

The Early Medieval agglomeration of Libice – on the quest of suburbium

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1. Introduction

The meeting in Mikulčice focused on defining the function and structure of the so-called ‘associated areas’ (*Nebenareale*) of the Early Medieval central sites. The areas have been defined negatively as the part of central places that were not the residences of rulers¹. In archaeological literature are designated bailey or suburbium, the definition of these terms is based on topography and spatial division of fortified centers. Discoveries of several unique items can be used as evidence for some kind of social topography. There are many examples that can vindicate this approach but using the example of Libice stronghold we would like to show how misleading it can be without detailed analysis.

2. Stronghold and suburbium

Early Medieval centres, settlement agglomerations or the so-called ‘early towns’ existed in the 9th-11th century on the large territory of central, northern and north-western Europe (CLARKE/AMBROSINIANI 1991; PIEKALSKI 1999). Despite different political systems, natural environments and economic conditions they had many comparable characteristics, especially their size and spatial division. The fortified area is generally divided into a smaller *acropolis*, situated at a strategically convenient place, and one or more *baileys* (Vorburg, předhradí). The settlement laying beyond the fortification is described as *suburbium* (LUTOVSKÝ 2001, 13, 241, 269; KLÁPŠTĚ 2005, 331).

The functions of these components of centres can be guessed not only from archaeology, but also from written sources, but written sources do not offer such accurate evidence for the spatial organization of Early Medieval centres (SLÁMA 1986, 33-34; MOŽDZIOCH 2002, 201) as archaeology. Various authors of medieval

texts usually distinguished between the fortified centre (*urbs, civitas*), and the neighbouring *suburbium* (Kalhous in this volume). Generally said, the suburbium played mainly economic role, as a market place; there were handicraft workshops, houses of merchants, clergy or princely officials. The suburbium could also be fortified. Nonetheless, the ability of archaeology to demonstrate all the functions of suburbium is very limited. It is possible to identify only a small portion of craft workshops, usually those working with fire and metals. Luxury items that are interpreted as the property of people of higher social rank could be used in fact in houses of a rich merchants, princely officials or ruling authority. The number of luxury finds is usually very limited and archaeological interpretation of their social environment highly speculative without further analyses (MOŽDZIOCH 2004).

3. The agglomeration of Libice

The Early Mediaeval stronghold in Libice nad Cidlinou is situated on the confluence of the rivers Elbe and Cidlina in the Eastern part of Central Bohemia, approx. 60 km east of Prague. We define the *agglomeration* of Libice as the stronghold and its immediate vicinity. This area was a part of stronghold’s daily life. It includes all traces of human activity, especially settlement and burial places, within a range of 2 km (Fig. 1) outside of the fortified area. The border of the agglomeration is determinable thanks to the high density of archaeological trenches especially in the cadaster of the modern villages of Libice and Kanin, south and north of the fortified enclosure. The first description of the agglomeration was given by R. TUREK (1971). Its extent and division is comparable to present state of research and it is used in this paper, despite some reservations about the nomenclature used.

3.1 Dating of Early Medieval Libice

Three major developmental stages have been distinguished at the site; **1st phase**: the Middle ‘Hillfort’ period, **2nd phase**: the Late ‘Hillfort’ period, **3rd phase**: the Terminal ‘Hillfort’ period (MAŘÍK in print b). The

¹ The ‘associated areas’ were defined in description of the grant project Non-residential areas of early medieval central agglomerations in Bohemia and Moravia in archaeological sources http://www.arup.cas.cz/en/vyzkum_en/anotace_nerezidencni_casti_aglomeraci_en.html [2005-05-10].

individual phases are characterized mainly by their ceramics and grave inventories. In terms of absolute chronology the beginnings of this important centre is dated to the end of the 9th century. The 2nd phase started around the half of the 10th century and partially overlapped with the period in which Libice is historically known to have been ruled by the Slavník dynasty. However, the military assault that ended, according to the historical tradition, the rule of Slavník family in 995 is not represented in the archaeological record and the transition from the 2nd to the 3rd phase is quite indistinct. It took place during the 11th century, when the so-called '*pottery of the Slavník phase*' is replaced by pottery with a rim pulled upwards, typical of the 3rd phase and it appeared, as early as in the first half of the 12th century (PRINCOVÁ/MAŘÍK 2006).

