## COLONIZATION, DEVELOPMENT AND DESERTION OF THE MEDIEVAL VILLAGE OF BYSTŘEC

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It was in the middle of the thirteenth century when a large number of settlements came into existence in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. They originated partly due to what is known as Great or German colonization. In this period mainly vast areas of so far little populated parts of the country at the foothills of the mountains were settled and colonizers were coming to Central Europe not only from Austria or Germany, but also from Belgium, Holland and other countries. The network of newly founded settlements was so dense that in some places the forests were almost entirely cleared and converted into arable land though it was not suitable for agriculture. As a result, a number of these settlements were abandoned in the following centuries. Their desertion was often directly caused by a military conflict or other violent clashes. Naturally, only economically prosperous villages were renewed and settled again. This is what happened in the area of Drahanská vrchovina (The Drahanská Highlands) in Central Moravia. Professor E. Černý located more than 60 deserted settlements in this area (Černý 1992). Among them there was the village of Bystřec belonging to the largest ones and it was chosen as the object of archaeological research which is now nearly at an end.

The first written evidence of the existence of the settlement dates to 1349, when the village was bearing the German name of Mehrinschlag, just like most other settlements in the area ( $\check{Cerny}$  1997, 117). In 1371, however, it appears under the Czech name Bystrzicz, derived from the expression "bystřina", i.e. a stream with quickly flowing water ( $Hos\acute{a}k$  -  $\check{S}r\acute{a}mek$  1970, 137) and it kept its name in the following centuries. The village was deserted after a violent attack in the first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The settlement was then plundered and burnt. It was this way of abandonment of the village that enabled us to reveal a number of unique finds (Fig. 1).

The settlement of Bystřec (Fig. 2) was founded on the route connecting two important centres, Blansko and Račice, in a valley on both banks of the stream. It was thus a forest village with two rows of houses and fields behind them. Due to the fact, that the axis of the village was formed by the stream with its banks being often rather swampy, the main track did not lead through the central part of the village but behind the houses on both sides. The research indicated that the foundation of this settlement had been planned and prepared with geodetic precision (Fig. 3). This is true especially about the right, southern part of the village in which a straight 490-metres line was marked out and seven building sites were measured out, each of them 70 metres wide. Only one of these homesteads was wider by ten metres and it was obviously widened later with its further development. The fronts of the homesteads are situated on a straight line marking out the edge of the building site in the direction towards the stream. This way, the fifth homestead in the row, otherwise homestead XII (further on mentioned only as H XII), moved from the terrace above the stream to the valley near it where it suffered from floods. This is why it was necessary to move this homestead uphill, together with the other ones on the same line. This was not, however, carried out spontaneously as you may imagine, but another straight line was marked out for this purpose, starting at the final point of the original straight line and directed higher uphill at an acute angle. Not only a new homestead H XII was founded there but also the other homesteads in the row including H XI which had been built into the already built-up site X I. This is the only example in Bystřec of two homesteads being built into a single building site.

Distances among the farmsteads on the southern slope of the valley are quite considerable and they are much better arranged than those on the opposite slope. Chamber and storage room are mostly at a right angle (H IV,VIII, II and XII) which later, when the other buildings were constructed, gave origin to the L-shaped

layout of the homestead. This can be seen e.g. at H I (Nekuda 1975), where the buildings are connected under one roof, or at H X where they remained standing separately (Belcredi 1997a) (Fig. 4).

A different arrangement was used only at H XI which is very much unlike any other building in Bystřec. This is a unique manifestation of how a classical three-part house was developing (Fig. 5; 6). It had its free space between the chamber and storage room covered by the roof which gave origin to the hall (Smetánka 1994). The storage room of this homestead is, moreover, the only storage room in the settlement built entirely of stone. Another homestead, which is different in appearance, is H IX, the chamber of which is situated on a huge artificial terrace on the westernmost edge of the site, whereas its storage room is on the large neighbouring natural terrace near the eastern edge of the site (Belcredi 1998, 23). This situation was due to the unfortunate appearance of the site which has a depression in its centre, and to the necessity to build the chamber on the front line of the marked out straight line which did not allow the builder to move it higher uphill.

The situation is considerably different on the opposite, i.e. northern part of the valley.

A large concentration of buildings is to be found in its western part. These are built so closely that it is very problematic to distinguish if this was one or more homesteads. We find a very analogous situation in the deserted medieval settlement (DMS) of Pfaffenschlag (Fig. 7). The right hand side of the settlement was also precisely measured out there, and on the opposite side the researcher located a magistrates house and a mill, with the pattern similar to that of Bystřec (Nekuda 1975, Fig. 154a). All the finds in Bystřec lead us to the conclusion that this is a settlement of utmost importance. It can be divided into two parts, private and common.

