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The Jewish garden in Prague's New Town. The latest findings based on archaeological research

ANNOTATION

A listing of all archaeological research activities within the "Jewish Garden" emphasizing the results of research carried out in 2009–2014 and presenting their contribution to the expansion of our existing knowledge of what is the largest necropolis of a Jewish community in medieval Bohemia. Burials took place in the necropolis from the second half of the 13th century to the second half of the 15th century. In the 14th century it was attached to the northern part of the Upper New Town of Prague. The work of archaeologists within this monitored area was primarily associated with the new construction of the Quadrio commercial office building, in an area where there once was a traditional dense urban area originating in the early Middle Ages, until the construction of the metro in the 1970's. New findings about the Jewish cemetery supplement a wide range of recent discoveries regarding the settlement mosaic of the investigated area.

SUMMARY

Between 2009–2014, in relation to construction activities in the southern foreland of the Old Town of Prague, seven rescue excavations were carried out in the northern part of the Upper New Town. These activities built on findings known from earlier excavation and from archival sources. Recent field work and its subsequent evaluation enabled a revision of the northwest section of the previously accepted boundaries of the extinct necropolis known as the Jewish Garden (Fig. 4). As documented both by historical sources and the situation as revealed by medieval tomb findings (R 1 and 3), the boundaries of the burials should be clearly situated not on the southern front of the buildings of Purkyňova Street, but a few meters further north to the current boundary between the road and the new multifunctional Quadrio building.

Based on previous findings, it is possible to accept that within the designated boundaries of the necropolis, the intensity of funeral activities varied according to the period and the specific location. This is further suggested by the situation documented in the eastern part of Purkyňova Street. Skeletal remains were not discovered here, and the graveyard boundary in this section was most likely marked by a trench (Fig. 6). So far, the largest concentration of graves has been shown in the central part of the Garden, where most of the grave pits were spaced an average of 0.3 meters apart, compared to its eastern and northern peripheries where the distance between the graves oscillated to about 0.8 meters (Fig. 4). The newly researched graves on Purkyňova Street may be dated to the beginning of the 13th to the end (?) of the 14th century. The age of the situations detected on Vladislavova and Jungmannova Streets was set to a wider range, from the middle 13th century to the 2nd half of the 15th century.

The exposed stratigraphy shows that in the northwestern part of the necropolis, the funeral activities overlaid an older settlement horizon, dated by finds of pottery and denarius of Vladislav II to the period around the mid 12th to the first third of the 13th century (Fig. 10), which can be combined with the foreland settlement of Újezd of St. Martin.

In addition to the described graves, direct proof of the existence of the cemetery is provided by a collection of 24 fragments of tombstones found north of its area (R 3; Fig. 3; Tab. 1). The individual stele were executed from fine-grained sandstone of different thicknesses. External marks and fragments of the epitaphs classify their age to the period from the 14th century to the 2nd half of the 15th century (Fig. 11). Most of the plate tombstones were used secondarily as part of the masonry construction of the sanitary structures of the area's houses and buildings (pits, wells; Fig. 12; Cymbalak/Matějková 2012, 47–48). There are two unique items in the discovered collection which stand out among finds of medieval Jewish tombstones in Central Europe. These are fragments with an unfinished inscription, where the first line of the votive inscription was carved, but the second line is only indicated by a red line as a template (Fig. 13, 14). This fact provides justification for the hypothesis of the existence of a workshop in the vicinity that produced tombstones.

The comprehensive protection and furthered knowledge of the cultural heritage property "former Jewish cemetery – Jewish garden, archaeological traces" are associated with regular monitoring of the area's construction activities together with the essential professional archaeological documentation.

Fig. 1. Historic core of Prague with Josefov area demarcated (current boundaries) and the Jewish Garden (according to historical records) in yellow and the course of the Old Town fortifications with the moat in deep gray.

Fig. 2. Jewish Garden and its nearest surroundings on reconstruction plans from the middle 19th century. **Left** – situation before 1348; **right** – situation after 1419 (Tomek 1892).

Fig. 3. Prague 1-Josefov. Fragment of tombstone stelae from the Jewish Garden moved in 1866 to the Old Jewish cemetery (taken from Pařík 2003, 18).

Fig. 4. Prague 1-New Town, block of houses north of the Jewish Garden – between the streets of Spálená, Purkyňova, Vladislavova and Charvátova. According to localization and designation from AO NPÚ ÚOP HMP surveys. Archaeological surveyed site in blue.

Fig. 5. Prague 1-New Town. Archaeological excavations performed so far in the area of the Jewish Garden. **A** – archaeologically documented existence of Jewish Garden cemetery (1–7); **B** – areas with new findings of tombstone stelae; **C** – locations without archaeologically documented traces of burials (8–21); **D** – reconstruction of the boundary of the Jewish Garden according to written records. Localizations and literature on points No. 1–7 (positive evidence of the Jewish cemetery) are mentioned in descriptions of particular activities. Localizations and literature on points No. 8–21 (negative) are mentioned in this figure's description.