3.2 Fortified area

The fortified area of the stronghold of Libice is situated on two remnants of sand and gravel terraces of the Cidlina and Elbe rivers. The smaller part of the stronghold, designated the inner bailey also called 'acropolis' (10 ha) (Fig 1.A), is completely surrounded by river flood-plain, while the larger, outer bailey (14 ha) (Fig. 1.B) is protected by the river flood-plain on the south. The western and northern sides were divided by former oxbows of the Cidlina. The modern level of the flood-plain is approx. 4-6 m lower than the surface of the inner and outer bailey. A detailed geological survey proved that about 2 m sediments have covered the flood-river plain since the Early Medieval times (HAVRDA 2006). The whole enclosure was defended by a wood-earthen rampart covered by marlstone screen wall (MAŘÍK 2006; MAŘÍK in print a; PRINCOVÁ in print).

3.2.1 Inner bailey

Systematic excavations were undertaken within the inner enclosure under the leadership of R. Turek in the years 1948-1953 and 1967-1973. The research focused mainly on the eastern side of the inner bailey, where it was expected that the masonry foundation of Early Medieval buildings would be found². This expectation was completely fulfilled by the discoveries of a church, 'princely palace' and burial place (TUREK 1981; PRINCOVÁ 2001) Unfortunately, the archaeological trenches that cover 4.5 % of the inner bailey concentrated in the eastern part provided minimum information about the nature of settlement within the whole area. R. Turek assumed that the inner bailey had been depopulated because of the construction of the church and 'princely palace' in the mid-10th century (TUREK

1966-1968, 94; TUREK/HÁSKOVÁ/JUSTOVÁ 1981, 35-37) with the entire inner bailey serving exclusively for the princely family and members of the higher social ranks. Nevertheless, this assumption has never been proved and the results of archaeological research in the narrow trenches oriented north-south (Fig. 2.A) has never been published.

The organization of space seems to be more complicated in the light of non-destructive research undertaken since 2000. The aerial photographs taken in 2000 and 2007 showed a lot of crop-marks indicating a very high density of settlement (Tab. 8). Although dating of the crop-marks is doubtful, pottery datable to the 1st and 2nd phase was found within the whole area of the inner bailey during surface collection. If the crop-marks indicate the remains of the Early Medieval settlement, it is possible to infer that the inner bailey was settled quite intensively in the 1st and 2nd phase. The spatial analyses showed a rectangular grid³ in the southern part of the bailey. This area was also divided off from the rest of the bailey by some type of fencing (Fig 2.B). Other remains of rectangular units are visible in the north-east of the bailey. Results of the aerial photographs have to be confirmed by magnetometric measurements (Fig 2.C). This method was tested only on c. 2500m²; it revealed numerous anomalies interpreted as traces of sunken features and fencing.

3.2.2 Outer bailey

Archaeological excavations inside the area of the outer bailey have been underway since 1974. Most of them have been rescue excavations preceding construction of new buildings (JUSTOVÁ 1980; 1985; 1990). The outer bailey is covered by a relatively even network of 94 trenches that show a very high density of the Early Medieval settlement activities (Fig. 3). The sunken features of oval or irregular shape represent the predominant finds, the functions of which are in most cases obscure, with dwelling features identified only in minimal numbers. The present state of evaluation of these excavations makes it impossible at present to reconstruct the spatial organisation and development of this area. The excavations in trench 14 offer some evidence of the density of the settlement activities. Nearly 700 of sunken features dated to the 1st and 2nd phase were found in 6000 m² large trench (Fig. 4).

The archaeological research also discovered the remains of a huge building on a stone foundation in trench 2 in the south-eastern part of the outer bailey (Fig. 3.A). On the basis of the finds of ceramic zoomorphic vessel (aquamanile) and writing tools (stilus),

2 The marlstone destruction debris was visible on the surface in 1948 and it was probably the main criterion for location of the first trenches.

3 The aerial photographs taken in 2007 were rectified and evaluated in software GeoMedia Professional 6.0 and GeoMedia Grid 6.0. Statistical analysis 'Zone score diversity' that shows the number of unique cell values in the zone was applied for the crop-marks (Fig. 2).