H III in the western part is formed by an irregular L-shaped building with three or four storage rooms, and H V, adjacent to it has a considerably different layout (*Belcredi 1997b*), with about ten buildings set in a closed rectangle (*Fig. 8*) which is completely unlike all the other buildings in Bystřec. Its uniqueness is also due to the unusual concentration and quantity of finds. Major part was found in storage room 1, precisely defined by the stone foundations (*Fig. 9*).

Not only goblets or jugs were found in rows here, but there were also large storage pots standing there and tens of metal objects were excavated. It was in this part of the settlement only, where military finds appeared, especially tips of arrows for crossbows, stretching devices for crossbows, various bowie knives, lances, but also glove armistice. All this testifies that this place must have been truly exceptional. Also the adjacent homestead is much different from what we know from the opposite side, especially as far as its layout is concerned (Fig. 10). Three farm buildings denominated H VII form an integrated whole, closed from the south by a building with three storage pits. The chamber stands on its own, west of these and there is another one or two storage rooms at H VI above this.

The remaining seven homesteads in this part of the village are again divided into regular building sites, this time, however measuring 50 square metres each. The swampy or marshy areas, unsuitable for agriculture, were left out. Two homesteads (H XVI and XVII) were so badly damaged during the irrigation and drainage work in the 1970s that it was impossible to reconstruct their appearance precisely. Out of the five remaining homesteads, two were built as L-shaped (H XIV and XV), and three in a row, with the entrances to the chamber and storage room orientated opposite to one another (H XIII, XVIII and probably also IXX).

While on the southern side and in the western part of the northern slope the buildings are placed on natural or artificially raised platforms, following the marked out straight lines, the houses in the remaining part of the northern slope are situated further on from the stream and respect its flow. We face, therefore, two criteria for the placing of the homesteads. Due to the fact that the risk of floods was obviously lower here, the terraces are not raised so high and we often encounter the builders endeavour to situate the building to the centre of the site. In this particular respect, the situation at homestead IXX is very typical. The house had originally been founded in the centre of the site. The builders soon realised that this placement was very unsuitable because, probably as a result of the clearing of the forests, so much sand was brought by the water from the ravine above the homestead after rain, that the house was soon abandoned and moved to the edge of the site.

Under a thick layer of sand we found a building, dated by pottery finds to the early days of the settlement of the village (Fig. 11). It also revealed the information about the appearance of such a building, which, unlike later houses, which were either houses built from posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered or built from logs, was constructed from wooden blocks on the level of the ground without the stone basement. A part of an oven has also been preserved. Judging from the remains of wood it can be deducted that the house had not been burnt.

In the yard of H II in the opposite corner of the village, we have probably found evidence of even older settlement. We revealed an underground dwelling equipped with heating which later served as a refuse dump (Belcredi 1987a).

From the total number of 17 revealed homesteads, 11 have one or two farm buildings at the maximum, apart from the chamber. It can be therefore concluded that almost two thirds of the homesteads are two- or three-roomed, while there are more three-roomed ones on the left side of the stream. Moreover, there is one four-roomed farmstead on each side and the last farmstead on the right side is H X which is five-roomed. On the left side there is one six-roomed homestead and also the largest site with ten buildings. The great majority of farmsteads have scattered layouts of the buildings which are typical of mountainous regions. This means that individual buildings stand on their own, mostly on raised terraces which are either natural or artificially and deliberately piled up. If there are more storage rooms at the homestead, it is usually an L-shaped type of homestead on condition that the terrain permitted such construction. The entrances from the chamber to the storage room are always led by the shortest possible way, and the storage room is situated in a place well visible from the door of the chamber. A very important role is played by the paving of the yard which not only suggests the main communication zone within the yard but also defines the entrance from the main tracks to the farmstead and its operation area.

We can deduce from these facts that some yards were not accessible for the carts and it was necessary to carry all the things to the farmstead through one of the farm buildings which served as a passageway (e.g. H IV, V and X). We did not find any paved connection between the farmstead and the main track.

The basic construction unit of every medieval settlement was represented by the chamber with an oven. The Bystřec chambers are exceptionally large in comparison with the chambers found in the other deserted settlements in the region of Moravia (Belcredi 1987b, 158). The area they cover ranges from 20 to 33.5 square metres. All the eight homesteads on the right side of the valley have chambers made from logs with the stone basement. In four cases the main storage room was constructed in the same way, differing from the other farm buildings by the exactness of its construction. In two cases the storage room was only built from posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered, and in one case it was entirely made of stone. In one case, at H XII it was impossible to evaluate the storage room.

