

MAGDALENA BIS*

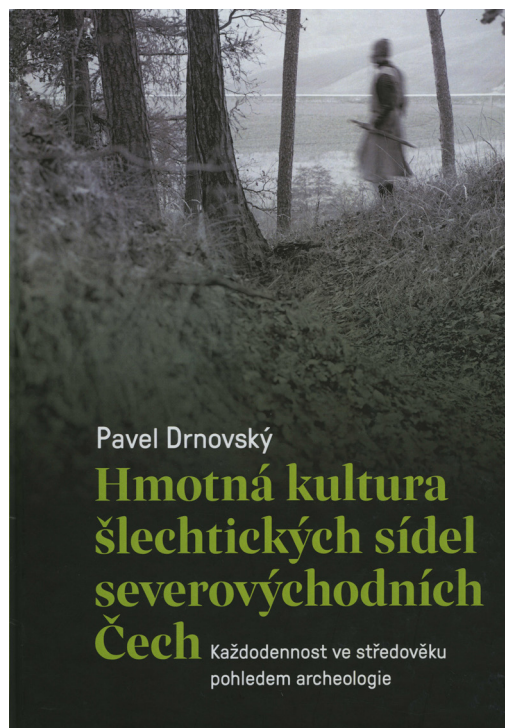
(REVIEW) PAVEL DRNOVSKÝ, *Hmotná kultura šlechtických sídel severovýchodních Čech. Každodennost ve středověku pohledem archeologie* (MATERIAL CULTURE OF NOBLE RESIDENCES IN NORTH-EASTERN CZECHIA. EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES ACCORDING TO ARCHAEOLOGY). HRADEC KRÁLOVÉ 2018. PP. 344.


Received: 31.08.2021 Accepted: 02.09.2021

Citation: Bis M. 2021. (Review) Pavel Drnovský, *Hmotná kultura šlechtických sídel severovýchodních Čech. Každodennost ve středověku pohledem archeologie* (Material Culture of Noble Residences in North-eastern Czechia. Everyday Life in the Middle Ages according to Archaeology). Hradec Králové 2018, pp. 344. "Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae" 34, 153-157, DOI 10.23858/FAH34.2021.011

Past material cultures have been studied in diverse ways from a variety of angles and through different disciplinary lenses. It is a broad and complex field engaged not only by the humanities, but also by the exact sciences.

In the case of the publication under review, we are dealing with a classical archaeological approach employing methods and sources pertaining to the discipline. The work is focused on the material culture of noble residences from north-eastern Czechia, manifestations of various aspects of life in the late Middle Ages and the post-medieval period. These considerations are rooted in research on artefacts unearthed during archaeological excavations. The way in which the leading theme is approached by the author is perfectly illustrated by the words of another Czech scholar, Josef Unger, chosen as the motto for the volume:¹ 'The essence of archaeology lies not in discovering relics but rather in the past life itself. To this end, however, we need to study these relics scrupulously'. (*Smyslem archeologie není objevovat trosky, ale život v minulosti. K tomu, abychom onen život mohli objevit, je potřeba ony trosky důkladně znát*).²



* Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0108-7625>; magdabis@wp.pl; magdabis@iaepan.edu.pl

¹ Unger 2002.

² I am indebted to Prof. Marcin Pauk from the Faculty of History of the University of Warsaw for his assistance in translating the quote.

The publication in review was authored by Pavel Drnovský, a member of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Hradec Králové.³ The book was released by the Pavel Mervart publishing house as the third volume in the series *Archeologické Studie Univerzity Hradec Králové*, edited by Tomáš Mangel and Richard Thér.⁴ The structure of the work follows the standards set for this kind of source studies. It consists of nine main chapters varying in length. The initial chapters outline the background for the discussed material – the essential basic information is laid out in the Introduction (1. 'Úvod') and the chapter on the early Middle Ages in the investigated area (2. 'Poznání mladšího středověku severovýchodních Čech pohledem archeologie'). The subsequent presentation of particular sites included in the study (3. 'Lokalita') leads up to the crux of the work – an analysis of different categories of relics obtained there (4. 'Vyhodnocené soubory'), which is the most detailed part of the book. Further chapters offer an interpretation of the finds and thus serve as an attempt at reconstructing various aspects of everyday life that would once have taken place in the investigated residences (5. 'Poznání každodennosti na šlechtických sídlech v severovýchodních Čechách z pohledu archeologických pramenů'). The text is capstoned with the Conclusions (6. 'Závěr') and an extensive English summary (7. 'Summary: Material culture of aristocratic residences in north-eastern Bohemia. Everydayness in the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of archaeology'). The publication is supplemented with a catalogue of the referenced written primary and secondary sources (8. 'Použité zdroje') as well as illustrations in the form of 103 charts (9. 'Obrazová příloha').

