth, Ocean and Heaven and the reverse depicts a front of the Roman warrior ship – a prow. A uniqueness of this finding can also be found in historical approach. It can be believed that it is not only import of the coin, but actually that the people of discovered dwelling could have been Celtic Boii coming from the North Italy. It would confirm historic sources describing Boii defeat by the Romans and their searching for new settlements. This theory supports another coin of the three silver coins from Nitra. It is a coin weighting 0,967 g with a picture of Goddess Athena Alkis (diameter 0,8 cm). The similar means of payment coined Boii in the North Italy and the Boii settled in Czech imitated such coins.

*Did you know that Roman Republican coin "Aes grave" discovered on Nitra territory is almost quarter of kilogram in weight?*



Around the turn of the centuries the Central Europe underwent considerable economic, political and cultural transformations. Promising expansion of the Celtic society before the beginning of our AD had been stopped by until then unknown historical element – Dacians. They moved to north from the present-day Romania under command of king Burebist and at the end of the old century they took control of large part of the southwest and east Slovakia. Since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Nitra had been a centre of Celtic-Dacian settlement which was concentrated on Castle Hill and in Upper Town at both Little Seminary and Nitra Gallery premises. It is believed that a fort stood on Castle Hill supported by discovered remains of a wooden stockade. It was surrounded by smaller production villages documented in Lower Town, at Mostná, Farská a Štefánikova Streets as well as Svätopluk's Square. On the left bank of the River Nitra, remains of a settlement were discovered on Martin Hill, Chrenová Borough and Mikov dvor. Material culture of Celtic – Dacian horizon represents mainly typical rough hand-made pottery, Dacian cups. Red and white painted pottery and vessels made on a potter's wheel can be found too. Unique are the parts of clothing – buckles and decorations or Roman Republic coins (denarius). Dacian settlement lasted until the beginning of the Roman Period and is mentioned in ancient sources as neighbour of the German Kingdom of Vannius.

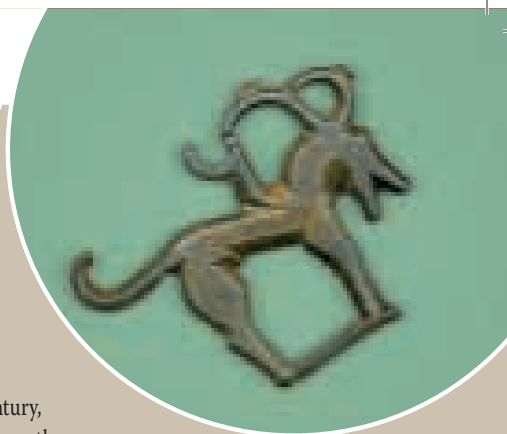
## Nitra – Mikov dvor, Nitra – Párovské Háje Boroughs

### GERMANS AND ROMANS

Closely to the turn of the centuries, Slovak territory becomes a scene of confrontation of two significant civilisations and cultures – ancient, Roman and barbarian, German. Roman expansion reached Danube and two provinces Pannonia and Noricum were established in the vicinity of Slovakia. Danube Limes remained during the whole Roman Period (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) the northern boundary of the empire due to Germans. Vicinity of the Roman Empire influenced penetration of civilizing conveniences of ancient world into barbarian society and significantly affected material culture and lifestyle of Germans. According

to ancient historians (Tacitus), Quadi invaded our territory. A long period of Roman – German interactions had various forms. From the beginning, the Romans tried to capture German territory. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, they formed a vassal state between the Rivers Morava and Váh, Kingdom of Vannius, and towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Quadi colonized Upper Nitra, lower part of Upper Hron and Ipel' River region up to Danube. Step by step they started to revolt against dependency and regulations of Roma and to raid the Roman provinces. Pressure of Germanic and other barbarian tribes led to Marcomannic wars (166 – 180), during which the Romans under Marcus Aurelius got deeply into the centre of the Quadi territory. In times of peaceful coexistence and military campaigns, the Quadi gained ancient products and experiences which had essential effect on their own production and lifestyle (jewel-making, pottery, production of weapons, luxury seats of princes and ancient bricked edifices for local Germanic top-class) and these they communicated to other Germans in the north as well as Sarmats to the southeast. New raids of the Germans from the half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century strongly weakened power of Romans who in a half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century finally left the Central Danubian land and the fortified border at the Central Danube gradually vanishes.