On the northern slope, H IV, VI and XIV were the only homesteads in which the chambers made from logs with stone basements have been proved. The chambers of H XIII, XV, XVIII and IXX were built from



Fig. 1. The medieval village Bystřec.

posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered. There was no chamber found at H V and it was impossible to trace any chambers at H XVI and XVII at all. The construction of the storage rooms made from logs has been proved at H III, almost all the buildings at H V, VI and XIV were made from logs, while the others were built from posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered. We have proved clearly that the development of the construction led from the house built from posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered, to the houses from logs with a massive stone basement. It seems that the house built from posts originally had the log building around and the former was later demolished. This is suggested by the repeated finds of the rows of posts along the inner walls of chambers. This continuity can be observed in all the cases where the log constructions appear, with the exception of H III and IV where the log constructions represent the original houses and next to them new ones were added later. This find is vital for the under-

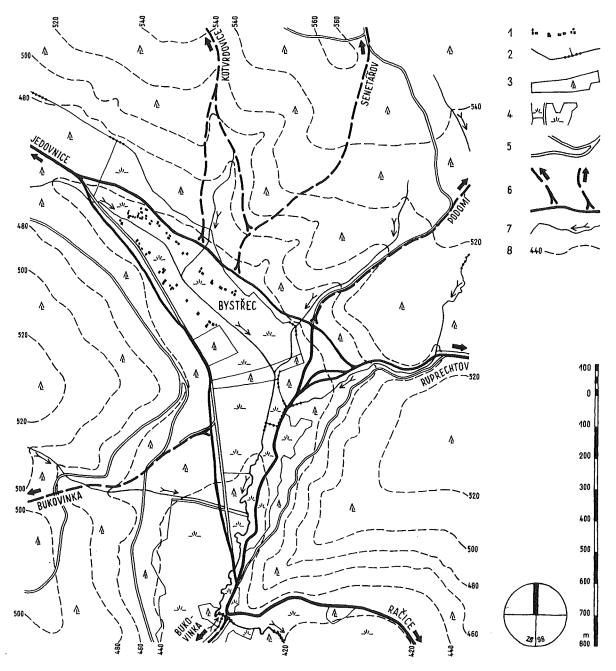


Fig. 2. The estimated routes of medieval tracks connecting the settlement of Bystřec with the neighbouring villages. 1 - the houses of the deserted medieval settlement (DMS) of Bystřec, 2 - cadastral line, 3 - present forest, 4 - meadow, 5 - present tracks, 6 - medieval tracks with the name of the neighbouring village, 7 - stream and its tributaries, 8 - contour lines at 20 metres.

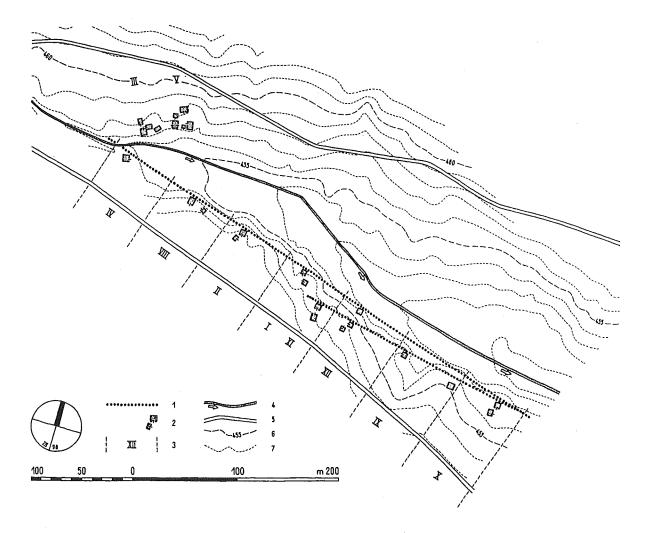


Fig. 3. Hypothetical layout of the village on the right bank of the stream. l - marking out a straight line of the colonization foundation, 2 - revealed buildings with estimated entrances, 3 - estimated bordering lines of the settlements building sites, 4 - stream, 5 - tracks, 6 - contour lines at 5 metres, 7 - contour lines at 1 metre.

standing of the building development of the settlement. Not all the houses built from posts, however, were turned to log constructions. In the northeastern part of the village we can trace as many as four alterations of the house which, however, preserved all the time its original construction of a house built from posts.

The most distinctive change occurred at H IV where the oldest construction from posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered, and the latest log construction are divided by 80 centimetres of gradually piled layers and there are also some other adaptations of the terrain (*Belcredi 1986*).

