

EDITORIAL

This issue steps slightly outside the usual stream of *Archeologické Rozhledy*. To facilitate debate on the economic role of early medieval agglomerations, their provisioning, and their relationships with surrounding settlements, we have prepared a special issue bringing together five discussion papers under the title ‘Socio-economic relationships between centres and hinterlands in Great Moravia and beyond’.

The special issue was initiated by Jiří Macháček, who submitted his paper in spring 2025. In doing so, he returned to a line of argument he had followed in *Archeologické Rozhledy* 3/2015 with his article ‘On the subject of Great Moravia, early medieval archaeology and archaeologists in general’. At that time, much of the heat of the debate was around the statehood of the entity we call Great Moravia, sometimes even the Great Moravian Empire. For laypersons outside the archaeological and historical business, the distinction may look like the sort of problem capable of disturbing little more than the dust on library shelves. But yet, questions of Great Moravian statehood become considerably less esoteric once we realise that Great Moravia is often recruited as an instrument of current politics and state legitimacy.

More than a decade ago, Macháček argued that the political entity spanning Moravia, western Slovakia, and other parts of Central Europe for much of the 9th century lacked many attributes of a state, let alone an empire. One strand of his arguments concerned the market. Great Moravia, he argued, was only weakly commercialised; its major agglomerations were not ordinary market centres, and the transfer of goods between centres and hinterland was governed predominantly by political dependency, reciprocity, and redistribution rather than by an integrated market system.

In his piece in the present issue, Macháček develops this earlier position and frames it more explicitly around three competing models of how Great Moravian agglomerations were provisioned and how they related to their hinterlands. He concludes that the centres were not agriculturally autarkic, but neither were they provisioned principally through markets. Centres depended materially on surrounding rural settlements, but food and other resources reached them predominantly through redistribution, reciprocity, obligations, and negotiated relationships rather than simply through farmers selling surplus at market.

A more conspicuous difference between the 2015 and 2026 papers is formal but by no means trivial. The present article, together with the responses that follow it, is published in English. This makes it accessible to a much wider scholarly audience, and the debate does not become entrenched within national borders. In my opinion, historical archaeology in Central Europe has too often been partitioned along national and linguistic boundaries, which can make scholarly debates inward-looking, limiting field progress and new views. Yet the questions raised in this issue are hardly confined to Moravia, Bohemia, or Slovakia. They should be relevant to scholars of early medieval centres well beyond the former territory of Great Moravia, both to the west and east. Nor need we stop at chronological boundaries. Researchers studying La Tène oppida or proto-urban centres of the Bronze Age, for example, face essentially the same deceptively simple question: who fed all those people, and how?

Let’s see what the other contributors make of it.

Michal Hlavica challenges Macháček's view by defending the market system. He argues that redistribution, agricultural self-sufficiency, and market exchange need not be mutually exclusive but could have operated simultaneously. In his model, major centres formed relatively discrete market zones, reflected particularly in regional ceramic distribution. He also rejects the idea that top-down control was incompatible with markets. Political elites could participate in and profit from exchange, including through control over imported commodities. Markets thus need not imply a fully monetised economy but could have provided one mechanism for circulating agricultural produce, craft goods, and imports between centres and their hinterlands.

Michaela Látková addresses the economic role of Great Moravian centres particularly from the perspective of archaeobotany. Building on her analyses of material from Mikulčice-Valy, she presents centres as predominantly consumer sites dependent on their hinterlands. Rather than arguing for full self-sufficiency, Látková proposes partial local production combined with external supply. Archaeobotanical evidence suggests organised crop processing within the agglomeration and cultivation in its immediate floodplain surroundings. Látková therefore reconstructs a decentralised and ecologically adapted system in which centres had their own production capacities but remained functionally integrated with a heterogeneous hinterland through complementary supply and exchange relationships.

Zbigniew Robak brings another, out-of-centre perspective to the debate, despite still holding the ground of Great Moravia. Drawing on his research at the Bojná-Valy hillfort in Western Slovakia, he demonstrates how easily models built around the most prominent centres can obscure the diversity of the past. Bojná lacks the settlement hinterland expected of a classical agglomeration and instead displays a strongly military and logistical character that suggests Bojná-Valy was a specialised node of control. Its case therefore questions the transferability of models derived from the Moravian core and points towards an organisation that was more functionally differentiated than its most conspicuous centres might suggest.

The piece by Ivo Štefan shifts the discussion in space and time, though not into an entirely different economic world. Drawing mainly on written sources from 11th- and 12th-century Bohemia, he examines how centres were provisioned and uses this better-documented setting to reconsider Great Moravian models. Štefan rejects any single supply mechanism and proposes overlapping strategies combining local production, rents and dues from estates, kin-based provisioning, and market exchange. He also reconceptualises the hinterland as a network of property relations and commodity flows that could extend far beyond the immediate surroundings of a centre. Unlike Macháček, Štefan assigns a clearer role to markets, arguing that exchange could function without coinage, while many inhabitants of agglomerations were probably still involved in agricultural production.

As editor, I would like to thank all the authors for their submitted articles, which demonstrate how productive disagreement can be when facts and arguments, rather than emotions, govern the debate. Readers familiar with the history of *Archeologické Rozhledy* may remember that its discussion pages have not always been quite so temperate. It gives hope that scholarly debates in Central European archaeology will set the right course for the future.

Václav Vondrovský