Position of Nitra Town and its surroundings during the Roman Period is reliably documented by many archaeological sources. The earliest ones appear at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and the latest at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Mostly they are Germanic settlements with typical six pile dwellings and outbuildings and manufacturing houses. They were discovered at Chrenová Borough, Mikov dvor, Janíkovce, Dolné Krškany, Ivanka pri Nitre, Branč and many others situated along both banks of the River Nitra. Findings from the centre of the town are very rare (Kupecká and Mlynská Streets where isolated objects, buckles were found). The most prevailing articles at the settlements are earthenware, initially hand-made and from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century shaped on a potter's wheel.



## CELTS, GERMANS AND ROMANS



Remarkable is local production of bronze dress fasteners in Mikov dvor. Also pottery kilns from different locations at Chrenová and Párovské Háje document local pottery manufacture. Many settlements supply evidence of trading contacts with Pannonia, frequent is terra sigillata – pottery originally from Rhineland provinces of Gallia and Raetia. Apart

from pottery, metal fasteners, glass and bronze vessels could be found, however, we usually find only fragments at the settlements. Burial practice in Germans may be partially reconstructed thanks to graves and burial sites (Veľký Cetín, Báb, and etc.). Cremation, burning the bodies and laying down the mortal remains together with offerings into urn of clay or a shallow pit prevail. Extraordinary are the skeleton graves of princes, superior class with luxury jewellery, bronze and glass vessels and luxury pottery. However, none known from Nitra. It is assumed that in Nitra or its close surroundings, a Roman marching camp or a permanent military base could have been in times of Marcomannic wars (166/168 - 180) testified by richness of Roman import at the Germanic settlements and concentration of Germanic population at wider vicinity of Nitra dating to this period as well as discovery of seasonal camps of Roman forces which grow thanks to aerial prospecting (for ex. in Požítavie, Vráble).

Continuity in settlement until the Migration Period has been traced at settlements in Párovské Háje and Lužianky Borough. At the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the first groups of Slavic population arrived to our territory and settled, apart from other locations, in Nitra.

## Nitra – Chrenová, Nitra – Janíkovce Boroughs

### OLD SLAVS

Slavic settlers arrived to present-day Slovakia at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century from the home land in the Rivers Dneper and Bugu Basin. Written sources suggest that they already occupied Central Europe

in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. Early Slavic non-fortified settlements concentrate mainly in lowlands with fertile soils within water courses. Their highest concentration was confirmed thanks to archaeological research undergone in Nitra area. Of particular importance is a settlement at Mikov dvor within Agrokomplex premises or under the motorway R1 in Malé Janíkovce. Remains of others have been found at the former barracks premises below Zobor Hill at Martin Hill, close to sports grounds at Chrenová Borough, at Párovce close to the Church of St. Stephan and during the research undergone at Nitra Castle. Typical were square earth-houses with pile construction and wicker walls covered with clay, less often log-cabins would be built. Stone stoves or open fireplaces usually at the corner would heat the dwellings. Often we can find traces of manufacturing activities. Interior was modest. The floor was made of clay, only rammed down or covered with clay. The roofs were covered with straw or cane. Every settlement had to have storage pits and other outer buildings (sheds, store rooms). The people made their living chiefly as farmers and cattle breeders. Old Slavs made home-made pottery initially by hand, but in the 6<sup>th</sup> century they started to use a slowly rotating kiln. Similarly they produced agricultural tools, processed iron, women spun threads, weaved fabrics from wool and hemp. They manually worked with stones to produce millstones, sharpeners, bones and horns used to produce awls, needles and combs. Metal products (iron knives, sickles, flints, axes, simple bronze decorations) are rarer at early Slavic settlements. The burial sites are scarce, known from the west areas of Slovakia. A burial site at Čakajovce showed that they burnt their dead and their ashes placed into urns usually pots or shallow pits. Parts of burnt animal bones in graves document burial feasts – funeral ceremony.