The main part of the work is focused on determining the present status of the residence, or more precisely, understanding the nature of its current remains and inferring its furnishings from the available archaeological sources.⁵ At the core of these considerations lie utility items, with the crucial goal being to establish the role played by them in the past. Such an approach

³ See https://uhk.academia.edu/Pavel_Drnovský

⁴ Parts of the reviewed publication, namely the title pages, table of contents, introduction, English summary, and referenced literature are available online: (PDF) Hmotná kultura šlechtických sídel severovýchodních Čech; Material culture of aristocratic residences in north-eastern Bohemia | Pavel Drnovský - Academia.edu

⁵ In Polish archaeological literature, these questions have been addressed predominantly by Prof. Anna Marciniak-Kajzer (cf., for instance, Marciniak-Kajzer 2011a; Marciniak-Kajzer 2011b; Marciniak-Kajzer 2016a; Marciniak-Kajzer 2016b; these works reference other Polish contributions). They were also discussed mostly by Prof. Leszek Kajzer (e.g. studies collected in: Kajzer 2014), and Prof. Dominik Nowakowski (e.g. Nowakowski 2008; Nowakowski 2017).

allows for a glimpse into past reality. However, these items are but a subset of the utensils and other goods necessary for living in the past.

Pavel Drnovský, driven by his desire to engage the broadest possible source base, undertook the demanding task of analysing relics and artefacts obtained from 26 dwellings of the nobility situated in what is now north-eastern Czechia. Out of these, the sites which yielded the most comprehensive source base were 16: castles (Brada, Bradlec, Bolkov, Božanov, Bradlo, Břečtejn, Červená Hora, Kumburk, Nebákov, Pečka, Rotemberk, and Rýzmburk) and fortresses (Batňovice, Javorník, Semonice, and Třebovčice). The finds obtained at other places were used less prominently and to a varying extent. They come from the castles of Brandýs nad Orlicí, Dolní Štěpanice, Skály, Stárkov, Vizmburk, and Vražba, as well as the fortresses of Bříšťany, Mladé Buky, Obědovice, and Staré Hrady.

An objective difficulty in these studies was the state of preservation of the sites and the varying extent to which they have been archaeologically explored and elaborated. The collections of relics referenced in the work were excavated between the late 19th and early 20th century and are currently held by museum institutions and several private collectors. Thus, they either required a re-evaluation or were subjected to investigation for the first time. The chronological scope of the study is defined by the functioning of the discussed sites, from the late 13th to the early 16th centuries.

It should be seen as an interesting technical solution by the author to group finds from all the 16 selected residences into general functional categories,⁶ although the division itself has been long known and employed by archaeologists (in Poland as well). This mode of presentation clearly reveals the diversified frequencies of finds at the selected sites. However, we are not provided with a matching table showing exact numbers and/or percentages documenting disproportions in that regard.

Nine main categories of artefacts were distinguished: appearance of the residence; operation of the residence; transport of people and goods; weapons and armour; attire, personal items; preparation of food and dining; religious beliefs; ceremonies, presence of elites, and leisure time; exchange and trans-regional relationships. In keeping with this division, Chapter 4 offers detailed descriptions of the items, after analysis of pottery and stove tiles.