Homesteads XI, XIII, XV and IXX show signs of a number of older alterations and layers as well. What can be observed at homestead X is continuous development from a two-roomed homestead to a five-roomed farmstead, in which the location of the main storage room was transferred, and as a result also the entrance to the chamber was changed. For the first time in the rural area in Moravia there was a well discovered as a part of this homestead. The entrance was also transferred at H XI and the storage room at H V.

A considerable part of the chamber is occupied by the oven, located in most cases to the left side of the entrance. Besides a few exceptions, this is a horizontal type of oven, 2-3 metres long and 1-1,5 metres wide. The ovens are orientated both in the east-western and in the north-southern directions. Unique in this respect appear to be homesteads II, X and XI which are equipped with two ovens, each of them different, however, both in appearance and in the purpose for which it was constructed. At homestead II the horizontal oven is complemented by a circular oven placed in the neighbouring corner of the room (*Belcredi - Nekuda 1983*, 44), at H X by what may have served as a drying oven with a drought pipe (*Belcredi 1997*, 109) and at H XI a new oven was constructed later as a blacksmiths hearth. The original forge was in the northeasternmost edge of the village at H IXX. Apart from this one, H III also had a square heating equipment which had a flat

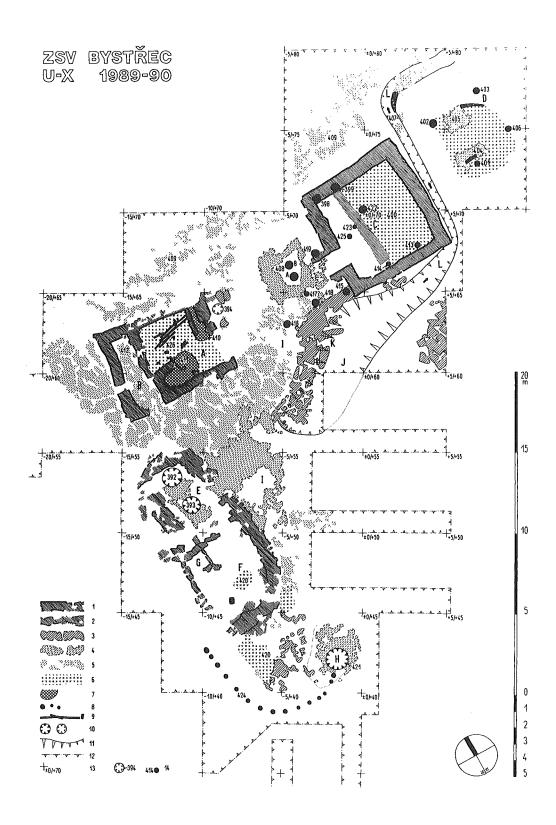


Fig. 4. Ground plan of homestead X, the finds. I - straight stonework, 2 - non straight stonework, 3 - reinforcement of the slope, 4 - pavement, 5 - stone areas, 6 - baked clay, 7 - fireplace, 8 - posts, 9 - the remains of the beams, 10 - sunken objects, 11 - incline of the terrain, 12 - edges of the excavated sites, 13 - points of the square net, with a side 5 meters long, 14 - numbers of buildings, A - living room, B - annexe, C - storage room, D - farm building, E - storage room with storage pits, E - farm building with thrashing floor, E - area for storing grain, E - well, E - yard pavement, E - dunghill, or a water tank, E - reinforcing the slope with stones, E - drainage channel.

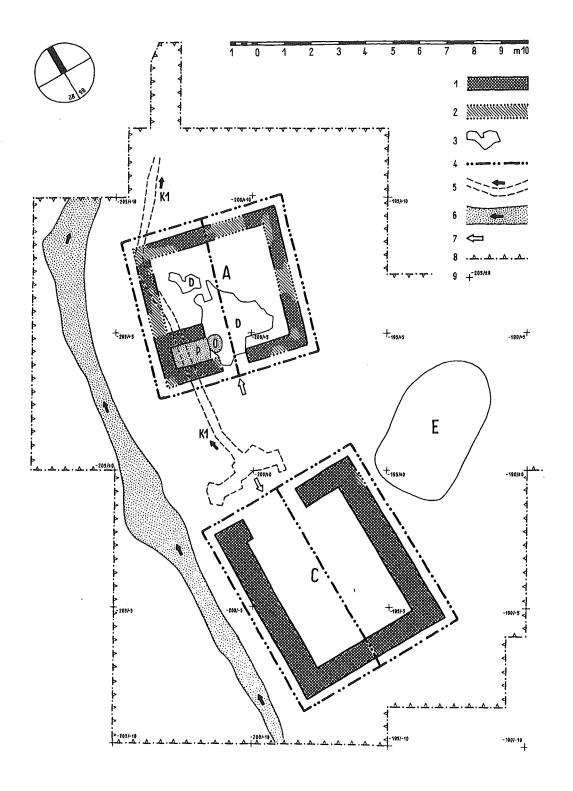


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the ground plan of homestead XI, older phase.

