

Hypothetical reconstruction of a late ancient manor house at Podunajské Biskupice

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Introduction

The remains of a late ancient Germanic manor house dated to the last third of the fourth century AD, unearthed at the location Križovatka in the village Podunajské Biskupice at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018, is one of the most unique discoveries in decades.

Ancient manor house at Podunajské Biskupice

The archaeological excavation unearthed the remains of a Germanic farmyard, which formed part of a larger settlement. The size of the excavated area was around 48 x 58 m. The farmyard was enclosed by a wooden fence, which went into the depth of 40 cm from the point where it was recorded. The fence had probably enclosed the yard on all four sides, but in the southeast, east and northeast only fragments of it were detected. In front of the northern, eastern and southern sides of the enclosure we recorded a system of a large number of irregularly arranged pits of various sizes and depths. The pits were relatively shallow, around 15-20 cm from the point where they were recorded. Most of them respected one other – they formed three parallel rows – but some of them were in superposition. Since both the fence and the pits were rather shallowly sunken in the ground, we may assume that they served only to demarcate the area within the settlement, and were not remains of a fortification system.

The inner structure of the farmyard was formed by six wooden rectangular buildings, whose foundations have survived in the form of trenches and postholes. Stone was used only to support the columns of the portico in Buildings I and III. These were arranged along the inner sides of the fence, with a courtyard left in the middle of the farmyard. The superpositions of buildings II and III, and V and VI attest to at least two building phases of the farmyard. The earlier building phase includes building VI, which was disturbed by the portico of building V, and building II, which had a trench disturbed by a posthole from the portico of building III. Since the fill of both the trenches and the postholes contained a minimum of finds, it is not possible to provide an exact dating of the time frame between the two building phases. However, the time frame should not be too broad, as the accompanying finds from the whole area of the settlement are homogeneous and date to a relatively short period at the end of the 4th century (Hrnčiarik and Horňák, 2018, pp. 130-137).

Roman-style residences on the territory of Slovakia

The architecture of the farmyard differs from the standard Germanic settlements, which have buildings with halls or sunken-featured pit-houses. Aristocratic manor house in Podunajské Biskupice is built in wood, but its overall layout, the principles of symmetry and axiality predetermining the arrangement of the buildings, and the large square colonnade buildings are architectural features and principles rooted in the tradition of ancient architecture. It seems that both the architect who designed the complex and the builder who raised it came from the Roman world south of the Danube, and not from the native barbarian environment.

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The phenomenon of Roman-style residences on the territory of Slovakia is known from the turn of the eras (Bratislava-Castle) throughout the Roman period (Bratislava-Dúbravka) to Late Antiquity (Milanovce-Velký Kýr and in particular Cífer-Pác). In Bratislava-Dúbravka, Velký Kýr and Cífer-Pác, the farmyards were built during several phases. Unlike in Podunajské Biskupice, they were later rebuilt in stone. However, their buildings from the wooden or earth-and-timber phases bear resemblance to the buildings on the studied site (Hrnčiarik, 2013, pp. 209-216). The Germanic farmyard in Podunajské Biskupice was settled for a relatively short period of time. Even though its structure resembles that of the farmyard in Cífer-Pác, it was not rebuilt in stone, and after a short while was abandoned by its owner of unknown reasons.

The hypothetical reconstruction of Germanic manor house

The hypothetical reconstruction of the Germanic manor house is a result of an intensive cooperation between the archaeologists who conducted the excavation and Studio 727 in Bratislava. The purpose of this contribution is to present the process of reconstruction with emphasis on the specifics of fourth-century wooden architecture. The basic analytic tool for documentation of terrain indicators or archaeological features represented photogrammetric documentation. This was done by a combination of vertical and oblique drone images from a height about 20 m. The obtained photogrammetric model (produced in the AGISOFT software) was georeferenced into the coordinate system SJTS-SK. This allowed us to create precise DEM and comprehensive plans of the German manor house. A simplified model was created and approved by a team of research authors. Subsequently, we incorporated the comments and gradually clarified the individual construction details of the building. After then as object was approved, the texturing phase came. We searched for analogous examples of textures used on other archaeological objects. Textures were edited in Photoshop. Subsequently, these textures were applied to the materials of the individual parts of the model (wood, clay plaster and reed).

A model supplied by archaeologists was used to create the surrounding terrain. The whole terrain model was combined into one whole and then rendered in Redshift software. Rendered images were edited in Photoshop, where background was added. From the rendered images we selected the most suitable for the publication.

As mentioned above, only column pits and foundation gutters were kept. We took as an analogous locality of Cífer - Pác in Slovakia, which was discovered in 1969-1980 (Varsik, 2014, p. 141). Plans of three buildings have similar ground plan as in Podunajské Biskupice. The three buildings had a forward portico with a mast on each side. The largest building had a portico of only two longer sides of the building. We used a saddle roof for reconstruction. When designing roofing we chose reed. We excluded wooden shingle roofs and ceramic tiles because they were found in the excavation. To complete the real reconstruction we use also another analogous example of buildings, with are presented at the Freilichtmuseum Learn in Austria (www.freilichtmuseum-elsarn.at).

The article is about the principles and procedures used in the hypothetical reconstruction of an inconspicuous court in Podunajské Biskupice (Slovakia).

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Figures



Fig. 1. Germanic manor house at Podunajské Biskupice (© Horňák-Hrnčiarik).

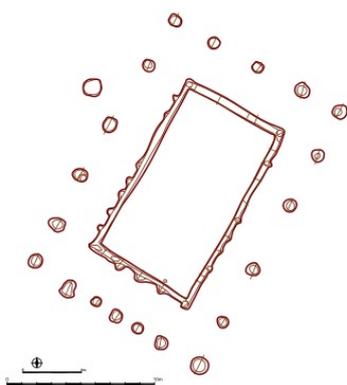


Fig. 2. Ground plan of Building I (© Horňák-Hrnčiarik).



Fig. 3. Hypothetical reconstruction of the Building I (© Horňák-Hrnčiarik-Minaroviech).

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