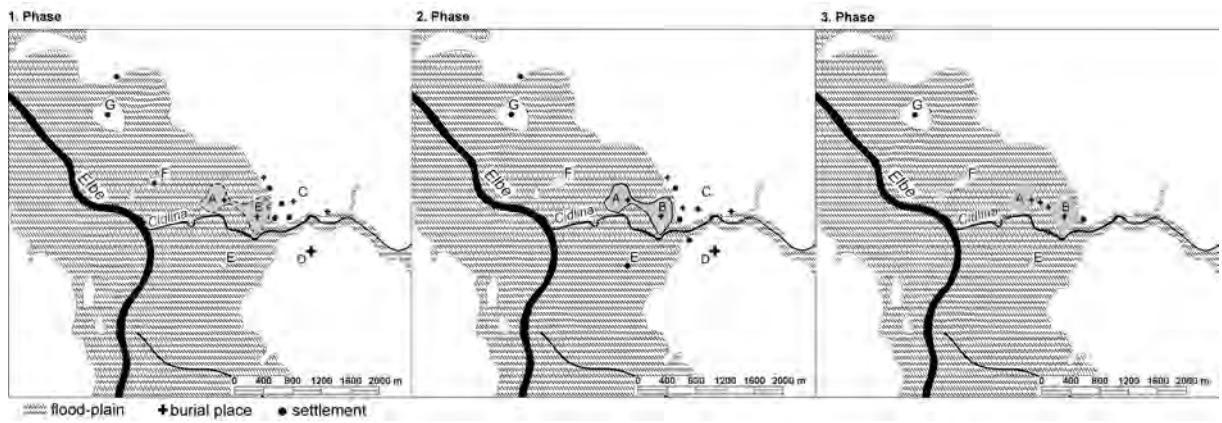


Fig. 1. The agglomeration of Early Medieval Libice: A – inner bailey (acropolis), B – outer bailey, C – right bank of Cidlina, D – burial place of Kanin, E-G – settlements in the flood-plain.



Fig. 2. Libice – Inner bailey: crop-marks (grey) on the background of spatial analysis showing the: A – archaeological trenches, B – fencing, C – magnetometric measurements.

