

ANTHRACOLOGICAL AND GEOARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL HOUSES IN ROZTOKY U PRAHY (CZECH REPUBLIC)

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A large agglomeration of settlement features from the 6th and 7th centuries AD has been discovered in Roztoky u Prahy. These finds belong to the so-called Prague Culture which is believed to represent the earliest Slavic populations in central Europe. The unusually large number of early Medieval houses (more than 600) and their location on the floor of a deep canyon-like valley is to a great extent enigmatic. Hypothetically, this concentration of people may be explained by the site being located not only on the major long-distance route, but also at a ford across the river.

The anthracological (charcoal) analysis of selected features from the early Slavic settlement of Roztoky u Prahy tries to reconstruct the local character of species composition. The analysis of 18119 charcoal fragments led to the identification of 18 plant taxa. The settlement is situated in an area with intensive long-term habitation; the determined taxa composition indicates strong human influence on the nearby vegetation. A mosaic of oak-hornbeam woodland, sparse coppice and scrub used for pasture was probably to be found in the vicinity of the settlement.

Among the studied archaeological layers, the charcoals from the ovens were markedly different. We can distinguish the ovens with dominance of oak, beech, shrubs or conifer charcoals. Anthracological analysis clearly demonstrates a different anthracomass in archaeological layers of the houses.

The geoarchaeological study applied to this site is concerned with the infillings of the sunken houses. A similar pattern is visible in many of these infillings. The site is located in so-called dusty to sandy over-bank deposits. The former houses were probably 1 m deep, but now 40-70 cm thick sedimentary infilling composing of three to four layers is preserved. A typical floor layer is usually missing, and just a trampled background is preserved, richer in clay minerals and with less voids. This could be interpreted as evidence of cleaning activities in the house. Above this layer is sometimes preserved a 1 cm thick layer richer in decomposed organic matter, remains of bones and charcoal together with strong bioturbation. This layer is interpreted as the remains of the last human activities in the house before destruction or part of the destroyed roof. A 20-40 cm thick layer above, poor in charcoal and other remains from human activities, typically features light orange spots, which are interpreted as concentrations of clay minerals. Those concentrations are a post-sedimentary development, during the change of pH which forced clay minerals to move down the profile. The change of pH was inhibited by the presence of an ashy layer in the final destruction layer. This layer composes the last preserved layer and usually contains a huge amount of charcoal, stones from destroyed ovens and decomposed organic matter.

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