Between the years 2006 and 2008 a thorough ar-
chaeological research was conducted on the plot of
a former town house no. 260/III. The excavations
completely analyzed the historical terrains (Cymba-
The building, the first records of which trace back
to the 15th century, is situated in the south-east cor-
ner of Lesser Town’s Square (Vlček et al. 1999, p.
363). By its location within Prague’s residential ag-
glomeration it is situated in the very core of the oldest
early medieval suburbium under the Prague Castle,
nowadays Lesser Town (Malá Strana; fig. 1). Ap-
proximately 270 m³ of occupation horizons with an
extraordinarily complicated stratigraphy, at times
even 4 m wide, was archaeologically analyzed, and
more than 18,500 artefacts were extracted, dating
from early Medieval to Modern Age. The recently
explored locations showed a complicated construc-
tion development of the building since the late Gothic
Era up to the last Classicist alterations in the 19th
century. The earlier horizon proved a dynamic set-
tlement usage of the explored area during the whole
Medieval Era. Various recessed buildings, fragments
of the oldest masonry build-up area and above all
the fortification elements of Lesser Town from the
second half of the 13th century were documented.
A massive functionally structured settlement strata
belonged to Early Middle Ages. Construction relicts
of several wooden roads could be dated between the
first half of the 10th century and the beginning of the
11th century (fig. 2–4).

BRIEF ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE AREA
OF LESSER TOWN IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

The development of the settlement in the area of
the Lesser Town Basin (excepting prehistoric times)
begin between the 7th and 8th centuries (Čiháková
1999, p. 13). According to the latest results of ar-
chaeological excavations the early residence on the
promontory of „Hradčany” situated above Vltava Riv-
er and later the establishment of the Prague Castle
as a seat of the ruling clan can be placed to the peri-
od around mid 9th century (Frolík, Smetánka 1997,
p. 34).

This event is probably connected to the decline
of the leading role of Levý Hradec as a main resi-
dence of the first Premyslids and consequently to its
moving by approximately 10 km southwards, to the
place of present Hradčany and the Prague Castle
(Frolík, Smetánka 1997, p. 38; Boháčová, Herichovo-
vá 2008).

The choice of the promontory of Hradčany as
a seat of the first Czech rulers was connected to sev-
eral factors. Obviously the question of communica-
tion with other centres of early medieval settlement
played a considerable role for its selection. It should
be noted that in those days there was no easy ford
across the river within several kilometres. Crossing
Vltava River was only possible using the fords and
islands located just in the centre of Prague’s prom-
ontory (Hrdlička 2000, p. 48). It should also be men-
tioned that the distant trade routes heading from west
Fig. 1. Prague 1 – Lesser Town, Lesser Town Square, plot no. 260/III. Localization of the research work. Graphic design by J. Hlavatý

Fig. 2. Surface of one of the levels of a documented early medieval road (see fig. 4 – green)
to east and from south to north were intersecting in this area (Čiháková 2000, p. 175). Controlling those routes presumably provided the ruler above all with a profitable income from the protection of merchants’ caravans (Ječný 1987, p. 24).

With a certain probability the enlargement of the dwelling area also played a substantial role in the choice of the new ruler’s seat.

The symbolic importance of Hradčany still remains an unanswered question. According to professional literature the localization of the residence built of stones, the enthroning place of Czech sovereigns, is placed at the centre of the later fortified promontory of Hradčany (Lutovský 2005, p. 872).

The examined area was situated outside the fortification of the suburbium during the first period of the Early Middle Ages (800–950), and in a later phase was integrated into the fortification (Čihákrová 1999, p. 15; 2001, p. 49). More than thousand years of development have left in the settlement core a stratigraphy of historical terrains about a 3 m in diameter, with numerous remains of structures, dwellings, agricultural and strategic buildings, as well as well-preserved wooden components. Remains of wooden constructions, undoubtedly belong-
ing to communications, were found inside as well as outside the early medieval fortified area (Čiháková 1996; 1997; Čiháková, Dobrý 1999, p. 339).

With the foundation of the town corporation of Lesser Town after 1257, the whole area of the suburbium underwent a distinct transformation, which permanently made its mark and shaped the archeological terrains (Hrdlička 2000, p. 50). Gradual development of the town is evidenced by traces of building activities (erection of houses, ecclesiastical buildings and premises) connected with repetitive ground and public space shaping (extensive ground shaping of the territory, lowering of terrains, new public space layout). The erection of the town fortification also proved a significant medieval urban transformation.