### SLAVS AND AVARS

The period of existence of Avar Khaganate (567 – 803) plays a fundamental role in the early medieval development in settlement of Slovakia. Confederation of nomadic tribes

## SLAVS AND AVARS

originally from Asia arrived to the central Danubian area and settled at first at Upper Tizsa. From there, the Avars expanded to almost whole Carpathian Basin and surrounding territories of Lower Austria and south Moravia. In the early half of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the northern border of the Khaganate stabilized on Danube. Only in the latter half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the southern parts of Slovakia became part of the khaganate, and at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the border defined by the territorial expansion of so called Slavic-Avarian burial sites, moved towards Nitra Town. One of such is a bi-ritual burial site in Dolné Krškany where presence of original Slavic ethnic group appears in manually shaped urns and cremation. In the skeleton graves, a cast set of a belt and pottery were discovered. Slavic-Avarian symbiosis causes that, based on archaeological sources, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century it is difficult to distinguish Slavs and Avars. Part of a burial site at Mikov dvor belongs to new discoveries. In one grave, a belt set and pottery more of Avarian origin were found. Comparing to number of known Slavic – Avarian burial sites, the settlements from the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries are less represented. In Nitra, the settlements dating to this period have been found at Mikov dvor, Chrenová Borough and traces of settlement in Ivanka pri Nitre. Collapse of Avar domain in Carpathian Basin was caused by series of Frankish campaigns under Charlemagne at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century along with other interior power, economic and social elements. A door for new economic and political expansion of Slavs was opened.

## Nitra – Old Town

### NITRA IN GREAT MORAVIAN PERIOD

Formation of a new political system – the Great Moravian Empire in 833 placed House of Mojmir onto a prince's throne in Nitra. Under the rein of Rastislav (846 – 870),

an appanage prince of Nitra became his nephew Svätopluk. Written documents mention Principality of Nitra as regnum Zuentibaldi (Kingdom of Svätopluk). In 869, the East Frankish monarch Luis the German organized military campaigns against the Slavs in Moravia and Slovakia. Svätopluk, without consent of Rastislav, made peace with Carolman, a governor of Bavaria. After the Rastislav's imprisonment and his death, Svätopluk did not gain his throne, on the contrary, in 871 he was also imprisoned in Bavaria and when he was released, as the Moravian Prince he continued in policy of his uncle, developing his realm and independent Church organization. In short time he attached Bohemia, Krakow region and part of Upper Tizsa, apart from Pannonia, to his dominions. On his request, Nitra became the Bishop's seat under Pope John VIII – a monk Viching was appointed – a main defendant the both archbishop Method and Slavic liturgy. Before his death (894), Svätopluk divided his reign in the country between his sons. Svätopluk II became an appanage prince in Nitra. Internal conflicts, state of war with Franks and Magyars, and dangerous neighbours, terminated reign of House of Mojmir in Moravia and in Nitra at the beginning of the 10th century.

Next to settlements dating to the Great Moravian Period (Castle, Martin Hill, Na Vršku and Lupka), non-fortified villages such as a barbican at Martin Hill, Kupecká, Štefánikova, Farská and Párovská Streets (environs of a settlement Na Vršku)

also at terraces of the River Nitra (Šindolka, Chrenová, Mikov dvor, Janíkovce and etc.) are known. They are concentrated on considerably biggest territory as the present-day town which shows that, in the 9<sup>th</sup> and also in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, this territory belonged to the largest settlement agglomeration in the Central Europe.

Did you know  
that in the 9<sup>th</sup>  
century Nitra territory  
belonged to the largest  
settlements in the  
Central Europe?







Along with typical sunken dwellings and outer buildings, in several villages manufacturing houses, e.g. blacksmith's shops at Šindolka were found.