These categories were further divided into more precise groups according to the purpose of the items: 1) appearance of the building, builders equipment, parts of buildings, lockable mechanisms, heating,

⁶ Drnovský 2018, the table after Page 198 as Figure 117 in the Czech version, and as Figure 233 in the English one.

and illumination (including such relics as the main keep, main palace-like building with extensions, farm keep, predominantly stone structure, several building phases, and movables, e.g. cramps, daub, flat glass, hinges, keys, lamps, latches, locks, nails, torch holder, or tiled stoves); 2) harvest, cultivation and soil modification, presence of utility animals, logging and processing of wood, and handicraft tools (such as axes, bits, curry combs, forks, hammers, harrow spikes, hoes, horseshoes, looms, pickaxes, ploughs, scissors, sickles, spindle whorls, or wedges); 3) riding gear, horse equipment, and wagons (including bits, horseshoes, linchpins, shaft fittings, spurs, and stirrups); 4) firearms, edged weapons, and armour (such as arrowheads, caltrops, crossbows, daggers, firearms, projectiles, scabbards, swords, or ring armour); 5) unnamed (e.g. buckles, finger rings, jingle bells, knives, pieces of fabric, pins, or thimbles); 6) food processing, consumption of food, consumption of drinks, and remains of food (animal bones, ceramic and glass vessels, cauldrons, forks, knives, and ladles); 7) religious motifs on stove tiles; 8) representation, objects with signs of status, aristocratic portraits on stove tiles, and leisure time (including astragals, glass vessels, portraits and heraldic motifs on stove tiles, spurs, statuettes, stoneware, or whistles); 8) coins and imported goods (bracteate case, coins, glass vessels, and stoneware).

The pottery meticulously analysed in the work was obtained from two residences – Břečtejns (2146 potsherds) and Javorník (5026 potsherds) – located close to each other and functioning in a similar period, that is, from the mid-14th to the mid-16th centuries and from the early 14th to the early 16th centuries, respectively. The author delivers a formal and technological characteristics of the artefacts by paying attention to the following features: firing method, texture and surface elaboration, macroscopic structure, colour of the sherd, and similarity of a given specimen to other potsherds. This allows him to distinguish different classes of pottery. The dominant group are vessels made of ferruginous clays – redware, typical of local craftsmanship (i.e. potteries operating in the Trutnov region) since the early 15th century. Greyware pots (foreign to the area) were also identified, as well as vessels made of low-ferruginous clays that turned white-beige upon firing which were more common in the 13th century. From a functional perspective, two groups could be distinguished – kitchenware and tableware – although in practice the vessels could have served different purposes, depending on the current needs of their users. These groups include, starting from the most common, pots, lids, jugs, bowls, pans, as well as occasional plates and cups. Initially, the assortment of used vessels was limited to lugless pots and lids, sporadically also jugs, and only later

was it expanded to include other forms – three-legged pans, plates, and beakers. The formal diversity of these goods is made evident by the compiled typologies: types of forming mouths, shaping bottoms and lid handles, and cross-sections of lugs and rims of plates and lids.⁷ Some vessels in these collections (up to ten percent or slightly above ten percent, depending on the collection) were glazed and decorated, and they did not appear before the 15th century. The ornamentation was simple and formulaic. The most common decoration techniques include etching, sometimes with the use of a stamp, and painting. The surfaces of the white-black vessels were ornamented with polished patterns.⁸ The morphological-technological features of these artefacts as well as their types match the typical trends in pottery production at that time.

The analysis of these collections allowed the dating of both residences to be moved back to before the mid-14th century (Břečtejns) and to the first half of the 14th century (Javorník). This is significant especially for the former site, because it had previously been assumed that the castle had not been erected before the 1440s or 50s.

The assemblages consisting of stove ceramics were retrieved in Brada (51 fragments), Břečtejns (257), Bradlec (32), Javorník (396), Kumburk (626), and Pečka (567). They served as parts of heating devices and interior decoration, but also – thanks to the decorative motifs displayed on them – as a medium for symbolic ideas. The group consists of pot tiles, bowl tiles, and plate tiles. Their relief ornamentation uses a wide spectrum of themes: motifs of religious character (scenes and figures from the New and Old Testament) as well as depictions related to heraldry, tournaments, symbolism, or vegetation, and various images of anthropo- or zoomorphic figures or fantastic creatures. Hence, unravelling the meaning of this iconography is one of the primary questions in the work. The starting point for these considerations is provided by a catalogue of images compiled by the author.⁹ In addition to the above, P. Drnovský discusses the origins of stove tiles, their placement on Czech buildings from the 14th and 15th centuries, typological and technological diversity, and delivers an up-to-date review of publications dedicated to stove tiles from the investigated area.