From the standpoint of historical development, on the building in the research area the northern basement part reversed by its front to the square belonged to the oldest part of the construction (fig. 1). In the

---

Fig. 5. Construction of the surface of an earlier road (see fig. 4 – orange). Graphic design by M. Ditmarová, J. Hlavatý
NEW DISCOVERIES OF EARLY MEDIEVAL STREETS IN LESSER TOWN IN PRAGUE...

earliest period of the town the building estate markedly featured a smaller size (ca. 40%) in comparison with nowadays. The southern half of the estate originally belonged to the belt of the town fortifications from the second half of the 13th century. After the demolition of the building in the second half of the 14th century the vacant place was used for town development.

History of the house plot no. 260 is connected to several building transformations of its size between the Late Middle Ages and Modern Age but lacks an immediate connection with the above mentioned discovery of early medieval communications.

METHODODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Terrain work itself took place on an relatively wide area of the house estate situated in the southwestern part of Lesser Town Square, located in the block of houses between the square and Tržiště Street (fig. 1). The extension of the examined area was limited by the extension of the building project. Methodology of the research as well as the strategy of the terrain scheduling were chosen with care, proceeding in a manner as detailed as possible with recording of single settlement strata and their mutual intertwining with the evolution of the town estate. Being an integral part of the project, the confrontation of the results of older researches with actually revealed situations has brought up an outline of unchained development of the settlement of the area from the 10th to the 20th centuries. Research work continued with shorter breaks for ca eight months.

ARCHEOLOGICAL FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD OF HIGH MIDDLE AGES AND MODERN AGE

The early medieval stratum was preceded by several chronologically earlier, but no less important findings. Among the most important ones was a 7 m long, 2.4 m wide and almost 1 m high fragment of the foundation part of the main wall of the Přemyslid fortification of Lesser Town from the second half of the 13th century (accompanied by a fragment of the moat). The building development of the town estate could be observed on the basis of the remains of several typologically various walled constructions and features (a High Medieval cellar, a recessed entrance to the cellars and a well).

Parts of existing but also destroyed building constructions of the house from the periods of Late Gothic to Classicism belonged to the latest periods. The most interesting discovery from the later period of the house was an adit documented in the second basement of the eastern Renaissance wing of the building. The detailed scrutiny of the drainage system proved its connection with a ca 15 m deep modern age well, revealed by the research in the southern part of the present yard.

SITUATION OF FINDS AND CONSTRUCTION OF EARLY MEDIEVAL COMMUNICATIONS

During the archaeological research of the area situated in the northern half of the yard and the neighbouring premises situated under the western wing of the house in the lower part of historical terrains, the depth of ca. 1.5–3.5 m (measured from nowadays surface) revealed a huge strata formed by remains of markedly decomposed wooden constructions of the roads (fig. 2, 3). As regards the finds, remains of roads leading approximately in three directions were uncovered in several depth levels (fig. 4). The extension of the exposure of particular sections of the roads was limited by the building project and by constructions of the existing house. Their uncovered length ranged from 6.75 to 7.25 m. Preservation of single sections and levels considerably differed. Stratigraphically later levels were rather fragmentary in comparison with the earlier ones. But the basic construction pattern was similar for all the roads. It was always in the form of two main massive beams, evenly spaced, with planks laid across and fixed together lengthwise, thus forming the surface of the road. The width of single sections varied. The oldest communication oriented in the west–east direction reached the smallest width of ca 2.4 m (fig. 4 – orange, 5). The remaining two directions were of almost the same width of ca 3.2–3.4 m. The material used for the road construction was found to be oak / Quercus on the basis of a species analysis (Dobrý 2007). Individual roads sometimes differed one from the other, above all by the number of levels above them and partial constructional details.

The oldest communication means (fig. 4 – orange) was preserved only on one level. In contrast with the others its foundations were slightly recessed into the subsoil. The foundation excavation was
found to be lined by a layer of argillite stones and pebbles topped by the wooden construction itself.