Specialised craftsmen worked at settlements. Pottery kilns at Lupka and a jewellery shop support this theory. and handiwork the villages provided



on Castle Hill  
Agricultural  
production of  
for a prince court.

burial grounds which have according to Christianity only skeleton graves are known from Nitra territory and its surroundings. Significant terraced burial sites are on Lupka and Dolné Krškany. Graves spread among the objects were discovered at Mikov dvor, a barbican on Martin Hill and on Castle Hill. The more luxury ones stored vessels, jewellery and weapons, and often articles of everyday use, metal tools and tools made of bones and horns.

centuries later. Scepticism on presence of pre-Great Moravian architecture and settlements in the 9<sup>th</sup> century was overcome only when renewed research works in 1980s discovered use of older construction segments in the Great Moravian forts and on the walls of Roman edifices, so already in the early half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century a stone edifice, church or palace stood there. Existence of the Pribina's Church on Castle Hill supports a fact that it was dedicated to St. Emeram and this patronage has not been changed to present day. Quantity of stone debris used to build later buildings (walls from the 11<sup>th</sup> century) within the Castle indirectly confirm existence of another edifice dating to the latter half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Similarly, foundations of a later edifice identified as Pribina's Church have been discovered under a Roman church on Martin Hill. However, it appeared that this connection has not been sufficiently supported. A coin from a grave discovered under a top of the altar of the later church, which served to estimate the date, has not been definitively specified. Its date setting varies from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indirect evidence of stone edifice, possibly a church dating from pre-Roman period, come also from a former settlement at Na Vříšku, Kupecká Street where a little stone block and mortar together with pottery dating

## Nitra – Castle and Martin Hill

### THE OLDEST CHURCHES IN NITRA

The oldest church in Nitra, supported by written documents, was consecrated by Archbishop Adalram from Salzburg in 828 for Prince Pribina. An evidence on his existence on Nitra territory brings a letter The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians (to Christianity) dating around 871. It does not tell where it stood and how it looked like but declares importance of a very act of its construction and consecration. Initially, a late-Baroque chapel standing in the south-east part of the

cathedral system on Nitra Castle used to be indicated as Pribina's Church. The results of a research in 1930s showed that it was built several

**?** Did you know that the oldest church in Nitra was the Pribina's Church consecrated in 828?



to the 9<sup>th</sup> until the early half of the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries were discovered within the premises under the graves from the 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. It could have been a predecessor of the Church of St. Michael depicted on a veduta from 1562 in place of today's Baroque chapel with the same dedication. One-nave church with a semicircular apse dedicated to St. Stephan stands within a market place already known at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Párovská Street). It was built at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries at the latest; dated after the coin of Vladislav I (1109 – 1125) from a burial site.

## Nitra – Old Town and Lužianky Borough

### AFTER THE GREAT MORAVIA DECLINE

Destiny of Nitra Region after the Great Moravia decline is not very clear. Its administrative and organisational competence is not known. It is possible that before 1000, Nitra became part of a political system of Czech princes. The Czech prince Boleslaus II had such expansion tendencies. A Hungarian chronicler Anonymus had recorded presence of Premyslid garrison and a Czech captain at Nitra Castle. Also Polish impact is suggested based on aggression of Boleslaus the Brave at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in the south-west Slovakia. Written and archaeological sources document arrival of old Magyar tribes which started to occupy mostly areas sparsely occupied by Slavs. Chroniclers recorded nothing on direct settlement they only recorded their raids throughout Europe. Allegedly, they were people divided into seven tribes. Each tribe had its own chieftain (writes a chronicle *Gesta Hungarorum*). Archaeological sites tell more. According to them semi-nomadic Magyars would settle in stages. In the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century warriors with their families would arrive and then in the latter half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century the rest of community would come. Some discoveries are from Nitra territory too. It is a grave of a horseman in Nitra-Mlynárce and a burial site in Lužianky. In these graves the following objects have been found: arrows with rhomboid points, ironwork from arrow quivers, parts of harness – shackles, bridles, buckles as well as various bronze, silver and gold-plated tin appliqué from clothing of circular, rhomboid or