Assemblages of metal objects come from the castles of Červená Hora (215 fragments) and Rotemberk (151). They consist of the above-mentioned metal items of all sorts and/or parts of various smaller or larger objects.

⁷ Drnovský 2018, 231-235, Figs. 118-122.

⁸ For the compilation of the ornaments, see: Drnovský 2018, 236, Fig. 123.

⁹ Drnovský 2018, 129-149.

To be explored in further studies, P. Drnovský proposes, among others, to focus on a chosen urban region in the Czech Republic and try to analyse its pottery production while tracing mutual relationships between individual urban pottery production centres or transregional contexts of its distribution. Another of his important research suggestion is to compare collections of finds excavated at the sites from other parts of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as other regions within Central Europe. Among the potential reference outside Czechia I propose to include Polish lands, especially Silesia and Central Poland, since these regions are well-researched in terms of medieval noble residences.

The content of the book is complemented by numerous illustrations (231 in total). The descriptive part of the work features high-quality maps clarifying the topographic situation of the discussed artefacts¹⁰ and figures showing the revealed relics.¹¹ The passages on kitchen- and tableware benefit from photographs precisely depicting the texture and colour of the vessels' surfaces¹² as well as graphs with data on the frequencies of products,¹³ whereas the part dedicated to stove tiles contains photographs of select decorative motifs.¹⁴ Similarly, the analysis of metal objects is supplemented with well-chosen iconography illustrating their forms and functions.¹⁵ Against this backdrop, the drawings of pottery and stove tiles presented at the end, which are essential for the problems addressed in the work, appear surprisingly subpar.¹⁶

The primary shortcoming of the reviewed book is the lack of archaeometric analyses of the artefacts. Admittedly, the author is well aware of the need for such analyses, but limits himself to listing them as a proposition for the future. It is worth noting that scientific methods are capable of providing additional information, supplementing that obtained from traditional macroscopic evaluation with details on production technology and technique otherwise impossible to infer. These details may include, for instance, the chemical composition of the ceramic mass, glaze, or glass, their

types and variants, content of metal alloys, temperature used to fire pottery, etc. All this has made archaeometric analyses a necessary element in compilations of these categories of finds. The available range of diverse physico-chemical methods currently applied is broad. Obviously, cost may be a limiting factor, but it has to be noted that the most common analytical techniques (e.g. EPMA, ICP, SEM-EDS, or XRF) are relatively affordable. Moreover, such analyses are always targeted only at a limited number of chosen finds.

Another drawback is that the publication lacks an index which would facilitate locating interesting phrases or problems. Moreover, while an extensive English summary of the whole book is provided, it would also be helpful to have all the captions for figures translated.

Taken together, however, the above-mentioned shortcomings do not alter the overall positive evaluation. The sheer number of the discussed objects, the diversity and multitude of the considered elements, pertaining to both architectural relics and artefacts, as well as factors related to the dispersion of the finds across institutions and their accessibility, state of preservation, and the organisation of the whole endeavour, clearly show the immense amount of work put by the author to prepare this multi-layered publication. This alone deserves being emphasised and appreciated.

The said diversity of questions addressed in the book by necessity often only briefly) may serve as a point of departure for further multidirectional studies, as rightly noted by the author himself. In particular, such research may be focused on specific categories, groups, or types of the discussed finds (although some of them have already been investigated, as indicated by the works referenced by the author), including the ceramic products which received most attention in the reviewed publication. The latter could be subjected to a multi-methodical study involving a series of scientific methods.

