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## New data concerning the settlement in the backyard of Týnský court in the Old Town square in Prague

### ANNOTATION

This presentation concerns the results of a rescue excavation of a house plot in the centre of The Old Town of Prague in 2006. In the backyard of a late 19th century tenement house, on a site neighbouring the Old Town square and Ungelt, a unique example of the settlement stratigraphy, dated to the earliest early medieval settlement phase from the 11th to the onset of the 13th century, was preserved. Both are key sites concerning the settlement of the historic centre on the right hand river bank. The excavated features are dominated by numerous negative features representing the original timber buildings, which were replaced in the early 13th century by a Romanesque stone construction built of plaener ashlar masonry. The well preserved condition of the site allowed a rare detailed study of stratigraphy and taphonomy of this area. The new knowledge contributes to the solution of fundamental themes of medievalist research of the genesis of pre-location settlement areas from their origins to their following transformation into high medieval legal towns.

### SUMMARY

During 2006 an excavation was undertaken in advance of the construction of new basements in a narrow, elongated yard belonging to a late 19th century house. The origins of the settlement in this part of town are connected with the process of infilling the Old Town terraces and subsequent foundation of a central market place, most probably towards the end of the 11th century or during the 12th century. Archaeological rescue excavations produced new data concerning mainly the medieval phase of this settlement. Below the current yard surface there was a 1,5m thick layer of heterogeneous dumped material connected with the construction of the currently standing building. The dump covered an almost intact medieval sequence of stratigraphy, with numerous wall fragments from the original housing estate. The oldest stratigraphical complex was a 1–1,5m thick Early Medieval layer covering almost the complete excavated area. In ca 4–5 development horizons numerous superpositions of large features dominated from small pits to larger sunken features, possibly representing houses built of timber and clay. These structural features were covered by highly organic sediments (wood, dung), which formed after their demolition. The frequent presence of pottery fragments in practically every context of the settlement horizon enabled a relatively clear chronological sequence for the development of the site from the end of the 11th century (sporadic presence of calix shaped rims and archaic bloated rims dominating), with extensive activity during the 12th century (classic bloated and upwards turned up rims prevailing). Mainly towards the end of the Early Medieval Ages the settlement activity was of such intensity that the ground levels rose by more than 1m in 100 years. At the north side of the yard an ashlar wall, dug into the Early Medieval layers and running from west to east, was discovered. This fragment of the wall was composed of four neatly faced courses of plaener blocks on a foundation built from roughly dressed plaener stone, set with lime mortar. This fragment of wall was ca 7m long and survived to a height of ca 1,36m, including the foundations. The original function of the wall is not completely clear; it could be either a house wall or an enclosure wall to a larger property. The wall can be given a preliminary date, on the basis of the stratigraphical analysis, of sometime in the first half of the 13th century. Subsequent settlement activities could be discerned, but only to a limited extent. Among several base parts of pits there were wall foundations, which could quite securely be associated with deserted buildings in the yard and in the back wing of the once spacious house no. 628, facing the north portal of the church of “The Virgin Mary before Týn”. These activities can be dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. Only in the limited area at the eastern edge of the current yard there were larger, late medieval and early post-medieval building dumps and pebble paving covering the earlier medieval levels. This historically later stratigraphy was radically removed from on most of the plot during the demolition of the previous house and the building of the present standing structure.

**Fig. 1.** Prague 1-Old Town. The excavation area in Týnska lane no. 1064/I marked in black.

**Fig. 2.** Prague 1-Old Town, Týnska lane no. 1064/I, detail from the topographical situation. Excavation area (dark grey) projected onto house no. 628 before demolition (hatched area) and onto the current cadastre plan (pale grey)

areas). Romanesque buildings in black. A: a fragment of an ashlar Romanesque wall, B: Romanesque vaulted space in the corner of the demolished house no. 628. The plan is oriented to the north .

**Fig. 3.** Prague 1-Old Town, Tynska lane no. 1064/I. The excavation area with the orthogonal grid A–N .

**Fig. 4.** Pyrotechnological feature – the bottom part of a pit like forge situated in the lower part of the settlement stratigraphy, dated to the 1st half of the 12ve century (square E) .

**Fig. 5.** Section through the historical layers dated from the 12th – to the fi rst half of the 13th century. At the bottom there is part of a timber and clay house cut into the subsoil, later infi lled and covered by settlement layers with a high organic admixture. At the upper part – evidence of building activities – position of plaener stones and malt debris .

**Fig. 6.** Excavation area with fragments of building constructions. The dating details in the legend .

**Fig. 7.** Drawing of the upper part and the foundations of the ashlar wall (Z02), with stratigraphically older features below the foundation line .

**Fig. 8.** Overall front elevation photogrammetry of the ashlar Romanesque wall with neatly faced courses of plaener blocks at the upper part and roughly dressed plaener stone in the foundations .

**Fig. 9.** Section B–R01 of the lower part of historical layers in the trench B, at a right angle to the ashlar wall Z02. Contexts: 1–subsoil: sandy sediments of the Vltava terrace; 2–sandy soils with organic inclusions – infi ll of sunken features; 3–humus soils – dumping layers; 4–sandy soils with higher content of mortar and plaener debris – building level of the ashlar wall; 5–wall from plaener blocks; 6–sandy clay – fl oor of a timber building; 7–burnt wood covered by building rubble with higher content of plaener and mortar – fi re and building destruction; 8–sandy soils – infi ll of sunken features; 9–sandy soils and building rubble – recent dump .

**Fig. 10.** Development matrix of the fi eld situation in the square B with preliminary interpretation of stratigraphical units, chronological framework and evidence numbers of fi nds assemblages – fi nds bags (in italics). Stratigraphical complexes depicted in colour .

**Fig. 11.** Selection of pottery from contexts associated with the ashlar wall (Z02) – assemblage B–007; assemblages from the dumping layers prior to the ashlar wall (Z020 construction – assemblage B–008, B–030, B–011, B–013, B–012 (in stratigraphical order from the latest to the earliest) .

**Fig. 12.** Selection of small fi nds from the Early medieval settlement horizon: a) an early 12th century fragment of a ceramic nozzle for inserting the bellows into an iron working forge. From the context of the pit like forge (photo by M. Kališek); b) a 12th century small stone spindle-whirl from fi ne reddish slate of Ovruc type. An import from Ukraine region; c) a 12th century fragment of blue glass from a vessel, decorated with gold and enamels. Origins of this product can be sought in the Near East area, probably Byzantine; d) a prick spurs one with a short barb decorated by silver wire and another with a larger conical barb. Together with some fragments of iron horse shoes they show evidence for horsemen in the area of the Old Town square during the 12ve century; e) a massive iron key with a diamond eye and a full shank indicates presence of lockable mechanisms in the Old Town house furnishing in the fi rst half of the 13th century .

*English by Linda and Patrick Foster*