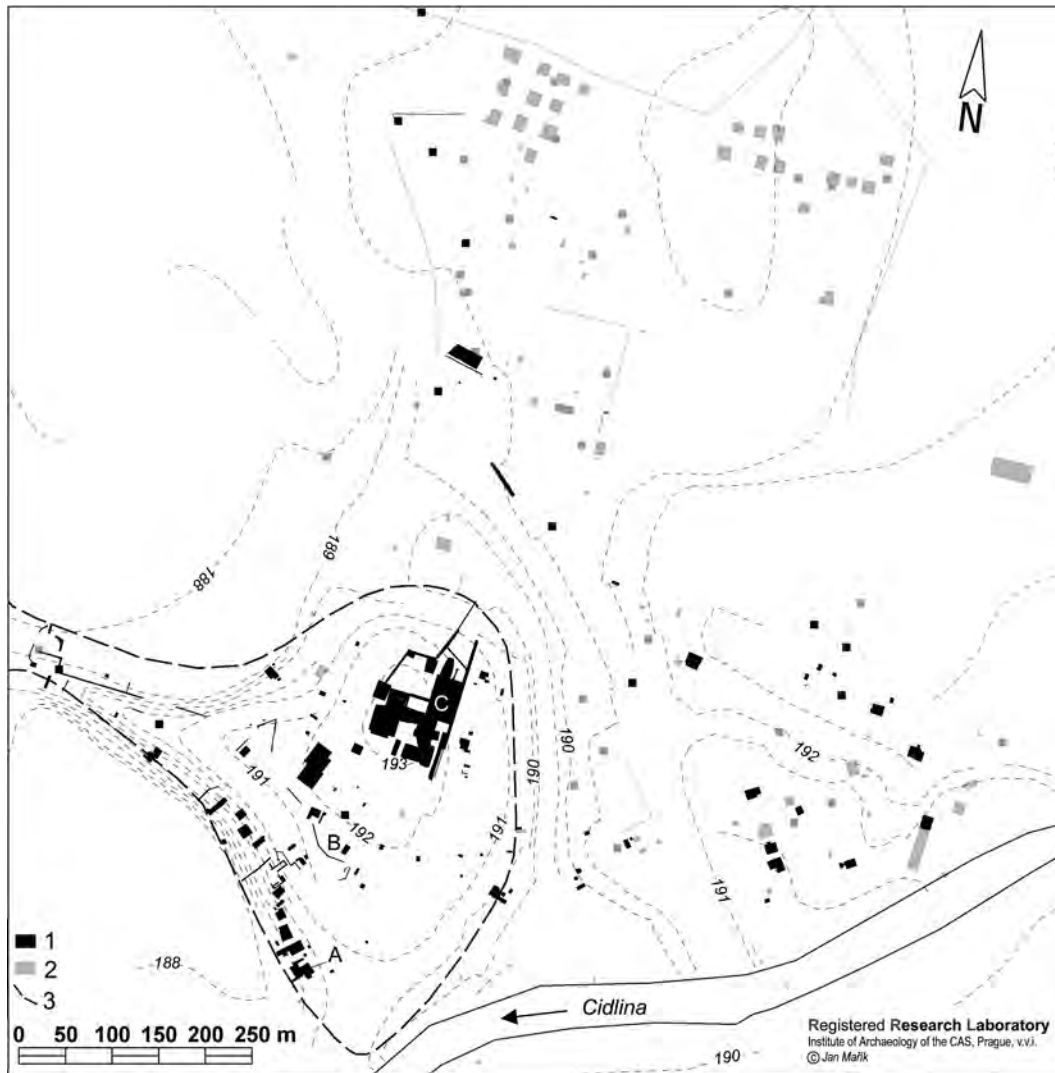


Fig. 3. Libice – Outer bailey: archaeological trenches; A – The so-called “priestly house”, B – Virgin Mary church, C – Trench 14, D – Burial place ‘U cukrovaru’, E – Burial place ‘U nádraží’, F – Burial place ‘Na růžku’, F – Burial place ‘Kanín’. 1 – Trenches with Early Medieval finds, 2 – Trenches with negative evidence, 3 – Assumed line of fortification.

this dwelling has been attributed to the clergy (JUSTOVÁ 1980, 248-251; PRINCOVÁ 1994, 194; PRINCOVÁ 1995, 257-258). Another interpretation focused on the finds from the area of the so-called ‘priestly house’. J. SLÁMA (1995, 194) pointed out that the writing tools could also have been used by merchants. Likewise, the aquamanile may not have been only for the ceremonial washing of hands by a priest, but was more probably for washing the fingers of table companions during their meals. The interpretation the aquamanile from Libice is complicated further by insufficient number of comparable finds and lack of information about discovery (KLÁPŠTĚ 2007).

The existence of a church in the outer bailey in the Early Medieval period is only indirectly documented. The earliest written evidence of the Virgin Mary church (Fig. 3.B) that was built in the centre of outer bailey is dated to the 14th century. However,

the development of the cemetery, which encloses it, goes back to as early as the 2nd or 3rd phase (MAŘÍK 2005) and a burial place without a sacral structure within the settled area seems to be quite unusual. The second indication is the dedication altar to Virgin Mary mentioned in legends of St. Adalbert, which played an important role in the young saint’s healing activities (PRINCOVÁ 1994, 194). On the other hand, it is not certain that St. Adalbert was born in Libice and the altar could have been placed in some private chapel (SLÁMA 1997, 18).

3.3 Right bank of the Cidlina

The evidence of the Early Medieval settlement on the right bank of the Cidlina is distinctly weaker than in the enclosure. The area of the right bank of the Cidlina has been monitored within the cadastre of modern village of Libice since 1979 and 40 Early

