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COVER—Beehive-shaped kilns and their chimneys on Georgia Vitrified Brick & Clay Company site in Campania near Harlem. Picture from Bill Baab #1462 August, GA. Story begins on page 3
Marián Čurný: Brief history of brick-making in Slovakia and signed bricks from Nitra.
Journal of the International Brick Collectors Association 27/1, Loveland, OH (USA) 2009, s. 30-33.
Hello,

I am almost for a one year member of IBCA and this is my first time when I want to publish in Journal of IBCA. I come from Slovakia, Europe—from the town Nitra where I work as an archaeologist. In these days I am finishing the work of my dissertation which is about brick from medieval and post-medieval Slovakia. Its name is “Brick as building material of medieval and post-medieval architecture in Slovakia. View of an archaeologist”. The article which I want to present in Journal is about signed bricks from the 18th to 20th century from the demolished buildings of Mostna Street in Nitra. From the period of about two hundred years we have about 30 different brick-signs. I hope that this article will be useful for readers of Journal.

Best regards,

Marian Curny, marian.curny@gmail.com, http://www.laterarius.eu

Brief history of brick-making in Slovakia and signed bricks from Nitra
by Marian Curny

The paper deals with one of omitted artefacts that are characteristic for modern time houses and other types of buildings in Slovakia—with bricks. Together with featuring of importance and age of signed bricks, which were revealed during several seasons of archaeological excavations at the plots of ground at Mostna Street in Nitra (Figure 1), which are presented in the paper, the space is given also to a brief description of brickmaking production on the territory of present-day Slovakia: From the 1st century AD, when Roman legionnaires brought this knowledge to territories lying to the north of the Danube, it was abandoned only for a short time in the early medieval period. Solidifying Christianity and arising Hungarian Kingdom gradually created favourable space also for more monumental architecture, in which bricks were ever more naturalized. We can see this first of all in sacral constructions and in regions with natural lack of good building material, stone and timber. First authentic types of bricks were characterized by porousness as a consequence of high content of organic ingredients (so-called chaff-bricks; 12-14th century) as well as by special surface finishing with cannelures or fingertipping (so-called fingertip-bricks; 14-15th century). In connection with development of towns and mainly complicated relations in the early modern society, we can see some specific expressions also in the brickmaking, e.g. gradual and easy stabilization of dimensions, change to full bricks of almost present-day type and signing, marking of bricks. Signs were used for legalizing of brickyard owner, usually secular or church feudalists and towns. This is obvious mostly on stable use of name and title initials (both social and professional). Sign letters were sometimes completed with numerals, which usually represented the year of building. From the 19th century on the signs became an inexpensive advertising, together with using of coats of arms or other stylized depictions. Up to the second half of the 19th century the signs used to be protruding, what was connected with the way of brick production in brickmaking matrices, to where clay was stuffed. Gradual advancement in brickmaking production made the process more industrial—presses, clay crushers, kiln with non-stop working and artificial drying kilns started to be used. The brick signs were impressed now.

Majority of historical buildings in Nitra were built of bricks substantially, and as they are almost without any exception houses from advanced modern era (the 18th-19th centuries), all of the bricks were signed (Figure 2). The bricks from Mostna Street came from this period prevailingly, too. This is documented e.g. by delayed finishing of building works in this northern part of Nitra “Lower town” which also due to missing fortification periodically suffered in turbulences and wars, usually accompanied with fire. Brickmaking production in Nitra was known as soon as at the end of the 16th century, specifically from the year 1579, when the bishop Bornemisa permitted to build a brickmaking kiln to produce bricks for the castle fortification reconstruction. It is probably the lately known brickyard in Tormos (the present-day housing estate of Chrenova) that existed up to the middle of the 20th century. Besides Tormos, episcopal brickyards, which were in the middle of the 18th century undoubtedly signed EN—Episcopatus Nitraensis (the
Nitra bishops, were situated also in villages of Lukacovce and Mocenok. The signs CN—Civitas Nitriensis (the town of Nitra) and CNE (Comes Nepomucius Erdody; comes=count) are evidently from the end of the 18th century. The simple U sign was used to distinguish products of the Uzovic family which originated from Pecenady (western Slovakia) and settled at Kynke near Nitra. However, a range of signs like AM, AN, BZ and ODB is still existing which have not been exactly traced. From the next period an array of variants of industrial brickyards signs is known, variability of which probably reflects competitive fights of brickmakers. Among them David Weiss, Zigmund Vero, Csernyak and the city and Episcopal brickyards have been identified clearly. Their private enterprise could be closed e.g. by the economic crisis in the 1930’s or by the Second World War and following nationalization of their enterprises. Other brick producers have not been reliably proved by archaeological finds, however, we know many of them that existed in Nitra and its vicinity from the 18th century. The bricks from Mostna Street that we have revealed during the excavations document that the building activities at this site culminated at the end of the 19th century and then stopped up to the time of extensive reconstructions in the second half of the 20th century.

“Will Lay Brick For Chewing Tobacco”

By Joe Neußendorfer #712, Levonia, MI

Clearly defined construction wage data for America’s early years are hard to find. However, I recently discovered old writings that said that in Virginia (about 1624) the price of a bricklaying job was fixed at 40 pounds of tobacco ($2.43) per thousand brick.

Early in the seventeenth century daily wages in Massachusetts probably were 3 shillings (73 cents) a day. The pay for bricklayers in New York City was 80 cents a day. In Pennsylvania in 1698 brick masons got between 5 and 6 shillings ($1.00 and $1.20) per day. In the first quarter of the eighteenth century bricklayers received 4 shillings (66.7 cents) per day. In 1712 bricklayers received 6 shillings ($1.00) a day. Wage rates for bricklayers in South Carolina in 1710 were 6 shillings ($1.00) per day. Passing to a later period, mason’s wages in Massachusetts were $1.50 a day in 1795 to $2.00 a day in 1815. In 1847, the bricklayer in New York received from $1.75 to $2.00 a day and worked 10 hours a day six days a week. In 1928 in New York City they received $1.75 an hour and worked 44 hours a week.

Ed: Joe sent a Christmas card which contained this “fun” picture. Notation on the back of photo read, Joe Neußendorfer IBCA #712 with his “Dream Brick.”