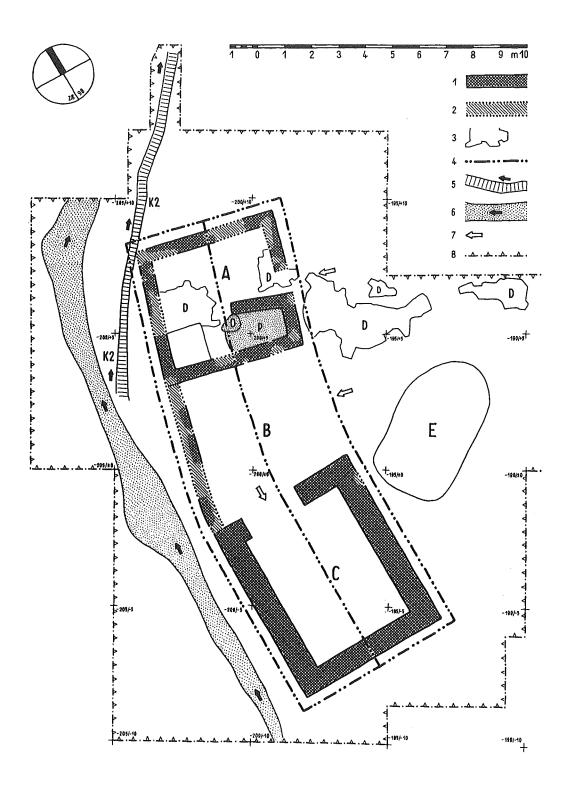


Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the ground plan of homestead XI, the last cultural layer. I - well preserved straight stonework suitable for reconstruction, 2 - dilapidated stonework, 3 - outlines of the buildings and terrain fault lines, 4 - the edge and the upper part of the roof, 5 - covered drainage channel, 6 - silted sands, 7 - entrances to the buildings, 8 - edges of the excavated sites, 9 - points of the square net, with a side 5 meters long, A - living room, B - hall, C - storage room, D - pavement, E - dunghill, K - drainage channels, P - ovens, O - fireplace.

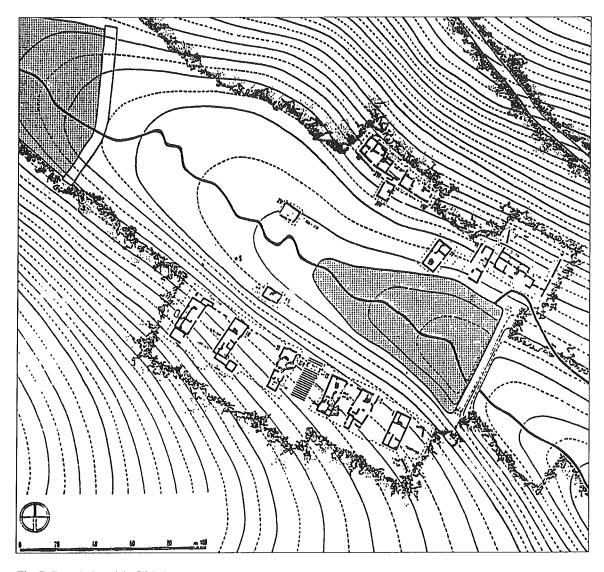


Fig. 7. Ground plan of the DMS Pfaffenschlag near Slavonice (according to V. Nekuda, reproduced from the monograph Pfaffenschlag, DMS near Slavonice, Brno 1975, Fig. 154a).

baked-clay area inside the oven which is used for heating placed at about 85 centimetres above the floor (Belcredi 1986, 436) which is exceptionally high. In a hole under the oven at H V there was a copper axe deposited probably as a votive offering (Kthovský 1992, 65). Further on, we also revealed a number of transfers or improvements of the ovens during the existence of the chamber or their repairs. At homestead IV the oven was revolved at a right angle in later periods (Belcredi 1986, 435), at H IX it was moved from the southwestern to the nortwestern corner of the room (Belcredi 1998, 24). At homestead XIII a few circular bowl-shaped sunken fireplaces appeared, coming to existence gradually.

