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Unknown air raid shelter in Prague 6-Bubeneč

ANNOTATION

This article presents a recent archaeological find of an unknown subterranean air raid shelter in Prague Bubeneč, with preserved original furniture and technologies including a filter device against fighting gases. This shelter was originally connected with a currently partially blocked corridor leading to a neighbouring house. Bulgarian graffiti from 1954–1972 were found on the walls. Among other artefacts, two unusual tin disc items were found, with Chinese signs. Interpretation of the archaeological finds, based on an extensive archive research, enabled to give a date of the origins and use of the shelter to the period of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

SUMMARY

In 2014 during a research archaeological excavation of a plot in Prague Bubeneč a subterranean air raid shelter was localised. This shelter, furnished with a filter against fighting gases and other furnishings, was originally connected with a currently partially blocked corridor leading to a neighbouring house. Bulgarian graffiti from 1954–1972 were found on the walls. Among other artefacts, two unusual tin disc items were found, with Chinese signs.

The shelter was surveyed and documented in detail. No written evidence has been found of the reasons to build the shelter, about its initiators, purpose, nor the period of its origins. Interpretation of the revealed artefacts helped to answer the proposed questions. Detailed archive research of the proprietary relations of the plot with the shelter and the neighbouring plots, and determinations of the origins of the furniture and the artefacts enabled to relevantly answer two basic questions: who and when built the air raid shelter and who had access into it?

The air raid shelter on the plot no. 144 in Bubeneč was built by the German occupation administration in the period of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia on a plot, which this administration confiscated from the Jewish owners. The shelter was furnished with a filter made originally by a Czech CHEMA firm from Lutín in Moravia, which was most probably acquired by the Nazis from the occupied firm. The shelter was built for the high ranking Nazi officers, who seized villas in the area confiscated from their Jewish owners, most probably for the ministry councillor Hans freeman von Watter, the head of the 1st department of The German state ministry for Bohemia and Moravia, who arranged a residency for himself in the neighbourhood of the shelter, or for Karl Hermann Frank himself, one of the most powerful men of the Protectorate.

After the war the shelter was abandoned. Although the plot and the villas in the vicinity were given back to the original owners or their successors, in the 1950s their use was gradually limited and made impossible, and finally the ownership of all the properties was transferred to the Czechoslovak state, resp. its organisations.

The hypothesis that the air filter was dismantled from another unknown shelter and reused here can be rejected. The original owners were given the property back in restitution after the war, so the construction could not be started until the period, when the assets were confiscated once more by the communist regime. It is also not possible, that the Bulgarian school with a hall of residence could originate in the interim period in No. 90 next to the newly built air raid shelter, into which the students would have access to mark the walls with graffiti. Since the shelter was abandoned, the Bulgarian inscriptions, which originated in 1954–1972, are preserved undamaged to the present day.

House No. 279, connected with the shelter and a subterranean corridor, was from 1961 rented via The Administration of the services for the diplomatic board to the institutions of foreign states, from which the first ones were representatives of the Chinese film and it is they that most probably left the tin lid of a film case in the shelter; whether using the corridor from the house or after the entrance from the house was already blocked, cannot be determined.

The research and documentation of the shelter and the investigation of its origins and further destiny leads to general questions concerning the research potential, preservation and heritage protection of similar structures and their furniture. Thanks to the cooperation with the Military historic Institute most of the preserved furniture was dismantled from the shelter and transferred prior to the construction of a new building of The Turkish embassy on

this site.

Fig. 1. Prague 6-Bubeneč, plots between Pod Kaštany and Na Zátorce streets with the air raid shelter. The plot with the air raid shelter is highlighted with a bold broken line. Also the subterranean part of the shelter is depicted (survey and drawing K. Kaufmannová, M. Pařez, description M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 2. Prague 6-Bubeneč, plot No 144. Part of the shelter [above-ground](#) (photo M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 3. Prague 6-Bubeneč, plot No 144. The above-ground part of the shelter (survey and drawing K. Kaufmannová, M. Pařez, description M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 4. Prague 6-Bubeneč, plot No 144. Groundplan of the subterranean floor level of the shelter (survey and drawing K. Kaufmannová, M. Pařez, description M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 5. The main room of the shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. To the right from the entrance from the connecting corridor there is graffiti (photo M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 6. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. The connecting corridor (photo M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 7. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. The main room of the shelter with the filter against fighting gases. On the right the filter device, in the corner on the left the filter cartridge (photo M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 8. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. Production plate of the CHEMA firm (M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 9. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. Dated inscriptions in the Cyrillic script (M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 10. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. Portable toilette with a vessel for the excrements (photo M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 11. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. Rounded tin box with Chinese signs (M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 12. Shelter on the plot No 144, Prague 6-Bubeneč. Scrap of the main journal of the Bulgarian communists *Rabotničesko delo*, undated (photo M. Bureš, 2014).

Fig. 13. Prague 6-Bubeneč. The plots with the shelter position in the orientation plan of Prague from 1938: **1** – plot No 144 with the shelter belonged to JUDr. Hugo Roth until 1940, afterwards to the Third Reich, officially returned to the original owner in 1949, from 1956 the plot belonged to the Czechoslovak state under the administration of the National council of the Prague capital city; **2** – plot No 143 with the house No 90, until 1940 it was owned by Elsa Kolínská and Robert Kolínský, afterwards by the Third Reich, in 1947 this property was returned to Robert Kolínský and joint owners, from the 1950s to 1992 the building belonged to the Czechoslovak state under the Administration of the services for the diplomatic board, which rented the building to a Bulgarian school with a hall of residence; **3** – plot No 155 with a house No 279, which until 1940 belonged to František Stadler, in 1939–1945 to the Third Reich, in 1945 returned to František Stadler, in 1946 Jan Stadler became the owner, in 1959 the building was acquired by the Czechoslovak state under the Administration of the services for the diplomatic board, which in 1961 rented the building to the Chinese film; **4** – house No 89 in Na Zátorce street (in 1939–1945 Yorckstrasse), with the seat of the head of the Ist department of Deutsches Staatsministerium für Böhmen und Mähren Oberlandrat Dr. Hans Freiherr von Watter; **5** – house No 807 in Na Zátorce street (in 1939–1945 Yorckstrasse), where K. H. Frank lived with his family during the Protectorate; **6** – house No 667 in Na Zátorce street, from 1939 the headquarters of the German riot police; **7** – house No 392 in Romain Rolland street (in 1939–1945 Jana von Werth), where the ministry executive Deutsches Staatsministerium für Böhmen und Mähren Dr. Robert Gies lived; **8** – house No 110 in Slavíčková street (in 1939–1945 Mařákova), where the chief of the IInd department of Deutsches Staatsministerium für Böhmen und Mähren ministry executive, Helmut Krieser lived (Into the map underlay of The Orientation plan of the Prague capital city with the surroundings (1938), 1 : 5000, sheet 30, drawn and described by M. Bureš and J. Pařez, digitalisation S. Babušková, 2017.)

Translation by Linda and Patrick Foster