

The oldest settlement of the south-west area of Staré Město of Prague – The archaeological research in front of and inside the building no. 246, in Řetězová street no.2

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Prague; early Middle Age; settlement; ceramic; archaeobotanical analysis

The very beginning of the settlement in the area of Staré Město was significantly affected by the original scenery, respectively by the division and accessibility of the field relief. The current state of the archaeological research based sufficiently on the researches within the area of Staré Město has proven the original idea, that the settlement in the area of Staré Město was extending gradually from the river, after the opposite left-bank and, to a certain degree, strait area of Malá Strana's cauldron had began to be an obstacle for a more extensive and dynamic development of the Prague outer bailey. In the second half of the 10th century and after the foundation of Vyšehrad, inhabitants of the Prague outer bailey crossed the Vltava channel for the first time and started to occupy the bank of Staré Město, which was more suitable for the settlement (Hrdlička 1996, 163; 2001, 205). The oldest urban archaeological findings in the cadastral district of Staré Město, mostly the fragments of the ceramic production, are being therefore logically found in the higher concentration in the area alongside the Vltava river channel.

The necessity of the archaeological research that originated in March 2002, was induced by an overall reconstruction of the building no. 246, incl. the reinstallation of existing utility networks outside and inside the building, during which time it was necessary to dig an almost 5 m deep excavation pit to connect the sewer system. The presentation of the results and findings of this research which are integrated into the historical frame is represented in this information panel.

The building involved is situated in the corner position determined by Liliová street (originally called U Anenského kláštera, later Betlémská, Za seminářem, current name settled at the end of the 18th century) and Řetězová street (originally called Kožešnická, it has carried the present name since the 17th century, probably due to crafts development). The building was provided with a house sign, according to which it was called U zlatého zajíce (At the golden hare), and it is also captured in this style in the model by Antonín Langweil from the first half of the 19th century (fig. 1). The building did not have to undergo a radical Renaissance and Baroque renovation, only its forefront facing Liliová street was modified in the spirit of late Classicism.

The first written remark on the building dates back to 1406, when Konstantin of Vechta bought it from the Carthusian monastery. Konstantin was first a provost of Bremen, then of Mělník, and the brother of the archbishop Konrád of Vechta. The building then changed its owner several times. The last transaction stated by Tomek is the purchase of the building by Mikuláš Zvolenský in 1428 from a publican called Jan (Tomek 1866, 84).

In the terms of the construction development, the only remain of the Gothic era is currently a part of the masonry structure of the south basement underneath the entrance hall, and the corresponding masonry of the building's ground floor. The ground area is not original, it is most likely a result of its Renaissance extension, when a small backyard developed at the cost of adjacent Řetězová street (Kašička 1996, 232).

