



## Early Slavic Pit-dwelling Settlement

IRN 15512	Murska Sobota – Nova Tabla archaeological site
<i>Location</i>	Murska Sobota
<i>Site type</i>	Settlement
<i>Excavated area</i>	366,000 m <sup>2</sup>
<i>Date</i>	4000 BC–800 AD
<i>Period</i>	Neolithic to Early Middle Ages
<i>Excavation director</i>	Mitja Guštin
<i>Date of excavation</i>	1999–2003

The site at Nova Tabla is located to the south of Murska Sobota in an intensively cultivated area damaged by a flooded gravel pit. The fields around the artificial lake, ploughed to a depth of 30 cm, are located by a former river bank. The gravel of the river bank extends into the ploughsoil in some places, while in others it is hidden deep beneath the surface. The geological layers at the site occur in the following stratigraphic order: river gravel, yellow or reddish clay, dark grey clay layer, yellow or brown sandy loess in some places and dark brown ploughsoil on the top. The gently rolling plain that is now divided by the motorway is aptly named Ravninsko (Lowland), the term being applied to this part of Prekmurje.

The Dobel stream wound its way through the Nova Tabla area as late as the Holocene, whilst a now defunct tributary flowed to the north of it. Settlement was focused on the banks of both streams as early as the Neolithic period and continued through the Bronze and Iron Ages, during the Roman occupation and into the Early Middle Ages. The remains of an extensive Early Medieval settlement were the most important discovery during archaeological excavation at Nova Tabla. These remains bear witness to Slavic settlement between the end of the 6th and the 9th century. Structures that can be attributed to the first settlement wave of Slavic immigrants up to the middle of the 7th century are particularly common. They comprised the core of the settlement that subsequently expanded to the west. Only the structural remains that survived beneath the ploughsoil are available for its reconstruction. The original ground

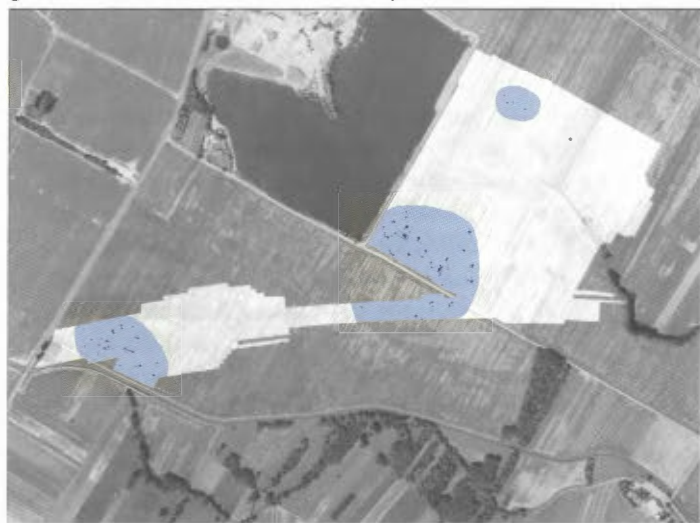


▲ View of the site (Photograph by M. Guštin)

◀ View of the site in September 2003 and its ideal reconstruction

surface of the settlement has been destroyed by deep ploughing, but the lower part of the pit dwellings, post-holes and storage pits survive, because they were cut deep into the subsoil.

A group of three pit dwellings and two pits was selected to illustrate life in an early Slavic settlement, located in the shelter of an oak wood close to the Dobel stream. They were cut into the area with soft and sandy yellow loess, which differs considerably from the clay or gravel subsoil in the immediate vicinity. Black outlines



Plan of the excavated settlement remains from the Early Middle Ages

of pits with charcoal-rich soil fills were clearly visible after the removal of the ploughsoil. Numerous grey and yellowish red burnt stones were discovered in them. The pit dwellings had characteristic oval pit ground plans, 5–6 m long and 2.5–3 m wide. Their surviving depths vary, ranging from 0.15 m to 0.50 m and sometimes even more than 1 m.

The structures had no extant special building and structural elements, with the exception of one pit dwelling. A semi-circular niche-like extension containing a hearth at its base was discovered by the north-eastern wall of this pit dwelling. It was made of a layer of fist-size cobbles, covered by a layer of burnt red clay. A charcoal-filled pit was found in front of the hearth inside the pit dwelling. It was probably intended for removing the ash from the hearth.

Pit dwellings were very common in the first millennium AD, particularly in barbarian Europe. They were used as dwellings and for storage, as well as workshops. They consisted of a sunken pit and postholes, which supported the roof structure.



Jar  
(Photograph by T. Lauko)

The walls were made of wattle and daub. The ridged roofs that generally reached the ground were thatched with reed or straw. Various types of pit dwellings are known from Slavic settlements. They may have square, rectangle, oval, round or irregular plans.

The shape of the pits from Nova Tabla, as well as those from Spodnje Hoče near Maribor, indicate that they belong to the oval type of pit dwellings. They were common mainly in the north-western parts of the Slavic territory and appeared in the earliest period, in the sec-



A pit dwelling under excavation (Photograph by M. Guštin)

ond half of the 6th and during the 7th century. An open hearth was one of their characteristic features. These pit dwellings had no supporting roof structures sunk in earth, which is otherwise self-evident in pit dwellings and is indicated by numerous postholes. However, it is posited that these pit dwellings had a light tent-shaped roof made of reed set on a framework of light poles stuck into the ground around the sunken pit.

The earliest Slavic pottery at the Nova Tabla site consists of numerous wide-bodied jars and round raised-edged platters or baking trays. Other vessels were probably made of wood, leather or dried gourds and have not survived. The excavated finds include some

iron artefacts: knives, scissors and an arrowhead, as well as some tiny glass beads. Some clay spindlewhorls that were used as weights for spinning were also found.

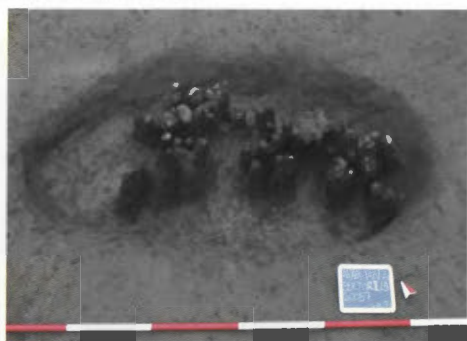
The rare remains of animal bones belonged mostly to domestic animals: pigs, cattle, aurochs and sheep or goat. Two cattle bone fragments indicate



Platter  
(Photograph by T. Lauko)

that cattle size was on average the same as that of Roman cattle and larger than the Early Medieval cattle known from contemporary sites. Traces of chopping and cutting are discernible on the bones.

Several factors bear witness to the Slavic ethnicity of the Early Medieval inhabitants of the settlement at Nova Tabla near Murska Sobota: the location of the settlement in a lowland area beside a stream; a series of characteristic residential structures and outbuildings – pit dwellings without posts, with hearths located in niches;



The three phases of excavation of the pit dwelling with hearth– sz 2  
(Photograph by M. Guštin)

characteristic hand-made, porous, undecorated pottery, above all jars and baking trays; the early date of the finds to the end of the 6th or 7th century. This is based largely on analogies with pottery from Slovakia and the absolute dating of the settlement structures by radiocarbon ( $C^{14}$ ) analysis.

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Reconstruction of part of the Slavic settlement at Nova Tabla near Murska Sobota, from the occupation period c. 600 AD (Photograph by K. Stare)

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#### References

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