shield shape often with plant ornamentation, also bracelets made of wire, tin or knitted and etc. In Nitra and its close surroundings several other burial sites from the previous Great Moravian Period still functioned and the settlements did not disappeared violently (e.g. burnt down). It shows that the Magyar penetration was not so aggressive as it was assumed. Earlier Slavic people still lived there. It seems that its chieftains cooperated with Old Magyar leaders. Thus military conflicts were minimized as much as possible. Settlement in this period is documented with findings from settlements (Šindolka, Chrenová, Mikov dvor, Janíkovce, Párovské Háje) and skeleton burial sites (Nitra – open theatre below Zobor, Šindolka, Mlynárce, Horné Krškany and among newer a burial site in Nitra at Školská Street).

Decline of the Great Moravian Empire did not automatically mean complete destruction of Principality of Nitra. Nitra has not lost its importance neither in the 11<sup>th</sup> nor in the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries when actually became an appanage principality within the Hungarian Kingdom.

An extraordinary discovery in Ivanka pri Nitre – so called Cap of Monomach – is closely connected with the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Seven tall little boards where Emperor Constantine Monomach with his wife, sisters and dancers are depicted were probably one unit. Scenes on the crown may be interpreted as a religious-political image of the Empire, dancers represent triumph over enemy and plants symbolise an Emperor's garden as a new paradise.





## Nitra Castle

Since prehistoric times people had benefited from strategic position of Castle Hill. As early as the end of Early Stone Age (40 000 – 9 000 BC) hunters of Late Palaeolithic Age found a shelter in a little cave under the present palace. Traces of settlements of the first farmers, Neolithic Period (6<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC) can be found. In the Bronze Age (2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC) a fortified village stood there, occupying the whole Castle Hill. It were Celts who rediscovered this site; their developed culture was destroyed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC by Dacians who built a fort on Castle Hill. After the Celtic-Dacian settlement had been forcibly terminated at the turn of centuries, Castle Hill remained deserted.

Beginning of continuous settlement of a castle goes back to the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Remains of the semi earth-houses around the Vazul's Tower and several graves remind them. Extraordinary position of a seat of

Principality in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century was documented by mortar and stone decorated blocks as well as debris both under and in a body of a Great Moravian wall which indicate existence of a significant edifice

**?** Did you know that in a cave below the present Nitra Castle hunters had already lived 40 000 – 9 000 years BC?

(palace, church ?) at the top of Castle Hill. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a massive fort with initially palisade walls was built. In the latter half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a rampart with a stone wall from outside and inside and wide of 5 m played defensive role. A building made of small limestone blocks dates to the same period. Their number suggests that bigger edifice (church and a palace ?) stood at the top of the hill. The little blocks were used the second time to build a new rampart, a wide cellular wall in the half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and then again when rebuilding the church at the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. They have also been discovered in the walls of a late-Baroque chapel and the Lower Church. The oldest part of the Cathedral of St. Emeram, the Lower Church, stood already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. During the large-scale rebuilding, the church was extended towards the east, a part which is called today Late-Roman Chapel. Interior was rebuilt too. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the church had probably two storeys. The Upper Church was added and a layout of the Lower Church dramatically changed after the Castle was damaged by the Matúš Čák's army at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. When rebuilding a chancel of the lower nave in the Gothic style sedilia in side walls were added and continued into the chapel. Both the Upper and Lower Churches were connected with several passages in walls. They were bricked up later. Other construction alterations of sacral complex into present appearance followed in the 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Zobor Monastery

Beginnings of the Monastery of St. Hyppolite which ruins stand to present day on the west side of the Zobor Hill relate according to historians to beginning of Nitra Bishopric in 880. Another opinion prefers beginning of the monastery by St. Stephan at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Its existence is already documented by several written sources. The oldest Hungarian legend from the 11<sup>th</sup> century on life of Zobor's Benedictines and hermits, Sts. Svorad and Benedikt is part of such sources. Both lived as saints, one on Zobor Hill, the other on Skalka close to Trenčín Town. The author of this legend, later Bishop in Pécs, Maurus describes events in contemporary literary form. It is the first Hungarian and Slovak legend and the first Latin-written literary work describing our land, a particular area around Nitra and Trenčín. Both monks were canonised

in 1083 among the first Hungarian saints. At the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, they were made the patrons of Nitra See and co-patrons of See Cathedral and has remained the patrons to this day. Their remains have been buried there (new archaeological discoveries indicate this fact).