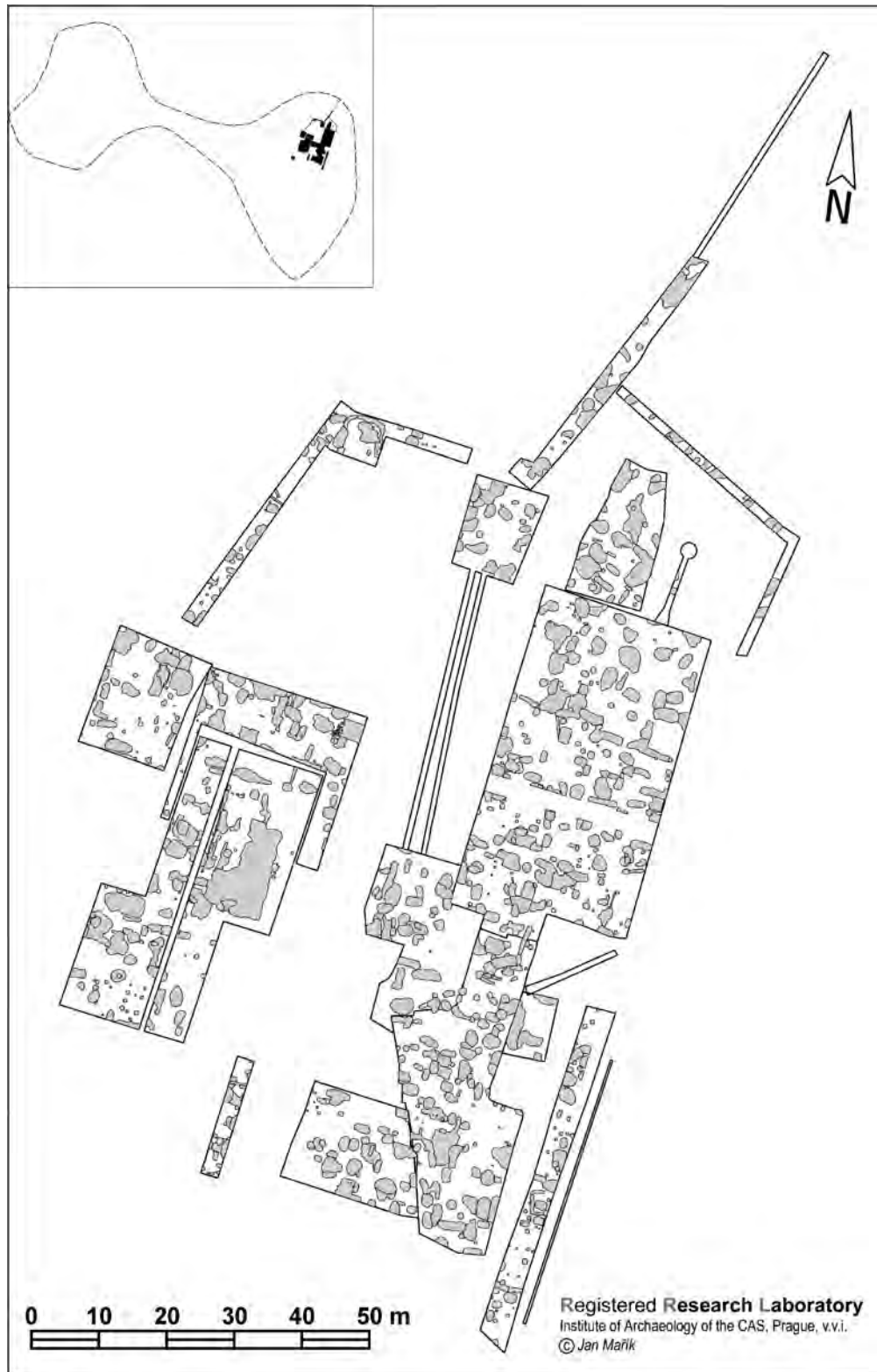


Fig. 4. Libice – Outer bailey: trench 14, sunken features (grey).

Medieval sunken features in 152 trenches covering c. 10 000 m² have been discovered here. The remains of settlement are concentrated along the edges of the fluvial terrace. There are 3-4 concentrations, which could be interpreted as smaller settlements or homesteads. People who inhabited this area probably used the smaller burial places in the neighbourhood (Tab. 9).

Comparing the large burial places at Kanin (Fig. 1.D) and in the inner bailey, the grave inventories on the right bank are rural in character. This corresponds to the estimates of the population that used these burial places (MAŘÍK in print b). The 3-4 homesteads could have 17-33 inhabitants in the 1st phase and 30-55 in the 2nd phase (see table on next page).

Burial place	1. Phase	2. Phase	3. Phase
Inner bailey	49-123	58-64	
Kanín	454-730		
Right bank of Cidlina			
U cukrovaru (Fig. 3.D)	14-22		
U nádraží (Fig. 3.E)		16-33	
Na růžku (Fig. 3.F)	3-11		

Estimations of populations' size that used particular burial place.

3.4 Settlement in the flood-plain

This type of settlement occurs in the regularly flooded area of the river flood-plain and is attested on both sand dunes and remains of the alluvial terraces. These sites seem to be concentrated mainly in the vicinity (up to 3 km) of the central (or significant) places. The as yet recorded mediocre cultural layers and relatively small number of sunken features suggest the short-time usage of these sites inhabited by population engaged in fishing, stock raising, and finally forest and raw materials exploitation. Cultivation appears to have been quite inappropriate in these sites since the river flood-plain areas lacked sufficiently developed soils and were regularly threatened by the floods. Information regarding the possible nature of the human settlement and activities could be retrieved by the palaeobotanical investigation and analyses (ČULÍKOVÁ 2006; KOZÁKOVÁ /KAPLAN 2006).