Apart from the chamber, the settlement consisted mainly of the storage room. The construction quality of the storage room always surpassed the quality of the other buildings which were often only built from posts with wattle in between on which mud was plastered. A number of settlements possess, however, a small storage room, probably built entirely of stone. There were mostly two pits dug in it, one with a flat bottom, the other with a pointed one (e.g. H II, VII and X). These were used instead of cellars which were impossible to build due to the high level of groundwater. The only homestead which had a storey granary dug into a partly artificially piled terrace was H V. The above mentioned pits served for storing food in a cold place. The deeper of the two pits drained water and thus it was possible to store food, that requires storage at a cold and dry place, in the other one. Homestead III had a storage room with three similar pits unlike homestead IX with the only pit, situated under a wooden porch, with perfectly preserved wooden parts of the lateral walls. At larger homesteads it is possible to identify buildings for storing grain with revealed thrashing

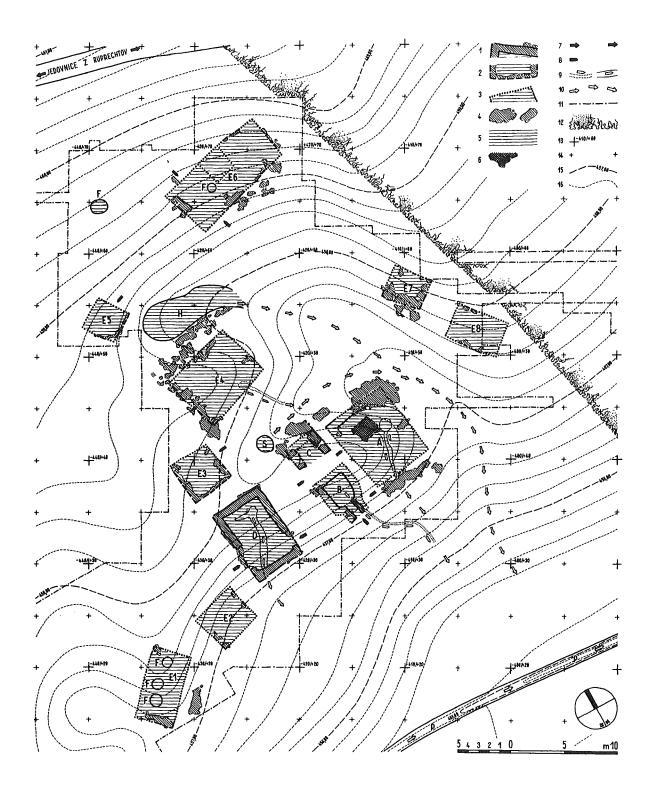


Fig. 8. Ground plan of homestead V. I - well preserved stonework suitable for reconstruction, 2,3 - estimated outlines of the buildings and operation areas, 4 - remains of stonework, 5 - building sites and operation areas, 6 - fireplace, 7 - direction of the track, 8 - entrances to the buildings, 9 - drainage of water by surface or covered channels, 10 - direction of the flow of surface water, 11 - edges of the excavated sites, 12 - border line of the present wood, 13 - points of the square net, with a side 10 meters long, 14 - points of the square net, with a side 5 meters long, 15 - points of the square net, with a side 1 metre long, 16 - contour lines at 20 metres, A - area with the fireplace, B - storey granary, C - annexe, D - the main storage room, E 1-E 8 - farm buildings, F - storage pit, F - artificially regulated spring with a filtering device, F - dunghill, F - present stream, F - track behind the houses.

floor. Due to the number of evidence that horses were present at almost every homestead, the spaces for their stabling must also be taken into consideration, together with the season shelter for the cattle. The revealed light roofed buildings can be identified as hen-houses, woodsheds and the like.

As a consequence of the problems with water we often find drainage channels in the settlement of Bystřec. One of the best constructed drainage channels was that which drained the above mentioned storey granary at homestead V. This was equipped with a few other drainage channels. At the other homesteads, XI and IXX, the drainage channels led under the floors of the chambers, or drained the yards and the smaller buildings. The edges of the homesteads are regularly marked from the east and west with drainage ditches for surface water. Grooves hollowed out by water running from the roofs have often been revealed. Stones along their edges which appear quite often were supposed to protect the houses from the water.

Drinking water was undoubtedly vital for the existence of the village. A lot of effort was made to gain purer water than that running in the stream which also probably did not flow all year round. This is proved by the find of a well at homestead X and of an artificially regulated spring with a filtering device at homestead V. Another clearly defined area in a number of homesteads is a dunghill. It was a habit also in the later periods to situate it behind the paved area, often in a central position between the chamber and the storage room.

The conclusion we can draw from this is, that it is no longer true, as it used to be, that heating is the only equipment of the houses for which there is archaeological evidence. What we identified in Bystřec was also a thrashing floor, granary, place for storing vessels and other kinds of objects, a pit (a double pit) for storing food in a cold place and also a source of drinking water and a dunghill.