According to Czech chronicler Kozmas, the hermits lived on Zobor Hill already in times of Svätopluk's rein. In 1099, the chronicler recorded two events on mysterious disappearance of King Svätopluk, the second one relates to Zobor Monastery, "a place on a hillside of Zobor Hill... where three hermits... had built a church..." Another two documents referring to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Hyppolite are the Zobor Letters dating to 1111 and 1113. They register the property of the monastery after military raids from Moravia and, at the same time, document existence of the villages in monastery ownership before the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Benedictine Monastery belonged to the significant centres of religious and cultural life in Hungary. It had owned large premises from Danube to Turiec and at Považie Region. General decline of Benedictine order in Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century had also impact on Zobor Monastery decline. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a new Camaldolese monastery (hermit order) was built at its place. Archaeological researches carried out until now confirmed stone foundation masonry and medieval edifices remaining from the older Benedictine Monastery and a coin from 1200 – 1246 (Friesacher Pfennig) related to it. Its existence in the 11<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries suggests

*Did you know  
that the mortal  
remains of Sts. Svorad  
and Benedikt are  
buried in Nitra  
Cathedral?*

medieval pottery. Several parts of the Calmadolese Monastery, particularly monks' dwellings have been researched in more details. Monks' cells consisted of four rooms separated by

a corridor. One would serve as a chapel, other with a stove would be for living, the rest would be used as a storage room and a cellar. Extraordinary is a set of acquired ceramics and glass vessels from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Archaeological research localized sites with preserved remains of the medieval and Baroque monastery, however, it has not supported its existence in the Great Moravian Period so far.

## Church of St. Michael in Dražovce

The Church of St. Michael in Dražovce dominates Nitra surrounding landscape. It stands at the top of limestone tongue of land above the village on its northern edge. Upper plain of the tongue is protected from three sides by artificially made rampart. The church with a rectangular nave and a small pyramid shaped tower has a right-angled porch and a semicircular shrine at the south side. A total exterior length of the building is almost 10 m. In the western part of the edifice used to be a platform on pillars so the building was originally thought to be a squire gallery church dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Different opinions classify the building as pre-Roman or Great Moravian edifice. We have no written record on the edifice itself, however, it is known that it was within Zobor Convent competence.

It was the first detailed classification of the church by the well-known architect V. Mecel in 1930s according to which the building was classified as the rural squire church dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century while the author assumed that the building was built of quarry stone and large stone blocks at the corners. Archaeological and ongoing architectonic and art-historical research provided more information, which so far are not the final. Archaeological research in the 1940s acknowledged existence of a cemetery, 55 graves mostly from the 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Only some graves were dating to the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Apart from valuable set of jewellery and ornamentations a habit to cover medieval graves with stone blocks was discovered.



Archaeological research in the 1980s at first aimed at building surroundings discovered the beginnings of burials at the cemetery already in a half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and brought interesting information on the church development. Two construction stages have been demonstrated dating before the present Roman building. The first one was built in a half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. In the Middle Age, one even bigger addition (southern) to the church with two construction stages formed the part of the building; based on connection with the graves at the churchyard cemetery, it is dated to the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> centuries and probably until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The next Roman additions were made of bricks (e.g. addition to the shrine, a gallery). More than 400 graves underwent research at the cemetery; most of them date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, less to the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and only several to the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.



**The Nitra Evangeliary**

## Nitra – Old Town

### MEDIEVAL NITRA

In the last third of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a new state system started to form – Hungarian Kingdom. Nitra Town became a seat of appanage princes from Arpad House, a duchy, which persisted until the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was a period of economic boom for Nitra Town. The dukes preferred their own interior policy, their power supported by their own army, had their own coins struck and helped to increase the importance of the Zobor Monastery.

