

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF PRESENT – DAY VILLAGES OF A MEDIEVAL ORIGIN IN BOHEMIA

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Medieval archaeology of rural sites in Bohemia (as in many parts of Europe) uses mainly data obtained from the research into deserted settlements which is limited by several factors: e.g., the deserted settlements were in existence for a relatively short period of time, they produce a limited amount of information concerning postmedieval village development and there was usually a spatial discontinuity in the period of the high - later medieval settlement pattern stabilisation which is reflected in the location of the settlements. As early as more than 20 years ago research in Bosau in Northern Germany (*Hinz 1977*) demonstrated the necessity for a complex study of medieval and postmedieval villages by combining the investigation of deserted villages (horizontal - contextual approach) and present - day or "living" villages (vertical - processual approach)¹.

The project of the archaeological research of present - day villages of a medieval origin in Bohemia was established in 1994 with the collaboration of three archaeological institutes (Institute of Archaeological Heritage of Central Bohemia, Museum of South Bohemia in České Budějovice and Museum of West Bohemia in Plzeň)². The project is concerned mostly with the retrieval of medieval and postmedieval archaeological data from present - day villages. The research focuses on 4 main topics: 1) the transformation of the early medieval settlement pattern and origins of nucleated villages, 2) constancy and changes in the late medieval and postmedieval village development, 3) high - late medieval and postmedieval farmstead and house, 4) standards of living in the high - late medieval and postmedieval rural society.

The research has concentrated so far on two types of localities: 1) villages facing total desertion due to coal mining in North - West Bohemia (Libkovice, Distr. of Most, *Nováček - Vařeka 1994*; *Nováček - Vařeka in this volume*) and 2) villages threatened with destruction due to intensive development in the 1990's (e.g., Češnovice, Distr. of České Budějovice, *Militký - Vařeka in this volume*; Všešimý, Distr. of Praha - východ, *Vařeka 1996*; Srlín, Distr. of Bechyně, *Dohnal - Vařeka 1996*).

Medieval archaeology in Bohemia produced extensive data sets for the final phase of the early medieval settlement pattern reconstruction and its desertion which appeared to have been connected with the high medieval transformation and settlement stabilisation dated to the 13th century (cf. e.g., *Klápště 1994a*; *1994b*). However, the archaeological evidence for the origins and formation process of nucleated villages in Bohemia remains still very limited (cf. *Klápště 1994a*, 130). Also the most recent excavations of present - day villages provide only fragmentary information concerning this process. Several localities produced archaeological evidence of the 13th century settlements situated within later medieval - modern villages. The spatial distribution of the 13th century settlement components and their analyse demonstrated an early medieval cultural

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- 1 There are still very few excavations of present - day villages of a medieval origin in Europe, comparing to deserted medieval settlements' research - e.g., Gristede (*Zoller 1969*; *1972*), Teltow (*Müller 1975*), Bosau (*Hinz 1977*), Ötting (*Stenholm 1986*), Vorbasse (*Hvass 1987*, 593), Wolkenberg (*Spazier 1992*), Koscielna Wies (*Kajzer 1994*), Elfgem and Belmen (*Päffgen 1995*, 100). Also excavations of individual farmsteads and houses in present - day villages (mostly rescue excavations) seem to be quite rare - for instance, Artolsheim (*Schwien - Fischer - Grodwohl 1990*), Höfsetten (*Codreanu - Bedal 1983*), Matting (*Alper - Hensch - Kirchner - Kirchner 1993*) or Honsolgen (*Kettemann - Wiegel 1990*, 155-156).
 - 2 The investigation of Libkovice started as early as 1991 (*Nováček - Vařeka 1994*) and it was linked to the medieval settlement research within coal - mining area of the Most region in North - West Bohemia realised mostly in the 1980's, which produced several present - day village rescue excavations focused mainly to the early medieval settlement (*Klápště 1994a*). This research influenced some theoretical approaches of the present project.

tradition reflected in the settlement area structure, house form, construction and also behaviour (esp. refuse disposal) being substantially different compared to the 14th - 15th century villages. There is still a lack of archaeological data proving any spatial - functional continuity between the 13th century buildings and established late medieval farmsteads. Therefore these settlements appear to have represented the earliest cores of later nucleated villages (stabilisation of the settlement pattern - change of the macro-structure - might have been realised within the early medieval tradition). The formation process of the developed nucleated villages, rising from small 13th century cores, could be dated to the late 13th - 14th centuries (change of the micro-structure - introduction of the stabilised village plans and farmsteads providing a long - term continuity). However, another possible interpretation cannot be excluded - the 13th century settlements situated within later nucleated villages might be, in some cases components of the final phase of the early medieval settlement structure, thus stabilisation of the settlement pattern could have taken place in some areas in the late 13th-14th century.

It is necessary to point out the multiplicity of different formation processes of medieval nucleated villages in Bohemia and also their different chronological and spatial contexts. The process of settlement stabilisation is relevant in areas with an early medieval settlement tradition. Nucleated villages with regular ground plans could easily have been introduced within the colonised forest areas where these new settlement forms might have had appeared earlier than in the so called classical settlement areas (cf. deserted late 13th century villages in Central Bohemia based on very developed regular plans: e.g., Svídna, *Smetánka* 1988 and Komorsko, *Nováček* 1995).

Excavations in present - day villages produced interesting evidence of the late medieval and postmedieval house and farmstead development. The earliest phases of excavated houses (14th - 15th centuries) were situated partly underneath the modern houses so that the general setting of the house within the farmstead had not changed since the 14th century; only shifting slightly both lengthways and in width has been demonstrated in the late medieval and postmedieval period. Also farmsteads and the boundary lines between farms and communal areas were already stabilised in the 14th century. Great rebuilding of villages in terms of the house construction (massive structures) and improvements in standards of living (e.g., introduction of living rooms provided with tile - stoves and glazed windows) occurred in the postmedieval period (mostly in the 16th-17th century). Houses were built in the same places as their modern counterparts in this period and also their basic structure remained the same until the present day in many cases. Research of present - day villages did not produce any complete late medieval house plans due to postmedieval and modern building activities. This represents one of the limitations of living village excavations compared to deserted settlement research. Archaeological data indicated that the late medieval three - compartment house types were similar to houses excavated in deserted medieval villages,³ mostly of the corner - timbered and perhaps also timber - framed (Libkovice) constructions which were in some cases provided with stone footings or foundations.

Present - day village excavations provided evidence of further farm buildings in the later Middle Ages and postmedieval period such as barns, sheds and other buildings of a lighter construction of different kinds and these also yielded interesting archaeological data from refuse layers. For instance, in Libkovice, yards were already paved in the 14th century, however, these were not apparently kept clean until the postmedieval period, so that layers of mostly organic material reaching 0,3-0,5 m in depth with a rich collection of finds were deposited there. Excavated localities provided huge data sets of material culture items for the study of the everyday life and living standards of the rural society in the 13th-18th centuries.

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3 Esp. the basic three - part house formed by the chamber (living room), hall and storage room.

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