

Petr Starec: Archaeology of Wenceslas Square in Prague

This PhD thesis is a part of archaeology of public space in medieval and early modern cities. Based on the findings of long-term archaeological research of Wenceslas Square it presents an analysis of the results of research in the square and interprets the image of Wenceslas Square in its transformation from the Middle Ages to modern times. At the same time, it presents information about the geomorphology of the selected area, water conditions, older settlement forms and the communication needs of this public space. The knowledge gained also provides a probe into the everyday life of the town's inhabitants.

Systematic archaeological research on Wenceslas Square is mostly associated with the construction of the subway in the central part of the square in 1967-1968. Later another great construction intervention in Wenceslas Square occurred at its lower end with the construction of the subway and Můstek metro line A station. Construction circumstances allowed archaeologists to obtain only partial information regarding issue of the Old Town medieval fortifications. Under the new circumstances after 1989 with further construction activities at the square it was possible to perform open archaeological preservation using interdisciplinary scientific cooperation.

Wenceslas Square has a preserved underground, and its oldest forms can be found in the surrounding area, not only houses with their facilities but other material archaeological relics of everyday life of its inhabitants as well as. Archaeologically documented layers of trash that were normally stored in vacant space and in public spaces inside the Old Town were later exported even farther to the open area behind the walls of Old Town. In the Middle Ages parts of today's Wenceslas Square and its surroundings were used as a trash dump.

During the formation of the square the area was partly levelled, and street level was reinforced with pebbles in the form of single row of gritting. The ongoing accumulation of trash on the marketplace, the worsening of conditions for pedestrians and traffic, perhaps the fear of infection and the overall quality

decrees of lifestyle probably became the impulse to repeat landscaping in a similar manner.

Archaeological finds from the former Horse Market show that blacksmiths and similar artisans processing iron worked there. Heaps of trash, which were formed mainly in the lower part of the square yielded findings of shoemaker, leather cutters and other craftsmen products. What also was found at trash dumps were broken household items – such as kitchen and tableware. The main component of municipal trash, however, is decomposed organic waste. Highly noticeable parts of this organogenesis, a former trash mixture, are findings of animal and plant macro-remains that represent a testimonial of daily lives and needs of Prague conurbation residents.

Another group of findings is formed by processed wood in the form of various household items. New Town water supply network forms an exceptionally abundant set of findings. It provided water to public fountains and private customers and was made up of interconnected pipes drilled lengthwise through pine trunks.

Prague – New Town – Wenceslas Square – Horse Market – market – public space
– archaeology – Middle Ages – Modern Times