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Collection of tiny figural sculpture with religious theme from the New Town locality – Palace Národní – in Prague

ANNOTATION

The topic of the study lies in high medieval, tiny, ceramic sculpture. In the Czech Lands a unique collection of several tens of fragments of these artefacts with religious as well as profane theme was achieved during the rescue archaeological excavations situated near the crossing of Národní and Mikulandská streets. The study of archaeological material presents the summary of types of excavated sculptures, production technology, used raw materials and current knowledge about the products labelled mostly as *Bilderbäcker* in German speaking countries or probably as puppet masters in the Czech background. The contribution of the study consists in the description of the topic of marginal production article in the central European context, which has been outside the point of interest in the Czech background.

SUMMARY

According to fragmentary survival, small formal variety of the collection and presence of semi-finished products including the deposition and concentration of the findings in the backfill of an object situated next to the pyrotechnological device (furnace/hearth?), the artefacts from the locality of Palác Národní are supposed to represent one of the first archaeologically documented evidence of the production of tiny mediaeval sculptures on the area of the historic core of Prague. The described collection symbolizes unique evidence of the production of figural votive sculpture already in the 14th century. The age of the finding is documented by accompanying ceramic material, stratigraphic situation and accessible analogies. (Majority of votive figural sculptures made of gentle floated clay in one-part or two-part moulds can be dated to the era between the 15th and 16th centuries despite the dating made according to artistic expression and not according to the find situation or accompanying dating material.) Existence of similar find situations is highly probable in near future on localities with the concentration of ceramic production.

The purpose of the figural sculpture could have been different. The function often overlapped. It could have been used as a toy, an amulet, a birth or christening gift, a part of home altars and the Nativity scene or a consecrated pilgrimage souvenir. Patterns for particular thematic groups of figural sculptures come out, in case of votive sculpture, of an area of higher art or as zoomorphic toys they illustrate everyday life.

Fig.1. Prague 1-New Town, Národní–Mikulandská streets No. 841, 842, 843. The area of the rescue archaeological excavations of The National Heritage Institute, Department in Prague No. 2013/33 with the location of particular finds of figural sculpture on the background of the square network of features – **grey**; highlighting of former gothic cellars – **red, blue and green hatching**; highlighting of reconstructed borders of particular town estates green broken line (according to Tomek 1892, unpaginated); wells and waste reservoirs. Places of finding of figural sculptures are depicted by coloured circles (elaborated by E. Ditmar, M. Kalíšek and T. Cymbalak, 2016).

Fig. 2A, B. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The east profile of the feature L06 and the ground plan of a feature V642. The finding situation on the place of the discovery of the collection of tiny figural sculptures with votiv theme (terrain drawing by P. Kaplan, J. Kopřivová, 2013; digitalization by E. Ditmar, 2014; stratigraphic analysis by T. Cymbalak, 2013).

Fig. 3. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The selection of fragments of pottery excavated in archaeological contexts situated next to the collective finding of figural sculptures (photo and graphic design M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 4. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The selection of fragments of pottery excavated in an infill of the feature V642 (photo and graphic design by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 5. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. A large ceramic storage vessel from the backfill of a residential structure (V513 = 536 = 538) from the pre-location period. (Photo by M. Frouz 2015; graphic design by M. Kalíšek, 2016; drawing by V. Čermák, 2015).

Fig. 6. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. Dinar of Vratislav II. from the backfill of the residential structure (V513 = 536 = 538). (Photo by F. Malý, 2014; drawings according to Šmerda 1996, 77 and Petrůň/Radoměský 2001, 273; graphic design by T. Cymbalak, 2014.)

Fig. 7A. The cut out of the painting by Hans Maria von Landshut from 1483. „Handing of votes and festive presents“ (adopted from Adamska 2013, 150, ryc. 1c).

Fig. 7B. The cut out of the painting by Jan Pollack from 1480. „Handing of votes on the grave of St Wolfgang“ (adopted from Adamska 2013, 151, ryc. 2).

