

Tomasz Cymbalak – Kristýna Matějková – Martin Musílek – Jakub Sawicki

## A New-Town Cesspit with an Assemblage of Pewter Ware : Evidential Limits of its Content Regarding Material Culture and its Users

### ANNOTATION

The paper presents everyday life of the inhabitants of Prague New Town in the early modern period through archaeological finds coming from the fill of a large cesspit belonging to the former burgher house No. 69/II in Spálená Street. The performed analysis proved the interpretation of the finds' context difficult with regard to the repetitive use of the feature. The assemblage of the artefacts is not exceptional; therefore attention was focused on its most attractive component – the pewter ware. The authors attempted a broader search of this issue and analysis of available written evidence with the aim to find out whether the obtained data can bring nearer the events on the smallest urban cell represented by a burgher plot.

### SUMMARY

Ten years ago, an exacting archaeological excavation was launched, during which, among other things, a large post-medieval cesspit of a square groundplan was revealed. The field work was carried out near the junction of Prague major streets (Národní Avenue, Spálená Street) in the New Town of Prague (Fig. 1). The article presents the most significant assemblages of artefacts and environmental samples, obtained by excavating the content of a sanitary feature (Z247 = Z253) with a volume of 85.7 m<sup>3</sup>. The cesspit is located on the area of the former plot belonging to the House At the Black Horse (currently non existing No. 69/II). The large inventory of artefacts (8 315 pieces in total) representing the material culture of currently non-existing house plot and its former inhabitants, is supplemented with comprehensive analysis of detailed field documentation and the archival sources. Comparison of archaeological data with available written evidence illustrates the waste management within a single city. The assemblage of post-medieval artefacts and their fragments is not exceptional. For this reason, attention was focused especially on its most attractive component – the pewter ware. Within the framework of archaeological research conducted in the historical centre of Prague this is the largest collection of products made of this material (Fig. 24: A, 25). The earliest layer 124-022 = 131-036 provided a smaller significant assemblage, which includes: **Saugkanne can** (feeding bottle) – height 9.3 cm; bottom diameter 6.8 cm; rim diameter 5.0 cm; spout /feeder diameter 0.85 cm; 87.38% Sn and 12.62% Pb; **goblet** with date 1598 – height 8.7 cm; bottom diameter 6.4 cm; rim diameter 7.6 cm; 94.05% Sn and 5.95% Pb; **pewter spoon** decorated with plant motif – total length 14.8 cm; bowl length 6.5 cm; bowl width 5.2 cm; handle thickness 0.6 cm; 96% Sn and 4% Pb; **pewter spoon** with a pair of grooves on the underside – total length 16.1 cm; bowl length 6.8 cm, bowl width 4.8 cm; handle diameter 0.77 cm; 90% Sn and 10% Pb; **pewter pad**, probably for forming materials (apparently soft non-metallic), so-called anka – upper part dimensions 8.0 × 8.0 cm; bottom dimensions 8.3 × 8.3 cm; height 2.0 cm; depth of the spherical dent 1.0 cm; diameter of the spherical dent 5.9 cm; the sides of the object are slightly deformed (bulged), probably by pressure from above.<sup>1</sup>

The exceptional assemblage of pewter artefacts required basic identification and characteristics of every item. The master mark on one of the objects (Fig. 16) enabled identification of its manufacturer (Václav Macek from the Old Town of Prague; Fig. 17: A), who at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century most likely operated in Jungmannova Street nearby (formerly Wide, Pewter or Bell Makers Streets). The dating of the assemblage is confirmed by the date (1598) placed on the outside of the rim of a goblet with a plant ornament on the medallion (Fig. 18). The metallographic analysis of the assemblage proved that the elemental composition of the objects more or less conforms to the guild regulations of the time and is around 1 Pb : 10 Sn (Fig. 15). Paradoxically, the so-called Saugkanne feeding can was, due to its composition, assessed the most harmful to human health of the whole assemblage.