As far as the finds are concerned, all the known shapes of medieval pottery were found in

Bystřec. A large quantity of pots of all sizes, but also jugs, goblets, bowls and tripods are represented. Further on we found open burners, older pots with handles in the upper parts decorated with nail nicks, miniature vessels, and what is dominant among these finds are ceramic statuettes: Our Lady with a diadem, a figure with hands folded in prayer, a figure with a falcon, and a horse with a rider (Měchurová 1988, table II/3,4). Due to the unique situation at H III we also revealed a fine example of a complete set of kitchen utensils of a small homestead, consisting of seven pots with lids of various sizes, a bowl and a goblet, all placed together in a row in the storage room and on a shelf next to the oven. The main storage room of homestead V probably served as a store room for all kinds of vessels because there were rows of pots, jugs, goblets and

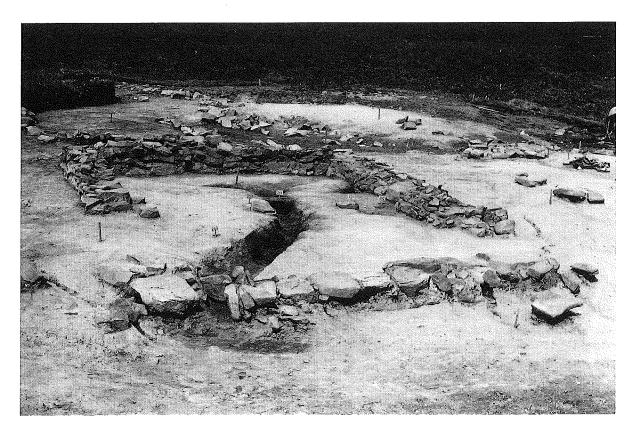


Fig. 9. View of the main storage room at H V from the southwest.



Fig. 10. Final appearance of the settlement with the building sites marked out. 1 - revealed buildings, 2 - badly damaged buildings, 3 - building sites of the homesteads, 4 - stream, 5 - tracks, 6 - contour lines at 5 metres, 7 - contour lines at 1 metre, P - spring site, B - swamp.

even a few storage pots along the walls. Also a well preserved last cultural layer of homestead XVIII left its equipment, comprising 8 pots, 3 jugs, 2 goblets and a storage pot.

Unlike homestead IV there is a number of finds from the other parts of the homestead and this is why it has not been possible yet to determine the total number of finds in this house. The most surprising fact about homestead XIII is the appearance of a pot, a whorl and metal spindle in a hole under the floor of the chamber. Ceramic whorls often made from the upper parts of the lids also represent typical equipment of the homesteads, but stone whorls have also been excavated.

In the set of pieces of metalwork all the well-known groups and objects typical of a medieval settlement are present as well, moreover in a strikingly large quantity (Belcredi 1988). It can be presumed that at some homesteads the whole equipment has remained preserved to these days, at others some objects must surely have been taken away. This depends on how thick the burnt layers covering the finds were. Naturally it was the least in the houses built from posts with wattle in between which was covered in mud, from which the things were taken away most often. The most interesting set of metal objects expected us on the bottom of the well of homestead V. It was here, probably just a short time before the village was deserted, where the ffarmerf had hidden a few particularly valuable metal objects which were easy to move at the moment. The set consists of three pieces of metal parts of a cart, a bolt of a cart, the metal part of a spade and two keys. It may have been the same person who hid a set of vessels in the dunghill. In one of them we found two coins, fgroschenf, from the king Wenceslaus IV. era, minted at about 1380. Another coin was discovered in the wall of the stone storage room at homestead XI. This was a fparvusf from John of Luxemburg era, dated at about 1320. The largest number of metal finds comes from homestead V where a big quantity was concentrated in the above mentioned storage room and around it, whereas e.g. in its northern part metal fitting from an entire cart was revealed. The most common find, apart from nails and wedges, was represented by knives,

sickles and horseshoes. Unique finds were the military objects, like a leaf-shaped lance, stretching devices for crossbows or a part of a glove armistice.

Three encolithic sharpened axes found here can be considered a rarity. These had probably been brought to the locality by its medieval inhabitant from elsewhere. It cannot be excluded that these objects played a role of so called thunder stones known from later ethnographic studies (Sklenář 1998, 33-65).

No remains of human bodies have been found so far and the finds of animal bones are also scarce. The finds revealed up to now prove the presence of horses, pigs, beef cattle, sheep, goats and there was one rare find of a tiny bone of a small dog.

