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New discoveries of early medieval roads at Malá Strana in Prague (contribution to the research of the road network of the settlement bellow the Prague castle)

ANNOTATION

Analysis of a large, functionally structured settlement stratigraphy, excavated in the SW corner of Malostranské square lead to characteristics of rare timber roads fragments from the end of the 9th to the end of the 11th century. Timber road surfaces were partially preserved in several levels, their direction was greatly modified with time. The newly discovered cumulation of roads was, in its period, in a strategic position in front of the fortification of the early medieval town. In the vicinity of the site, an entrance possibly existed according to previous research, probably a gate into the fortified suburbium centre, described in the 10th century as “the Prague town.”

SUMMARY

Between the years 2006 and 2008 a thorough rescue archaeological research was conducted on the plot of a former town house no. 260/III (Lesser Town Square, Prague 1). The excavations completely analyzed the significantly undestroyed historical terrains at several places endangered by building activity. The building, the first records of which trace back to the beginning of the 15th century, is situated in the South-East corner of Lesser Town's Square. History of the settlement of this place is fairly older and can be connected to the beginnings of Early Medieval suburbium under the Prague Castle in the centre of nowadays Lesser Town. Approximately 270 m³ of occupation area with an extraordinarily complicated stratigraphy, at times even 4 metres wide, was archaeologically analyzed, and more than 18 500 artefacts were extracted, dating from Early Medieval to Modern Age. Later examined situations had a logical connection to the building development of the house-building process from the period of High Middle Ages to the the latest alterations in the 1st half of the 19th century. Various recessed buildings, fragments of the oldest masonry build-up area and above all the fortification elements of Lesser Town from the second half of the 13th century were documented. The older layer proved a dynamic settlement usage of the explored area since Early Middle Ages. It is represented by a masive functionally structured settlement strata. Relicts of several wooden road constructions leading in three directions, preserved in some parts in several levels, belonged to exceptional archaeological situations. Periods of their creation and subsequent usage varied. The roads, according to their stratigraphical position as well as finds of pottery, can be generally dated to a space of time from the end of the 9th to the end of the 11th century. The discovery of wooden roads situated in the South-West corner of Lesser Town's Square signifies together with an earlier mosaic of findings a considerable contribution to the knowledge of the structure of communications network of the suburbium of the Prague Castle in Early Middle Ages. The extraordinary contribution lies in the dislocation of the revealed sections of roads found in the strategic position in front of its fortification in the area of a potential entrance, probably a gate into the centre of the suburbium. Their connection to the fortification system is highly probable especially in an association with an earlier find of a masive wooden construction which can be taken into consideration as a strategic point situated under the floor of the cellar of the house no. 259 (Hartig palace). Excavated roads can be connected to several known and archaeologically documented sections of the communications located in Northern and especially Eastern parts of Lesser Town which due to their construction as well as stratigraphical position belong to the given chronological context (Fig. 10). A more detailed study of the shape, gradual transformation and above all total chronology of the development of the whole communications system of Lesser Town's suburbium still remains one of the potential targets of a future archaeological research of the oldest historical centre of Prague.

English by Bohumila Cymbalak Jankovská