1 The pewter products are supplemented by a bowl of copper alloy spoon (total length 6.2 cm; bowl length 3.5 cm; bowl width 1.9 cm; oval handle diameter 1.5–3.8 mm).

The stratigraphy of the backfill of the referred cesspit and its closest surroundings, together with the analyses of the artefacts, carried out by environmental expertise, and the results of the archival search coincidentally confirm that the content and the structure of the cesspit fill reflect the events on the area of the town plot with the house No. 69/II in Spálená Street. The sequence of events can be considered a classic example of the continuous settlement development of a smallest urban unit in the period from the Middle Ages to the present time.

The table and kitchen ceramic ware discovered in the cesspit fill does not differ significantly from the similarly dated collections from Prague (BLAŽKOVÁ/VEPŘEKOVÁ 2015; BLAŽKOVÁ/MATĚJKOVÁ 2016; MATĚJKOVÁ 2018 etc.). It is likely that, despite the higher social status of the property owners, its real inhabitants could have been (only) craftsmen in the early modern period. This presumption appears to be supported by the analysis of organic macro-remains, which identified consumed species not exceeding the usual findings.

The presented interdisciplinary analysis of the New Town cesspit supplemented with archive evidence allow to go beyond the framework of traditionally available historical data and thus also to outline the everyday life of the real inhabitants of the city – not just of the formal owners of individual properties.

Although the article is based on a single feature and for financial and time reasons it is not completed, yet it brings new information. The text can be considered as a continuation of earlier research of cesspits in Prague (e.g. ČIHÁKOVÁ/MÜLLER 2013; CYMBALAK/MATĚJKOVÁ 2012; RÜCKL/HAVRDA/TRYML 2007). Further research of similar features and especially detailed analyses of objects discovered in the past will presumably bring further information, especially if the research is supported by comprehensive analyses of various sources for the development of burgher plots.

**Fig. 1.** Prague 1-New Town, block of houses between Spálená, Purkyňova, Vladislavova and Charvátova Streets. Section from the Map of the Evaluation of Archaeological Terrain in PPR. **A** – area of major rescue archaeological excavations carried out by the Prague National Heritage Institute in connection with the COPA Centrum Národní/Quadrio project (nr. 2009/16, 2009/40, 2010/16, 2010/40, 2012/16, 2013/23, 2013/24, 2014/10, 2014/16); **B** – earlier excavations (up to the year 2005 according to HRDLIČKA 2005 and 2009); **C** – masonry pits and wells (red – referred cesspit in former No. 69/II); **D** – archaeological trenches; **E** – original plots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (bold line of the plot with the cesspit Z247 = Z253); **F** – present-day plots (OD Quadrio plot in bold line); **G** – present-day buildings. **Frame** – Prague historical centre within the boundaries of the Prague Heritage Reserve with the researched block of houses (composed by E. Ditmar, T. Cymbalak, M. Kalíšek, S. Babušková, 2015, 2017, 2019).

**Fig. 2.** Prague 1-New Town, house plot belonging to the former House At the Black Horse No. 69/II in the eastern front of Spálená Street. Checkerboard pattern of the excavation and the localization of the cesspit Z247 = Z253 on the plot (plotted into the Stable Cadastre Map by M. Kalíšek, 2019).

**Fig. 3.** Prague 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II. The upper part of the vault of Z248 = Z207 and the cesspit Z247 = Z253 at the time of the excavation, later staircase Z245 = Z270 on the left. **1** – vault of the cesspit Z248 = Z276; **2** – shell of the cesspit Z247 = Z253; **3** – staircase Z245 = Z270, before the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century (photo by E. Ditmar, 2010).