4. Crafts activities

Evidence for various production activities at the agglomeration is very rare. Pieces of iron slag, the results iron smelting, were discovered at two places in the outer bailey (TUREK/HÁSKOVÁ/JUSTOVÁ 1981, 37). Melting-pots used for copper and silver were found in the south-western part of the excavated area in the inner bailey. Several pieces of pottery with traces of gold and silver smelting were found in trench 14 in the outer bailey (PRINCOVÁ/MAŘÍK 2006). Potsherds were used instead of smelting pots. Their glassy surface contained small globules of gold and silver and the spectral analyses showed a content of lead, tin and copper (Fig. 5).

5. Burial places

Burial places are supposed to be one of the most important sources for exploration of social ranking of the former societies. Ten locations with evidence of Early Medieval burials have been found within the Libice agglomeration. Items regarded as indicators of higher social status (jewellery, weapons) were discovered at two sites, at Kanin and at the inner

bailey⁴. The comparison of numbers of finds showed that two cemeteries are similar (MAŘÍK 2005). The remaining burial places outside the fortifications were more rural in character.

The cemeteries at Kanín and at the inner bailey differ markedly, however, in terms of the occurrence of graves in which the deceased was deposited in an unusual manner (on the stomach, side etc.). Only one such grave was found at the inner bailey⁵ while 23 cases have been attested at Kanín⁶. The undignified position of the body and minimum of grave-goods implies that the buried people lived on the periphery of the society. The second viewpoint in social evaluation of a burial places represents is the location of the cemetery. Among the burial places within the agglomeration it was the site at the inner bailey in the immediate vicinity of the settlement that had the higher-ranking position. This burial place was restricted for a quite limited group of people probably on the top of the social ladder. Population estimates also showed that the cemetery at the inner bailey was used by quite a small group of people as compared to the Kanín site⁷ (see table on this page).

While some general image of the structure of the society could be drawn on the basis of burial places in the Libice agglomeration; reconstruction of the settlement pattern is a more complicated question. We can assume without any serious doubt that the burial places on the right bank of Cidlina belonged to the settlements in the neighborhood. The origin of people buried at Kanín and in the inner bailey seems to be more uncertain. The size of both burial places implies that they were used by people from the very intensively inhabited area of the fortified enclosure. Starting from the top, the cemetery located nearby the church and palace was used by people who belonged to the ruling echelon of society. Most of them probably lived in the palace on the inner bailey or very close to it, but we must taken into account the fact that this model was more and more disturbed by the increasing role of Christianity during the 2nd and the 3rd phase. Kanín was probably used as a central burial place for the rest of inhabitants of the fortified enclosure. Those buried included undoubtedly important persons equipped with swords, spurs, jewelry, etc., people who did not undergo standard burial ritual and were more or less thrown into the grave.

4 Vertical differentiation of society based on grave inventories can be applied only for graves of the 1st and 2nd phase because of the decreasing number of grave inventories.

5 Grave 249 (TUREK 1976).

6 J. MAŘÍK 2007, 115-116.

7 49-123 people in the 1st phase and 58-64 people in the 2nd phase. Most of the population of the agglomeration, a group of 454-730 people, probably used the burial place at Kanín.



Fig. 5. Libice – Outer bailey: trench 14. Piece of pottery with traces of gold and silver smelting.

6. Conclusions

This paper makes an attempt to distinguish parts of the Early Medieval agglomeration of Libice from the point of view of social topography and functions. Evaluation of archaeological sources has shown that the standard archaeological division of a centre into acropolis, bailey and suburbium in terms of their expected functions does not work and should be used only for general description of the topography of the site. On the example of Libice it has been shown that, the residence of the ruling elites was identified in the eastern part of the inner bailey but on the other hand there is no evidence that the rest of this part of enclosure was inhabited by people of the same social status. The larger outer bailey was not used only for crafts and

other activities supplying economical demands of the centre of the stronghold, since a building discovered here (the so-called ‘priestly house’) could have been used by people of higher status. The Early Medieval settlement and adjacent burial places concentrated on the right bank of Cidlina were rural in character and the interpretation of 3-4 homesteads as suburbium is questionable. There is no doubt about the location of the residence of the rulers in the inner bailey, and the function of the suburbium as it is described in written sources was fulfilled by the rest of the settlement within the fortified enclosure.