In conclusion, I would like to point out one more, even if secondary, aspect of the book: it confirms the advisability of re-analysing materials from older research, along with their verification against the later progress in studies on particular categories of finds and application of new research methods, as it paves the way for solving problems previously undecidable and adjusting the dating of related phenomena. On the one hand, therefore, the reviewed book highlights the potential hidden in such finds while, on the other hand, it reveals the pitfalls that await scholars undertaking similar tasks (for instance, problems due to the discrepancies between modern and past methodologies, varying documentation or publication standards, as well as missing field documentation or artefacts). These remarks are perfectly relatable to studies conducted by

¹⁰ E.g. Drnovský 2018, 19, Fig. 6; 23, Fig. 10; 26, Fig. 14; 33-34, Fig. 19-20.

¹¹ E.g. Drnovský 2018, 21, Fig. 8; 29, Fig. 16; 32, Fig. 18; 37, Fig. 23-24.

¹² See Drnovský 2018, 55, Fig. 36; 70, Fig. 45.

¹³ E.g. Drnovský 2018, 53-54, Figs. 30-35; 62-63, Figs. 42, 44; 72-73, Figs. 47-51.

¹⁴ See Drnovský 2018, 96-97, Fig. 61.

¹⁵ E.g. Drnovský 2018, 83, Fig. 53; 156, Fig. 96; 163, Fig. 103; 166, Fig. 105; 179, Fig. 112.

¹⁶ This method of presentation of pottery (i.e. publication of hand-drawn pottery documentation) is rejected by the author himself (in favour of a combination of photography and drawings of cross sections), e.g. in his latest paper on the finds from the castle of Mokřice near Jičín, Drnovský 2021, 284-286, Figs. 6-8.

Polish archaeologists. The aforementioned approach – studies on previously excavated finds stored by different institutions – has been preferred by Polish heritage conservation agencies for some time. This has created favourable conditions for the dissemination of

many categories of finds which have been waiting for attention for years due to the numerous research-related pitfalls mentioned above.¹⁷

The reviewed publication is a testimony to the benefits of taking up this arduous task.

References

- Drnovský P. 2018. *Hmotná kultura šlechtických sídel severovýchodních Čech. Každodennost ve středověku pohledem archeologie*. Hradec Králové.
- Drnovský P. 2021. *Analýza keramických a skleněných nálezů z hradu Mokřice u Jičína*. “Archeologie východních Čech” 20, 272-295.
- Kajzer L. 2014. *Archaeologia historica. Pisma wybrane*. Łódź.
- Marciniak-Kajzer A. 2011a. *Średniowieczny dwór rycerski w Polsce. Wizerunek archeologiczny*. Łódź.
- Marciniak-Kajzer A. 2011b. *Badania nad kulturą materialną średniowiecznego dworu rycerskiego w optyce archeologa*. In: M. Adamczewski (ed.), *Polska i Europa w średniowieczu. Przemiany strukturalne. Podmioty i przedmioty w badaniach historycznych*. Warszawa, 115-123.
- Marciniak-Kajzer A. 2016a. *Archaeology of Medieval Knights' Manor Houses in Poland*. Łódź, Kraków.
- Marciniak-Kajzer A. 2016b. *W sprawie obrazu kultury materialnej dworów rycerskich w średniowieczu*. “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Archaeologica” 31, 135-144.
- Nowakowski D. 2008. *Siedziby książęce i rycerskie księstwa głogowskiego w średniowieczu*. Wrocław.
- Nowakowski D. 2017. *Śląskie obiekty typu “motte”*. *Studium archeologiczno-historyczne*. Wrocław.
- Unger J. 2002. *Problémy rekonstrukce života na středověkém hradě*. In: J. Hanák, J. Unger (eds.), *Seminář Život na středověkém hradě ve 14. století. Předklášteří 3. června 2002. Okresní museum Brno-venkov. Sborník 2002. Předklášteří*, 19-47.

¹⁷ An example of this kind of research endeavour may be the multi-faceted project funded by the National Programme for Development of the Humanities (Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki), supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, conducted in the years 2012-2017 at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IAE PAN) in Warsaw, and entitled *Vetera et nova. Opracowanie źródeł archeologicznych z zasobów IAE PAN nowymi metodami badawczymi (Vetera et nova. Elaboration of the archaeological sources held by the IAE PAN with the use of new research methods)*; directed by Prof. Zofia Sulgostowska). Its outcomes included seven publications of archaeological materials from different sites dated from prehistory to the modern period.

