

Veronika Staňková

Early medieval cemetery in the Na Perštýně Street

ANNOTATION

Presentation of an early medieval cemetery, discovered in 2012 during an excavation of a canalisation shaft in front of the house No. 347 in the Na Perštýně Street in Prague – Staré Město. The only analogy to the specific arrangement of this cemetery, mainly lining of the gravis with ferrous sandstones blocks and noticeable depth of the grave pits has been found in a nearby cemetery of “foreign merchants” in the Bartolomějská Street, excavated in 1936. In conformity with this analogy and according to the evaluation of the new stratigraphy this find can be most probably dated to the 10th century.

SUMMARY

During a reconstruction of a public space in the Na Perštýně Street a shaft of a new canalisation inlet on the road before the corner house No. 347, to the south above the crossroad with the Bartolomějská Street, was excavated from May to June 2012. In a trench 3,0 × 2,5 m, immediately below two subsequent paving (the surface of the later paving 193,20 to 193,12 m above sea level), high medieval situations were uncovered. Stratigraphy of the later development included remains of the bottom parts of sunken features only, their upper part and the surrounding ground was removed by an unspecified levelling of the surface. A fragment of casted wall foundations of the corner (192,56 to 192,32 m above sea level), presumably connected with the predecessor of the house No. 347/I, was revealed parallel with the historic street line; its mortar character and the historic written evidence dates this wall fragment to the 13th century (the line of the façade was confirmed in the previous year in a trench for underground utilities and in the pit for tree planting in 2012, to the south and north from the described trench). A road stratigraphy was revealed between 192,7 to 192,3 m above sea level (with pottery fragments from the end of the 11th to the 13th century), terminated at the top with firm pebble paving.

The earliest period was represented by remains of four skeleton graves with a specific arrangement, analogical to the 130 m distant discovery from 1936 in the yard of the house No. 310/I in the Bartolomějská Street, with jewellery dated to the 10th century (pertinently to the late 9th century).

The grave H1 was situated in the northeast corner of the trench. The grave pit was dug from 192,00 to 192,18 m above sea level with standing ferrous sandstones raised above this level by ca 0,2 m. The stones were placed inside the grave, which became narrower underneath them forming a stepped edge and then continuing in a right angle to a flat bottom at 191,34 to 191,40 above sea level. The part of the grave in the trench covered an area 1,4 × 1,0 m, the space below the stones was 1,3 × 0,6 m. The pit was dug into subsoil gravel sands, which were reused for its backfilling. The skeleton on remains of a wooden coffin was revealed in the depth of ca 1,4 m below the surface of the cemetery (the head 190,62 m above sea level, pelvis 190,52 m above sea level). Apart from the head facing to the west the body with the right upper extremity and the pelvis were uncovered (anthropological determination: female, 50–60 years).

The grave H2 was revealed in the southeast corner of the trench. From the original lining only stone on the north side of the grave was preserved. The pit was dug from 192,18 m above sea level, the east section of the trench confirmed the stepped side line (191,7 m above sea level) with the bottom at 190,32 to 190,36 m above sea level. The width of the pit below the stone lining reached 0,7 m, the length 1,7 m is unfortunately incomplete. The dead was placed in the depth of ca 1,4 m from the cemetery surface (the head at 190,62 m above sea level, pelvis 190,46 m above sea level, upper extremity 190,40 m above sea level) oriented westeast. Remains of a coffin were not observed. The skull, the body with the upper extremities and the pelvis were anthropologically determined as male 40–50 years. In the rib area on the right side of the body an oval lump of red baked clay (14 × 6 cm) was found.

The grave H3 was revealed in the west part of the trench. The pit was dug from 192,16 m above sea level, the lining stones were placed in its upper part. The width of the grave was 1,18 m, the length in minimum 2,0 m. Below the stones (191,94 m above sea level) the grave pit narrowed to 0,8 m and 0,6 m at the bottom. The rather bowl

shaped bottom at 190,3 m above sea level was immediately underneath the wooden coffin scooped out of a fir or spruce trunk. The head was oriented to the west but was situated outside the trench area. Lower extremities were revealed (190,37 m above sea level). An attempt to ease the lower extremities from the trench support yielded a lump of red clay (analogical to the find from the grave H2).

The grave H4 was situated to the south from H3 but more to the west and thus only the stone lining of its east side was revealed.

Distances between the graves were relatively small, north south distance between the graves H3 and H4 was only 0,4 m, the north south distance between H1 and H2 – 0,7 m, the west east distance between H1 and H3 – 0,7 m. geological subsoil of dark yellow brown gravel sand was reached at 191,96 m above sea level (on the west section) to 191,74 m above sea level (on the east section).

Fig. 1. Prague 1-Staré Město. Archaeological excavations in the area of the referred trench 1.

Fig. 2. J. D. Huber 1769: Orthographical drawing of Prague and its surroundings – a cut-out with Staré Město, Na Perštýně Street and surroundings. Violet: Martinská gate in its latest simple form without fortification components and houses No. 347 and 348.

Fig. 3. Prague 1-Staré Město. Compilation of the stable cadastre map from 1842 and current cadastre map (in blue). Position of the trench 1 in red.

Fig. 4. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Trench 1 – combined perimeter section.

Fig. 5. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Wall Z01 in the south section of the trench 1.

Fig. 6. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Pottery from the trench 1.

Fig. 7. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Groundplan of the trench 1 with the upper part of the grave pits lined with stones, 192,10 m above sea level.

Fig. 8. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Groundplan of the trench 1 with the bottom part of the grave pits with the skeletal remains, 190,77 m above sea level.

Fig. 9. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Drawing documentation of the graves' groundplans in the trench 1.

Fig. 10. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Stones from the grave lining in the trench 1. Coding of the stones corresponds with fig. 9.

Fig. 11. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Trench 1, detail of the grave H1.

Fig. 12. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Trench 1, detail of the grave H2.

Fig. 13. Prague 1-Staré Město, Na Perštýně Plot No. 1129. Trench 1, detail of the grave H3.

Fig. 14. Two types of stone lining of the graves in various parts of Prague.

Fig. 15. Prague 2-Nové Město, Vladislavova No. 76+1390/II (excavation by Selmi Wallisová). Stone lining in the upper part of the grave pits. The stones raise from the original surface of the cemetery called The Jewish garden when it was in function.

Fig. 16. Prague 2-Nové Město, Vladislavova No. 76+1390/II. Stone lining in the upper part of the grave pits. As on the fig. O the stone blocks raise above the original surface of the cemetery, which was for the most part the last level allowed for excavation. The actual grave pits were not excavated.

Translated by Linda and Patrick Foster