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Souhrn

Cílem mikulčického kolokvia bylo poznání funkcí a struktury tzv. „vedlejších“ reálů raně středověkých center a jejich základních komponent. Tyto areály byly definovány negativně, jako ty, které nebyly bezprostředně sídlem vládnoucí elity. Hlavní pozornost se soustředila především na ty části, které jsou v archeologické literatuře označovány jako předhradí či suburbia. Přestože jejich prostorové vymezení je dáno především geomorfologií lokality nebo dochovanými relikty opevnění, dochází namnoze i k jejich funkční interpretaci. Na centrální a zpravidla také nejlépe opevněnou část je situována *akropole* (Fig. 1, A) se sídlem nejvyšší autority (vládce, knížecí správce), jedno či více opevněných *předhradí* (Fig. 1, B) je pak považováno za provozní zázemí akropole, kde vedle řemeslnických aktivit můžeme předpokládat sídla hradských úředníků nebo církevních hodnostářů (LUTOVSKÝ 2001, 13, 241, 269).

Přestože existuje celá řada příkladů, kde lze tuto interpretaci obhájit, můžeme na příkladě libického

hradiště ukázat že mechanické přebírání tohoto modelu bez konkrétních dokladů může být značně zavádějící. Akropole, předhradí a podhradí (suburbium) jsou archeologické terminologii používány k popisu konkrétních částí raně středověkých center, a proto by měly být užívány bez nároku na funkční nebo sociální interpretaci. Zajímavé srovnání poskytují v tomto ohledu soudobé písemné prameny, které se více soustředí právě na funkční a sociální rozdělení raně středověkých hradišť. V tomto více méně duálním pojetí stojí proti sobě na straně jedné *urbs, civitas, Burg*, jejichž protipólem je *suburbium*. Naopak rozlišení jednotlivých částí opevnění bylo pro autory raně středověkých textů mnohem méně důležité (KALHOUS, v tomto svazku).

Opevněná část libického sídelní aglomerace je tradičně dělena na akropoli (vnitřní hradiště) a předhradí. Mimo ně jsou součástí aglomerace také sídliště a pohřebiště na pravém břehu Cidliny, pohřebiště na katastru sousedního Kanína a sídliště obklopená říční nivou.

Systematický archeologický výzkum vedený na vnitřním hradišti R. Turkem v letech 1948-1953 a 1967-1973 sesoustředil na jeho západní část. Kamenné destrukce, které byly před zahájením výzkumu patrné na povrchu, umožnily předpokládat nález pozůstatky zděné architektury. Objevy „knížecího“ paláce, kostela a pohřebiště s bohatě vybavenými hroby toto očekávání potvrdily a vedly k předpokladu, že na vnitřním hradišti bylo výhradně sídlo vládnoucí elity, zatímco jeho větší část zůstala neosídlena (TUREK 1966-1968, 94; TUREK/HÁSKOVÁ/JUSTOVÁ 1981, 35-37). Nedávné výsledky nedestruktivního archeologického výzkumu však ukázaly, že s velkou pravděpodobností byla hustě osídlena celá plocha vnitřního hradiště (Fig. 2). Stopy velmi intenzivního osídlení jsou doloženy archeologickými výzkumy také na druhé části opevněného areálu, na předhradí (Fig. 3, 4). Výrazně menší byla hustota osídlení na pravém břehu Cidliny, kde se patrně nacházelo jen 3-4 menších usedlostí (Tab. 9).

Při pokusu o sociální interpretaci jednotlivých částí libické aglomerace můžeme vycházet ze srovnání sídlištních nálezů a pohřebišť. V opevněném areálu můžeme bez větších problémů identifikovat sídlo vládnoucí společenské vrstvy s nálezy R. Turka ve východní části vnitřního hradiště. Ve zbývajících částech vnitřního hradiště i předhradí je výpovědní hodnota nálezů ze

sídlištních kontextů značně omezená, neboť současný stav zpracování nedovoluje říci cokoli bližšího o vnitřním členění tohoto prostoru. O přítomnosti obyvatel s vyšším společenským postavením vypovídá například tzv. „kněžský dům“ (Fig. 3.A) objevený na předhradí. V obou částech opevněného areálu je doloženo také zpracování drahých kovů (Fig. 5).