After the destruction of the oldest road, two new roads emerged (fig. 6), the first one oriented northwest-southeast (fig. 3, 4 – red) and the second one more or less upright on the first one in the direction of the southeast-northwest (fig. 2, 4 – green). The development of both, for a certain time simultaneously functioning communications, was a long-term enterprise as well as a richer construction. The narrower road (fig. 4 – green) was similarly constructed on main beams imbedded on the surface of slope clays. Five levels in total were identified, the earlier one being equipped with a timbered drain (?)..

The same number of road levels was recorded at the northern road (fig. 4 – red), which we consider as the main road, according to the pattern of the communications network of the suburbium. Five road horizons spaced in regular intervals one over the other were documented. Particular levels were separated from each other by a ca 8–10 cm wide layer of clay and sand soil with organic addition related to their function (fig. 7).

The exploration of the two earliest levels of this road has shown, that there used to be parallel communication means, the width of one lane being ca 3 m (maximum), and divided by a ca 0.8 m wide trough, evidently a drain (fig. 6 – right upper corner of the map). However, after some time the drain was covered up and both lanes were joined together into one continuous road with a width of more than 5 m (fig. 7). Cumulation of huge pillared items holding up the construction itself, evidenced by the negatives, belongs to another technical specificity of the above road. Three groups in total were found in partial intervals in the foundation section in the northwest part.

Fig. 6. Construction of the surface of later roads (see fig. 4 – orange, green) north-west – south-east direction and south-west – north-east direction. Graphic design by M. Ditmarová, J. Hlavatý
of the explored area. The main items of each group were vertically recessed wooden pillars of 0.34 m in diameter, which were supported by obliquely placed wooden stanchions of smaller diameter. Wooden items were recessed into the geological subsoil formed by slope clays. Each group had its counterpart on the other side of the road, and its distance ranged from 1.8 m to 2 m. Ten vertical items, the purpose of which was to raise the road above surface level, were documented (fig. 8).

The road had been constructed in such a manner, because the surrounding terrain was geologically rather unstable and therefore unsuitable for building the road directly on its surface. This conclusion was also corroborated by the findings of the geological research, which repeatedly detected remains of local marsh in this area (Čiháková 1999, p. 11; Zavřel 2001, p. 20). Thus the road was partly formed by a bridge construction over the flooded terrain of the marsh. This fact most probably contributed to repeated renovations of the road surface and so testifies to gradual and marked growth of communications in that direction. Also other factors could have had an obvious influence such as increased traffic on the road, which reflected in repeated renovations of its surface as well as of the whole construction.

After destruction of the communication means, the area was found to be overlaid by a huge settlement strata of ca 1.2 m in width with domineering positions in upper part with destructions of minimally two unknown buildings with a ruined stone base wall, negatives of various pits referring perhaps to a former wooden build-up area. This marked stratum illustrates a completely different urban exploitation of the surveyed area from the 11th century to the first half of the 13th century.

**CHRONOLOGY OF THE ROADS**

The question of absolute dating of particular roads has remained unanswered. One of the reasons lied above all in bad condition of documented pieces of wood from their constructions which did not allow to carry out a positive dendrochronological measurement from more than 390 mineralized samples (Dobrý 2007). Only the analysis of rather a small collection of pottery enabled at least general dating of the building as well as existence of single levels of roads into the period from the 1st half of the 10th century to the beginning of the 11th century.
The earliest communication (fig. 4 – orange) was hereby on the basis of appearance of fractions of pottery with collar like profile rims dated into Middle Hill-Fort period (the 1st half of the 10th century). Later couple of roads (fig. 4 – red, green) were connected with the circulation of the pottery with chalice like profiled rims, the focal point of which belongs to the course of the 2nd half of the 10th century. The latest levels of these roads may be linked with the period of fading of this type of edge, therefore in the course of the 1st half of the 11th century. Herein to emphasize, the number of found fractions of the pottery was relatively small and chronologically not very conclusive.

EARLY FINDINGS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE AREA OF LESSER TOWN

The latest finding of wooden roads in the house plot no. 260 is closely associated with the question of the communications network of early medieval suburbium of the Prague Castle. Also in the past the archaeologists could explore the remains of communications from above mentioned period on several places of Lesser Town.