Dating to the Crusade Period, a record on Nitra Town from 1096 has been preserved when the crusaders travelling from the West to the East plundered Jewish villages. One of such groups led by Folkmar from Orleans attacked a Jewish settlement close to Nitra; however, Nitra forces “did not let them neither plunder nor kill Jewish people” and fought off the crusaders. A commander was probably killed.

Very special are the Zobor Letters dating to 1111 and 1113 preserved in original copies. The texts are written on parchment sheets in Latin. The first Zobor Letter dates to 1111 and it is a document where King Coloman (1095 – 1116) acknowledges a result of investigation of a conflict between the monks of Benedictine order from St. Hyppolyte Abbey on the Zobor Hill and the king’s collectors of custom duties and tolls regarding the right of the Abbey to get one third of revenues from all tolls in Nitra, Trenčín and along the River Váh. The document states the names of notable citizens of Nitra Town and officials, among which were e.g. former Nitra district chiefs (Bukven, Una, Bača), the oldest known reeve in Nitra Peregrín, dean of Nitra Canonry Lambert, and etc. A reference to a teacher Viliam proves existence of regular school education. It acknowledges existence of the Zobor Monastery, tells on king’s toll collectors in Nitra and introduces many precious information on situation in those days.

## MEDIEVAL NITRA



The second Zobor Letter dates to 1113. In this document King Coloman acknowledged old land ownership of the Zobor Benedictines in more than seventy villages of the West and Central

Slovakia. The villages stated in the list have their oldest historical record of their names in it (the following villages are mentioned Bojnice, Prievidza, Kláštor pod Znievom and etc.). Both letters are listed in NHL and the originals are stored in the See Archive of Nitra Bishop's Seat at Nitra Castle.

High concentration of population persists until the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Then, settlement network starts to change significantly and gradually the population cumulates into medieval villages (Janíkovce, Mlynárce, Párovské Háje, Chrenová, Hrnčiarovce, Štitáre and etc.) except of a central part of Nitra.

At the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, bishopric is renewed. Shortly after the Tartars raids, the king grants Nitra privileges of a free royal town. Archaeological research documented hundreds buildings and graves from all over present Nitra Town. Density of population and the burial sites especially in Old Town and at foot of Zobor Hill are still amazing (burial sites – the Castle, Kupecká, Školská, Párovská, Piaristická Streets, and etc).

11<sup>th</sup> century events related to Nitra are also described in the oldest Hungarian Illustrated or Illuminated Chronicle aimed at history of Hungary in the 6<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest mention of Nitra in 1048 recalls installation of Nitra border duchy, one third of the Hungarian Kingdom, which

was given to the future successor to the throne as appanage. Such “co-ruling” of Hungarian kings with Nitra appanage dukes lasted until 1106. Another record on Nitra from 1074 is associated with a battle at Váci between the armies of King Salmon and dukes Ladislav and Géza where battle arrays of duke Ladislav of Nitra are mentioned, and also a siege of Nitra Castle by Salmon's army. Illuminated Chronicle was made in 1358 and its author is supposed to be a canon Mark from Kált.

During 1288 – 1848 Nitra became the vassal village of Nitra bishops. After military conflicts – invasion of Premyslid Otakar II (1271) and Moravian duke Svätopluk (1273), Nitra development starts to drop down, probably also due to limitation of certain privileges. Since the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Nitra Bishop is also a district chief. The town itself, except of the Castle and its surroundings had relatively archaic or suburban character. The veduta from 1562 showing the Old Town with only minimum number of brick or stone houses acknowledges this fact. Archaeological findings from developed Middle Ages document a generally standard material culture – pottery, iron tools, and etc. Unique discovery is a set of tiles from a stove discovered during research at Mostná Street.

*Did you know that both original copies of the Zobor Letters are stored in the See Archive of Nitra Bishop's Seat at Nitra Castle?*



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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF NITRA

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