Poněkud lepší podmínky pro studium sociální stratifikace poskytují pohřebiště. Na vrcholu společenského žebříčku stáli lidé, kteří pohřbívali své mrtvé na vnitřním hradišti. Velikost této populace se pohybovala mezi 49-123 osobami (Tab. 1) v 1. fázi existence libického hradiště (PRINCOVÁ/MAŘÍK 2006), 58-64 osobami ve fázi druhé (MAŘÍK 2007b). Převážná část obyvatel aglomerace (454-730) však pohřbívala na mimo opevněný areál na kanínském (Fig. 1.D) pohřebišti, kde vedle bohatě vybavených hrobů byli pohřbíváni i lidé, kteří stáli na samém okraji tehdejší společnosti. Jejich těla byla do hrobů spíše pohozena než řádně pohřbena. Na kanínském pohřebišti byli patrně ukládáni ti, jejichž obydlí se nacházela jak na předhradí tak i na vnitřním hradišti, avšak mimo sídlo vládnoucí elity. Zcela mimo tento systém stála pohřebiště na pravém břehu Cidliny. Jejich venkovský charakter i odhadovaný počet lidí, kteří je využívali (1. fáze: 17-33, 2. fáze: 30-55) svědčí o tom, že patřila k výše zmíněným 3-4 usedlostem (Tab. 1).

Literature

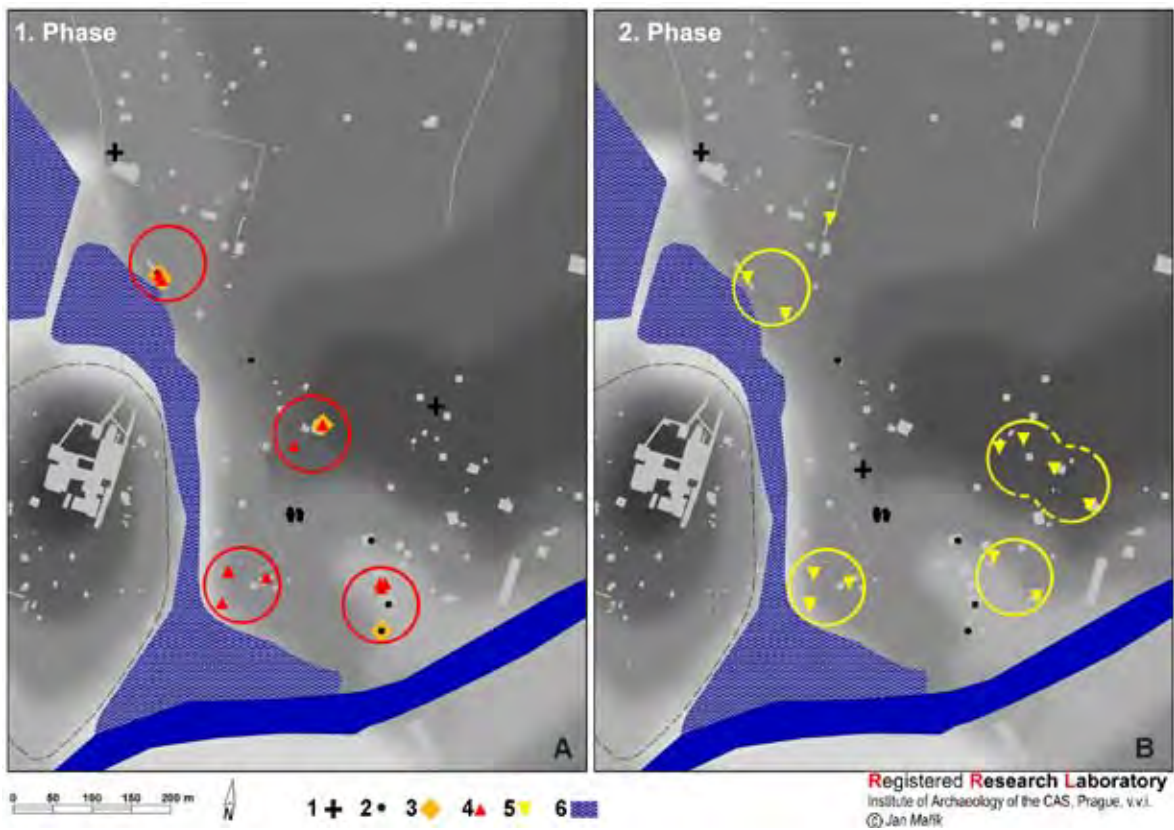
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Tab. 8. Libice – Inner bailey: aerial photograph (2007).



Tab. 9. Libice – Right bank of Cidlina: settlement and burial places in the 1st and 2nd Phase.