Fig. 6. Prague 1-New Town. Monitored area with on Jüttner's drawing of Prague 1811–1816 and cutout from current cadastral map of Prague with highlighted: **A** – grave findings; **B** – line of moat; **C** – cultural relics "former Jewish necropolis – Jewish Garden, archaeological traces"; **D** – currently accepted north boundary of the former necropolis; **E** – border of former necropolis according to written records.

Fig. 7. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova street plot No. 2384/1, locality 1, trenches of excavations 2009/40, 2010/09. **A** – ground plan of early medieval settlement situation, grave pits of the Jewish cemetery and later opoka wall (cemetery wall?); **B** – photo documentation of southeast part of the trench; **C** – developing diagram.

Fig. 8. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova street plot No. 2384/1, locality 1, excavation 2013/23. Finding situation with designation of two documented grave pits. **A** – sections, **B** – ground plan. Yellow hatch – graves, gray – recent disruption, brown – coffin walls. The excavation was stopped on the contour of the coffin each time; the content of coffin remained untouched.

Fig. 9. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova street plot No. 2384/1, locality 1, excavation 2013/24. Terrain documentation from the excavations with designatin of one grave pit. **A** – sections, **B** – ground plan. **Yellow** hatch – graves, **gray** – recent disruption, **brown** – coffin walls.

Fig. 10. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova street plot No. 2384/1, locality 1, excavation 2014/16. Terrain documentation from the excavations with designation of two (possibly three) grave pits. **A** – sections, **B** – ground plan. **Yellow** hatch – graves, **gray** – recent disruption, **brown** – coffin walls.

Fig. 11. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova plots 2384/1 and 2384/2, locality 2. Dry trench bordering the northern edge of the Jewish Garden. **A** – sections of trench from survey No. 2009 + 2010/16 (for situation see Fig. 12). Dark green – involution phase of the moat with a high proportion of natural silting, green – deliberate fill of the trench, light green – deliberate fill of the trench contaminated with younger material; **a** – surface of early medieval activity in the area; **b** – surface of geological substrate (soil type) in the vicinity. **B** – ground plan: reconstruction of the course of the ditch in gray according to survey No. 1978–1993 (originally XCIII) H. Olmerová – green and No. 2009 + 2010/16 T. Cymbalak.

Fig. 12. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova plots 2384/1 and 2384/2, locality 2. Dry ditch bordering the northern edge of the Jewish Gardens. **A** – sections of the ditch from survey No. 1978–1993 (originally XCIII) give an idea of the ditch's profile. **Dark green** – involution phase of the trench with a high proportion of natural silting, **green** – deliberate fill of the trench. **B** – ground plan; reconstruction of the course of the ditch in **gray**, outline of documented area of survey No. 1978/93 in red and survey No. 2009/16 + 2010/16 in **blue**, showing the documented areas with networks of sections.

Fig. 13. Prague 1-New Town, Vladislavova Street No. 1390, plot No. 753/2, locality 5. Site plan of fragment of burial ground (taken from Selmi Wallisová 2005, 18).

Fig. 14. Prague 1-New Town, Vladislavova Street No. 1390, plot No. 753/2, locality 5. Situation of archaeological excavations in courtyard of the building (taken from Pařík 2003, 16).

Fig. 15. Prague 3-Žižkov, New Jewish cemetery. Symbolic tomb with remains from Vladislavova Street and memorial plaque commemorating the circumstances of their transfer.

Fig. 16. Prague 1-New Town, Jungmannova Street No. 26, plot No. 710, locality 6. One of burials with extant fragments of wooden coffin and with stone plates on eyes.

Fig. 17. Prague 1-New Town, Purkyňova Street plot No. 2384/1, excavations 2009/40 + 2010/09, locality 1. Selection of pottery from 12th–13th centuries and silver plated denar of Vladislav II. (1140–1174) from period until 1158.

Fig. 18, 19, 20, 21, 24. Prague 1-New Town, block of houses between the streets of Spálená, Purkyňova, Vladislavova, Charvátova, plot No. 725/1, locality 3. Fragments of tombstones from former Jewish cemetery, for description see chart 1.

Fig. 22. Prague 1-New Town, block of houses between the streets Spálená, Purkyňova, Vladislavova, Charvátova, plot No. 725/1, locality 3. Fragment of tombstone No. 6 from former Jewish cemetery, for description see chart 1.

Fig. 23. Prague 1-New Town, block of houses between the streets Spálená, Purkyňova, Vladislavova, Charvátova, plot No. 725/1, locality 3. Fragment of tombstone No. 47 from former Jewish cemetery, for description see chart 1.

Translated by Bohumila Cymbalak Jankovská, Bryce Belcher and Martin Drahorád