**Fig. 4.** Prague 1-New Town, former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. Interpretative section of the post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253 at the trench 124 and 131. Color-coded chronological horizons supplemented with examples of artefacts. **A** – modern (recent) constructions of the public space surrounding the vestibule of the Národní třída metro station (1979–2009); **B** – 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century, upper parts of the cesspit infill, final phase of its existence, structural arrangements; **C** – 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century, the middle part of the fill, intensive alternation of content, Baroque and subsequent, neo-classical reconstruction of the House At the Black Horse; **D** – late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, earlier part of the pit with typical interfaces of particular deposits, which prove repeated cleaning of the feature; **E** – 16<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, construction of the cesspit and its early use; **F** – construction of a new staircase before the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; **G** – geological subsoil: Vltava terrace – Pleistocene – Holocene (elaborated by T. Cymbalak, E. Ditmar, M. Kalíšek, S. Babušková 2015, 2019; photo of finds by M. Kalíšek, K. Matějková, 2019).

**Fig. 5.** Prague 1-New Town, area of former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. Results and graphs of archaeobotanical macro-remains analysis of samples taken from the fill of the cesspit Z247 = Z253 (composed by P. Kočár and T. Kutek, 2012; see KOČÁR ET AL. 2012; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 6.** Prague 1-New Town, area of former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. Results and graphs of archaeobotanical macro-remains analysis of samples taken from the fill of the cesspit Z247 = Z253. Occurrence of taxa below 1 % (see KOČÁR ET AL. 2012; graphic design by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 7.** Prague 1-New Town, area of former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. Results and graphs of palynological analysis of fill samples taken from the cesspit Z247 = Z253. Occurrence of pollen taxa above 1 % (see HOUFKOVÁ

2012; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig 8.** Prague 1-New Town, area of former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. Results and graphs of palynological analysis of fill samples taken from the cesspit Z247 = Z253. Occurrence of pollen taxa above 1 % (see HOUFKOVÁ 2012; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 9.** Prague 1-New Town, area of former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. **A** – percentages of categories and subcategories of selected finds obtained by excavation of the cesspit Z247 = Z253; **B** – percentages of grey and glazed ceramics excavated from the cesspit Z247 = Z253 (compiled by M. Kalíšek, 2019; graphic editing by S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 10.** Prague 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253. Pottery fragments from the earliest horizon of the pit – contexts 124-022, 131-036 (drawing by V. Čermák, 2019; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 11.** Prague 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253. Fragments of small faience bowls with cobalt blue painting (drawing by V. Čermák 2019; photo by K. Matějková, 2019; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 12.** Prague 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253. Fragments of pots decorated with clay pigments. **a, b** – pots; **c** – bowl torso (drawing by V. Čermák 2019; photo by K. Matějková, 2019; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 13.** Prague 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253. Earthenware pottery with decoration imitating Saxon stoneware of the Triebel-Muskau regions. **a** – jug; **b** – fragment of a jug/pot (drawing by V. Čermák 2019; photo by K. Matějková, 2019; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 14.** Prague 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253. Torso of a flower pot decorated with green painting (drawing by V. Čermák 2019; photo by K. Matějková, 2019; graphic editing by M. Kalíšek and S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 15.** Prague 1-New Town, area of former No. 69/II in Spálená Street. Results of microanalysis of selected pewter ware (see ZAVŘEL 2011; graphic editing by S. Babušková, 2019).

**Fig. 16.** Praha 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253, stratigraphic unit 124-022 = 131-036. A pewter feeding can with a medallion on the inner side of the bottom depicting the Crucifixion scene, with a movable lid and a master mark on the handle of interconnected letters "M" and "W". Height 9.3 cm; bottom diameter 6.8 cm; spout/rim diameter 5.0 cm; spout/feeder diameter 0.85 cm (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2019; drawing by V. Čermák, 2013).

**Fig. 17.** Master marks belonging to Prague pewter makers crowned with monograms. **A** – monogram with initials "W" and "M" (taken from HRÁSKÝ 1988, 57); **B** – monogram with initials "X" and "M" (taken from HINTZE 1926, 378, fig. 1420).

**Fig. 18.** Praha 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253, context 124-022 = 131-036. Pewter goblet with the date of 1598 and a medallion with a plant motif on the inner side of the bottom. Height 8.7 cm; bottom diameter 6.4 cm; spout/rim diameter 7.6 cm (photo by M. Kalíšek, 2019; drawing by V. Čermák, 2013).