On the other hand, what appears quite often are the finds of crops, leaves of trees and grass. Among those appearing most often, there are various kinds of cereals and flax, but we also found vetch, strawberry plant and also weeds. Dried wild pears were found at homestead IX and a considerable amount of knowledge comes to us from the analysis of the sediments in the bottom of the well. It showed that in the environs of the village deciduous trees such as willows and hazels but also poplars, beeches, oaks, limes and grasses used to grow in the time of its existence. The so far founded posts used in the construction of the houses, however, come from firs.

The village of Bystřec has become, after Pfaffenschlag (Nekuda 1975), the second entirely explored village in Moravia. Now, when 19 homesteads have been revealed, the research is about to finish. It has become quite clear by now that it is one of the cornerstones helping us to understand the process of colonization and the foundation of the colonization settlement itself in the first place. For the first time in medieval settlements we managed to prove the link between the building sites of the houses and the parcelling out of the agricultural land (Fig. 12) which has luckily been preserved as a whole in the surrounding woods. This also enabled us to estimate the acreage of the individual homesteads. We got evidence that the royal order concerning the allocation of one "Frankish acre", which equalled to 23.5 ha, for each homestead was observed in the village of Bystřec, which was quite exceptional in Drahanská vrchovina (the Drahanská highlands).

Equally important is what we have learned about the development of the individual homesteads and houses, their conversions, development, decline and reuse, until the final abandonment of the settlement which was followed with probably just a short period of time when the only homestead, U XI, was dwelled in again. From the social point of view it is very important that the existence of an economically differentiated society in the colonization village has been proved. The differences in the economical situation result in a variety of farmhouses, differing both in size and contents. The character of the last cultural layer is a result of a 200-year process of development of the deserted medieval village of Bystřec. The facts about the material culture and the evidence of the level of economics in the medieval village are of great importance as well.

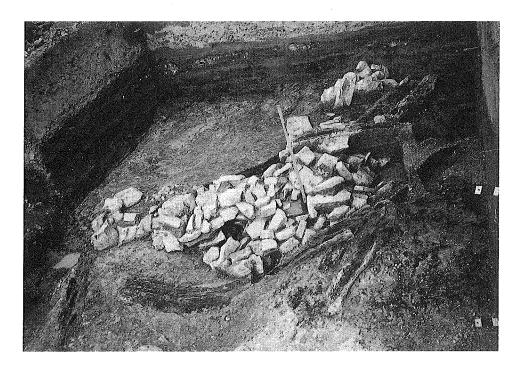


Fig. 11. View of the researched HIXX.

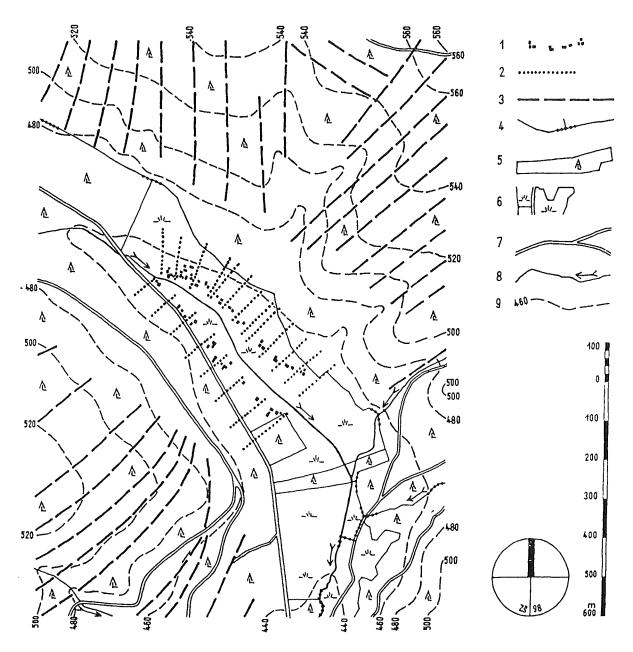


Fig. 12. The link between the sites of houses at the DMS of Bystřec and the parcelling out of the agricultural land. The agricultural land according to E. Černý – drawn into an adapted map of the state, 1:5000 from 1982, 1989 and 1994. I - buildings, 2 - bordering lines between the sites of homesteads, 3 - bordering lines of the fields, 4 - cadastral lines, 5 - the area of the present wood, 6 - meadow, 7 - tracks, 8 - stream and its tributaries, 9 - contour lines at 20 metres.

## KOLONISATION, ENTWICKLUNG UND VERWÜSTUNG DER MITTELALTERLICHEN DÖRFER VON BYSTŘEC

## LA COLONISATION, LE DÉVELOPPMENT ET L'ABANDON DU VILLAGE MÉDIEVAL DE BYSTŘEC

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