The most important as well as the biggest areal discovery of an early medieval communication was carried out in the area of nowadays Mostecká Street and neighbouring Josefská Street which was described as a huge foundation construction composed into a rectangular network of frames without extent communications levels. The total documented length
The earliest evidence of a road in Lesser Town’s suburbium is the finding situation documented in the area of the house plot no. 2 situated in the centre of Lesser Town Square. This was a two-phase communication, the early medieval one, paved by stones and by chance also by animal bones was dated into the beginning of the 9th century. The stratigraphically following wooden communication functioned approximately on the verge of the 9th century (Čiháková 2003; 2008; Čiháková, Havránek 2008, p. 218). The closest known analogy for the findings from the area of Lesser Town is represented by the massive wooden and stone communication dated into the 10th century, excavated in the area of the Third Court of the Prague Castle (Boháčová 1998, p. 10, 11; Frolik, Smetánka 1997, p. 89).
CONCLUSION

The discovered section of wooden communications signifies together with the earlier mosaic of findings a considerable contribution to the knowledge of the structure of communications network of the suburbium of the Prague Castle in Early Middle Ages. The extraordinary contribution lies in the dislocation of the finding itself – the crossing of roads in front of its fortification in the area of a potential entrance (gate?) into the centre of the suburbium. Thanks to its position it can be connected with the section of so far documented roads in the eastern part of Lesser Town directing to the crossing or later bridge across Vltava river (fig. 9). This section was probably an integral part of a traditionally mentioned backbone communication coming through the centre of the Prague Basin from the west to the east (Čiháková 1999, p. 19; 2000, p. 175; Čiháková, Zavřel 1997, p. 99, 100; Čiháková et al. 2000, p. 131–133). More detailed knowledge of the chronology of the development of the whole communication system of the fortified area under the Prague Castle and its gradual transformation still belongs to the main targets of a following research.

Translated by B. Cymbalak-Jankovská

LITERATURE

Boháčová I.

Boháčová I., Henichová I.

Cymbalak T., Podliska J.


Čiháková J.

1997 Sdělení o archeologickém a palynologickém výzkumu v Praze – Malé Straně (čp.259/III), in: J. Kubková, J. Klápště et al. (eds), Život v archeologii středověku – Sborník příspěvků věnovaných Miroslavu Richtrovi a Zdeněku Smetánkovi, Praha, p. 120–129.


2003 Praha 1 – Malá Strana, Malostranské náměstí, čp. 2/III, Nálezová zpráva o výzkumu 28/00 NPÚ Praha, Archiv nálezových zpráv ARÚ AV ČR Praha č. 9441/03.


2008 Starobylé komunikace pod domem Malostranské náměstí čp. 2/III, Archeologický výzkum NPÚ Praha č. 28/00. Ancient roads underneath the house at Malostranské square Nr. 2/III, Archaeological excavation NPÚ Prague Nr. 2800 at Malá Strana, Edice Archeologické prameny k dějinám Prahy, svazek 1, Praha (e-Book).

2008a Dřevěné vozovky z 10. století pod domem Malostranské náměstí čp. 271/III, Archeologický výzkum NPÚ Praha č. 6/01, Timber roads from the 10th century under the house at Malostranské square Nr. 271/III, Archaeological excavation NPÚ Prague Nr. 6/01 at Malá Strana, Edice Archeologické prameny k dějinám Prahy, svazek 2, Praha (e-Book).

Čiháková J., Dobrý J.

Čiháková J., Dragoun Z., Podliska J.
Čiháková J., Havrda J.  

Čiháková J., Müller M.  

Čiháková J., Zavrel J.  
1997 Ibráhímův text a archeologické poznání Malé Strany – Ibráhims Text und die archäologische Erforschung der Prager Kleinseite, Archaeologica Pragensia 13, p. 93–103.


Dobrý J.  

Frolík J., Smetáčka Z.  
1997 Archeologie na Pražském hradě, Praha-Litomyšl.

Hrdlička L.  

Ječný H.  

Lutovský M.  

Podliska J., Cymbalak T.  

Vlček P. a kol.  
1999 Umělecké památky Prahy, III. díl, Malá Strana, Praha.

Zavrel J.  
2001 Geologie, morfologie a osídlování malostranské kotliny – Geological and morphological conditions of the Prague Lesser Town basin and their influence on the beginnings of settlement in this area, in: M. Ježek, J. Klápště (eds), Pražský hrad a Malá Strana, Mediaevalia archaeologica 3, Praha, p. 7–27.

Mgr. Tomasz Cymbalak  
PhDr. Jaroslav Podliska Ph.D.  
Národní památkový ústav  
Územní odborné prácoviště v hl. m. Praze  
Praha