Fig. 8. Robert Campin, about 1438: Triptych, Cologne, panel painting. Heinrich von Werl (donator) and St John the Baptist (**left**), St Barbara (**right**). Household use of the sculptures is depicted in the details. Deposition: Museo Nacional del Prado (adopted from <<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/saint-john-the-baptist-and-the-franciscan/28b9fdc8-467b-4528-8eba-de91581ccad5>> [vid. 2016-11-23]).

Fig. 9. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The list and metrical characteristics of findings of figural sculptures discovered during the excavations of the locality Palace Národní (composed by S. Svatošová and T. Cymbalak, 2016).

Fig. 10. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The collective finding of tiny figural sculptures with religious theme discovered in the backfill of the feature V642 (photo by F. Malý, 2013; graphic design by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 11. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The selection of tiny figural sculptures with the portrayal of Virgin Mary with Jesus (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2015; drawing by V. Čermák, 2014).

Fig. 12. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No 135. The selection of torsos of tiny figural sculptures with the portrayal of young Jesus and Virgin Mary with Jesus (photo by F. Malý, 2013; M. Kalíšek, 2015; drawing by V. Čermák, 2014; graphic design by S. Babušková, 2016).

Fig. 13. Augsburg, Dom Mariä Heimsuchung. Madonna with a baby from the south portal (photo of F. Srovnal, 2012).

Fig. 14. Prague 1-Prague Castle, Cathedral of St Vitus, Wenceslaus and Adalbert. Gravestone of Přemysl Otakar I. by Peter Parler, second half of the seventies of the 14th century (from Schädler 1978, 18).

Fig. 15. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The sculpture of a woman with a plait on her back and a can – St Elizabeth of Thuringia (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2013; drawing by S. Svatošová, 2013).

Fig. 16. The tiny sculpture of St Elizabeth of Thuringia from Regensburg (adopted from Endres/Millitzer, 2002, 52, Abb. 28).

Fig. 17. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The tiny sculpture with a portrayal of young Jesus (photo by F. Malý, 2013; drawing by V. Čermák, 2014).

Fig. 18. Prague 1-Lesser Town, Karmelitská street No. 387. The fragment of a tiny sculpture of young Jesus (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 19. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No 135. The tiny sculpture of Jesus lying in a cradle (photo b F. Malý, 2013; drawing by S. Svatošová, 2013).

Fig. 20. The reconstruction drawing of a cradle with a sculpture of sleeping Jesus according to the interpretation of T. Velímský (Velímský 1991, 36, fig. 31). Drawing by S. Svatošová 2016.

Fig. 21. Prague 1-New Town, Mikuladská street No. 135. The fragment of unidentified lower part of a sculpture (holý woman ?) discovered in the feature V642 (photo by F. Malý, 2013; drawing by V. Čermák, 2014).

Fig. 22. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The zoomorphic sculpture of a horse (photo by F. Malý, 2013; drawing b S. Svatošová, 2013).

Fig. 23. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The fragment of a tiny ceramic sculpture with a glazed surface portraying a horseback rider (knight) (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2016; drawing by V. Čermák, 2014).

Fig. 24. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. Zoomorphic sculptures of horses (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 25. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street No. 135. The fragment of a sculpture of young Jesus (L06-037-11) an obverse and a flat reverse (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 26. Prague 1-New Town, Mikulandská street 135, The detail of a cut off joining seam of the sculpture of a woman St. Elizabeth of Thuringia (with a plait on her back and a can – No. 2013/33-J10-007; photo by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 27. Konrad Witz, approx. 1440: St Catherine with Mary Magdalene – the cut out of the Marian altar. The look through a corridor onto a square with a shop window displaying offered sculptures. Another detail shows the producer's (Bildebäcker's – producer of figural sculptures) shop window (Gerlach 1998, 209, Abb. 18; available at http://www.malerei-meisterwerke.de/bilder_gross/konrad-witz-marienaltar-szene-die-heiligen-katharina-und-maria-magdalena-10317.html).

Fig. 28. Prague 1-New Town, Vodičkova–Jungmannova ulice, ppč. 2379 + 2381. The tiny sculpture of a woman in a loose cloak with a dark bluegreen skirt (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2016).

Fig. 29. Production of figural sculptures in period iconography (adopted from Kühnel 1984, 164, Abb 212).

Translation by Bohumila Cymbalak Jankovská