**Fig 19.** Praha 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253, context 124-022 = 131-036. Pewter spoon decorated with plant motif and "K" and "W" initials. Total length 14.8 cm; bowl length 6.5 cm; bowl width 5.2 cm; handle thickness 0.6 cm (photo by M. Kalíšek 2019; drawing by V. Čermák 2013).

**Fig. 20.** Praha 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253, context 124-022 = 131-036. Pewter spoon with a pair of grooves on the underside. Total length 16.1 cm; bowl length 6.8 cm, bowl width 4.8 cm; handle diameter 0.77 cm (photo by M. Kalíšek 2019, drawing by V. Čermák 2013).

**Fig. 21.** Praha 1- New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253, context 124-022 = 131-036. Pewter pad, called anka, of a square shape (8.3 × 8.3 cm, height 2.0 cm; spherical dent of circular shape of a diameter 5.9 cm). Artefact, made of a tin-lead alloy, presumably used for working with non-metallic materials. On the side there is the owner's monogram of the letter "A" (photo by M. Kalíšek 2019; drawing by V. Čermák 2013).

**Fig. 22.** Illustrations from the book *Nürnberg Hausbücher*. **Left** – pewterer Eberhart Deürnerin in his workshop, 1608 (available at <<https://hausbuecher.nuernberg.de/75-Amb-2-317b-74-v>> [seen 2019-08-27]); **right** – jingle bells and bells manufacturer Hanss Ronwald in his workshop, 1594 (available at <<https://hausbuecher.nuernberg.de/75-Amb-2-317b-55-r>> [seen 2019-08- 27]).

**Fig. 23.** Praha 1-New Town, Spálená No. 69/II, post-medieval cesspit Z247 = Z253, context 124-022 = 131-036. Copper alloy spoon bowl. Overall length 6.2 cm; bowl length 3.5 cm; bowl width 1.9 cm; diameter of the oval profile of the handle 0.15–0.38 cm (photo by M. Kalíšek 2019; drawing by V. Čermák 2013).

**Fig. 24.** Analogies to the referred feeding can, gained by archaeological excavations. **A** – Prague 1-New Town, Národní/Spálená No. 61/II. Torso and reconstruction of a pewter can (original height ca 12 cm) discovered in the backfill of a high medieval well (copied from JANSKÁ 1977, 191; ŠPAČEK 1981, 320); **B** – Elbląg, Poland. Pewter vessel analogous to the referred feeding can (original height ca 12 cm), described as "Hansekanne pewter jug", with movable lid, decorated handle and a medallion depicting the Crucifixion on the inner side of the bottom (FONFEREK ET AL. 2012, 46, fot. 22–23; POSPIESZNA 2014, 227, ryc. 1). Copied from *O Starym Mieście w Elblągu słów kilka*; <[http://starym8.rssing.com/chan-27786946/all\\_p2.html](http://starym8.rssing.com/chan-27786946/all_p2.html)> [seen 2019-08-27].

**Fig. 25.** Prague 1-Old Town, Old Town Square. Tall pewter cans from the archaeological excavation carried out in 1943 during the construction of a fire tank (copied from DRAGOUN ET AL. 2019, 45, fig. 19; LIŠKA 1949, 14–15, 30, 38, note 23).

**Fig. 26.** Pewter ware in The Czech Republic from 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century: **a** – archaeological finds of pewter ware mentioned in the text; **b** – presumed sites of the pewter manufacture; **c** – pewter manufacturing sites identified in the context of the Sušice hoard; **d** – foreign archaeological finds of Hansekanne mentioned in the text; **e** – sites of pewter hoards; **f** – the most important tin mines; **g** – areas of tin ore occurrence (elaborated by T. Cymbalak and M. Kalíšek, 2019).

**Fig. 27.** Tábor, Žižka Square, No. 6. Flat pewter circular plate from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The town coat of arms embossed on the upper side of the object's edge proves its Prague origin (taken from STARÁ 1995, 516, fig. 3).

*Translation by Linda Foster*