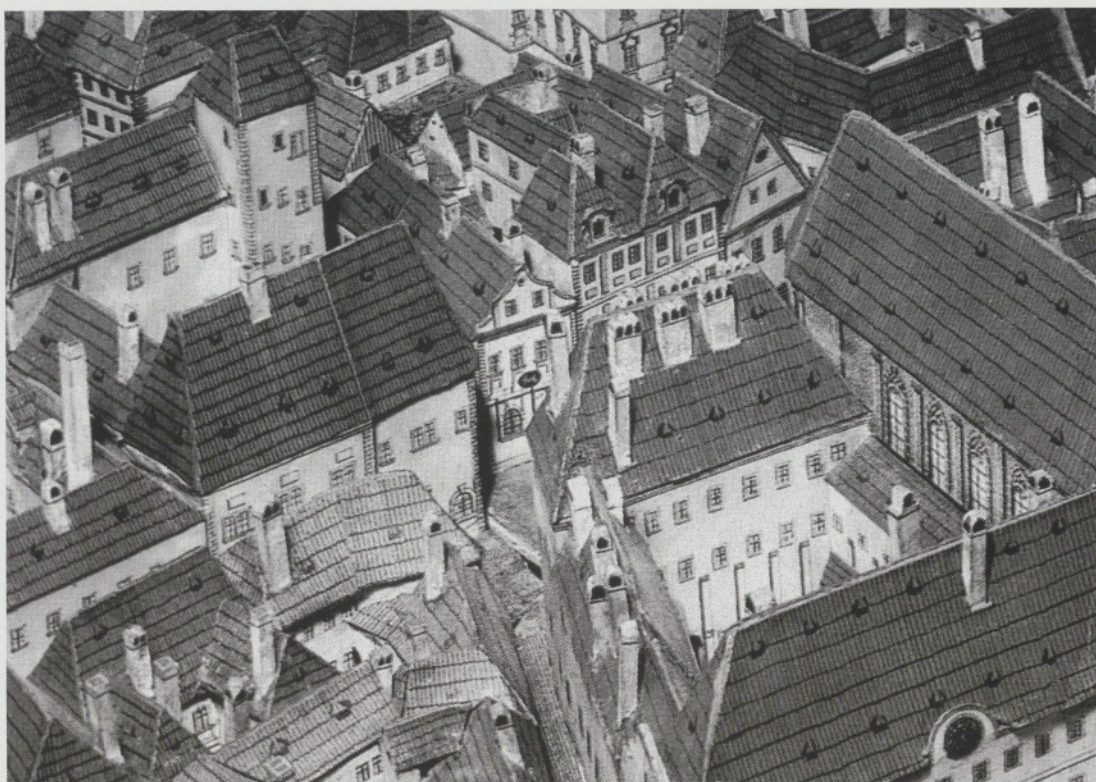


Fig.1: The building no. 246 on the model by Antonín Langweil from the first half of the 19th century.

With regard to the fact, that in principle the written documents cannot be used in order to obtain an image of the factual appearance of Prague, it is consistent, that the nature of the oldest settlement on the right, Old Town bank of the Vltava river is mostly described by single archaeological findings (Dragoun 1996, 12). These, as the documents of construction and workmanship activities and people's presence as such, inseparably relate to the process of the Prague development as a medieval town. The field part of the research has just proven the presence of this oldest horizon represented especially by the objects of the waste nature sunk into loamy-sandy diluvia of the Nebovidy terrace VIIc, the youngest and lowest terrace-like accumulation, whose origin is laid into the Würm glacial era (Kovanda 2001, 93). Its surface became a field, which was formed by the first Old Town occupants as a result of their construction and workmanship activities and manufacturing, which entirely modified its cultural landscape pattern. The stone base of Staré Město consists of soft clay slates of Ordovic Age.

Upon the removal of recent landfills of the current utility networks which reached 1,5 m in depth, an undamaged, intact archaeological

terrain of the 12th–13th centuries was found, exclusively preserved thanks to the fact that situating the 4,5 m deep sewage conduit in the full street length was realised by drifting, not by ordinary digging.

Several objects have appeared in the trimmed lower beds. Their fillings have provided us with altogether homogenous collections of the ceramic fragments with a relatively identical date of origin from the 12th–13th centuries. A total of several dozens of ceramic fragments with or without decoration motifs have been found here. The oldest horizon of our collection is represented by the fragments of the edges of pots with so-called cuplike profiling, which were often used in the territory of Bohemia from the 10th till the first half of the 12th century according to the current findings. This was slowly replaced by a younger type of ceramics in the terms of evolution, lasting from the second half of the 12th century to the first half of the 13th century, the ceramics with so called enforaged edge. Their presence has also been verified within the site in the form of enforaged edges as well as their derivatives. As the relatively youngest in the collection of edges, the so-called upward pulled edges were identified, which were perhaps applied to the pots

of a storing type, whereas the ceramic material contains a micaceous additive and it is sharpened very substantially. A relatively multiple representation in the entire ceramic collection is also provided by the so-called technical bowls, where, beside many fragments, two almost complete pieces are preserved. Their occurrence unlike the above mentioned edge types, continues even in younger periods, therefore in the period following the first half of the 13th century.

The finding of a base-fragment showing a potter's mark seems also relatively remarkable. Its negative was embossed in a potter's pad, thus there is a positive emboss on the pot itself. The mark itself is a simple grid. In the terms of decorative motives we can say that a relatively significant percentage of the obtained ceramic fragments was provided with decorative elements. These are mostly engraved grooves or flutes in the helix, either in single or multiple arrangement, or an engraved circle wave line, again in single or multiple arrangement (in the case of bowl fragments, it is situated on the inside of the edge), which remained a decorative motive during the entire period of walled sites.

The samples for a macro-residual and pollen analysis have been taken from the fillings of the two buildings (indicated by numbers 1 and 3) consisting mostly of brown-black muddy soil

with a significant portion of organic elements. Beside the ceramic findings, a high amount of animal bones was found during the field works, which will be a subject of an osteological analysis. It can only be expressed beforehand, that these are not skeletal complexes, so the most probable interpretation is that these are the remains of food waste.

The numerous findings of slag among the mobile archaeological findings can be considered as specific for the south-west to west part of Staré Músto. It was also similar in the case of the archaeological research in ěetûzová street. A significant volume of individual pieces of slag was obtained from the filling of the individual objects, more detailed determination of which is currently a subject of a professional analysis. With regard to the fact, that similar findings in this area were made during the archaeological research in the past (Betlémské námûstí, around Konvikt), it can be anticipated that the oldest occupants of Staré Músto were already specialised craftsmen most likely concentrated in the compact area alongside the Vltava river (Dragoun 1996, 12).

For the future of the archaeological research, an issue related to the crafts production of the oldest era of Prague in the south-west and west part of Staré Músto, the verification or the refutation of the existing hypotheses seem to be very interesting.

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