

TEREZA HOLASOVÁ*

THE OLDEST JEWISH CEMETERY IN PROSTĚJOV (CZECHIA) IN THE VIEW OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Abstract

Graves excavated during the rescue archaeological research of Hlaváčkovo square/Šerhovní street in Prostějov (Czechia) in 1998 can be linked to the presumed oldest Jewish cemetery owing to the presence of Jewish burial customs in the form of pottery sherds present on the eyes and mouth of the deceased, the inclusion of iron padlocks and quarry stones near the lower limbs of the deceased, and absence of complex garments. These customs had special symbolic meaning and function in Jewish burial rites. Also, the orientation of the deceased in the W-E direction, the use of wooden coffins reinforced by iron nails, and the stretched position on the back with arms stretched along the body corresponds with Jewish burial rites. A high concentration of children's graves suggests that a section reserved for children's burials called 'nefele' was discovered. Dating of the discovered part of the cemetery to the 17th and 18th centuries is based on analysis of archaeological features, stratigraphic relationships and finds originating in the 43 discovered graves.

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KEYWORDS


- Jewish cemetery
- Early Modern Period
- Jewish burial customs
- Prostějov
- Jewish burial rite

INTRODUCTION

One of only a few archaeologically excavated Jewish cemeteries in Czechia can be found in the Moravian town of Prostějov (Prostějov District/CZ) important for its flourishing Jewish community, which originated in the 15th century.¹ The presumed oldest Jewish cemetery is far less known than its two successors. The second Jewish cemetery, located in the Lidická/Studentská street, was established in 1801, and the Jewish section of the modern municipal cemetery in 1908.

According to František Světlavský, data from *Liber iurium* for the year 1483 mention payments for probably the first recorded Jewish burials in

Prostějov, noting that Jews buried their dead in *Schanze* inside the wall fortification of the town.² However, this statement does not entirely clarify if the described Jewish burial space refers to the same cemetery which, according to other written sources, was located outside the town's fortification, between town walls and a moat. Jakob Freimann's account described the extent of the cemetery as to the Plumlovská gate, past three citadels, and to the Brněnská gate; however, later authors mention that the cemetery extended along the whole fortification course.³ The cemetery was also associated with a place called 'Zwinger' situated near Fügnerova and Kravařova streets.⁴

* Archaeological Section, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc;  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3523-3345>; tereza.holasova8@gmail.com

¹ Klenovský 1997, 3.

² Světlavský 1900a, 7; Světlavský 1900b, 7.

³ Freiman 1923, 29; Kühndel 1939, 124; Příkryl 1929, 40. See Holasová 2019, 52-57.

⁴ Dokoupilová 2000, 75; Příkryl 1929, 133.



Fig. 1. Location of the archaeological excavations of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Prostějov:

1 – Hlaváčkovo sq./

Šerhovní street;

2 – Hradební street.
Source: Czech Office for Surveying, Mapping and Cadastre. Graphic design: T. Holasová.

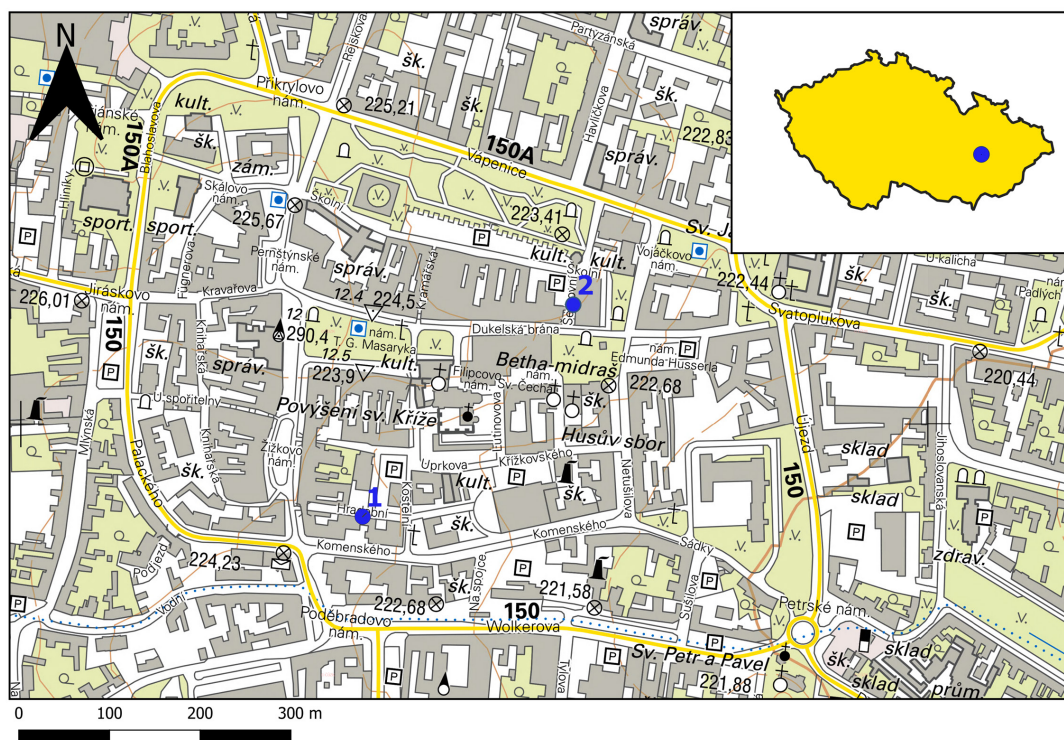


Fig. 2. Plan of discovered archaeological features during archaeological research of the Hlaváčkovo sq./Šerhovní st. in 1998:

1 – graves; 2 – city moat;
3 – city wall and gate;
4 – building activity from the 19th and 20th century.

Source: Čížmář 1999b, 5.
Graphic design: T. Holasová.



HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Apart from randomly found fragments of Jewish tombstones, the first skeletal remains connected to the Jewish community were discovered in 1934 near the National House in Prostějov.⁵ The find was recorded by L. Schap, according to whom more unrecorded discoveries had already been made.⁶ During a rescue archaeological research near the cartographic office on Hradební street in 1995, the remains of a burial in a wooden coffin probably belonging to a member of the Jewish community were excavated (Fig. 1:1). The burial was oriented in the East-West direction and was located at the foundation of the southwest part of the

old city wall bastion and inner edge of the city moat. The stratigraphic situation suggests that the burial was deposited during the use of the moat.⁷ In 1997, further research at Hradební street yielded a finding of most probably Jewish skeletal remains in a non-anatomical position. The secondary placement of the remains can be connected with the demolition of the old town wall.⁸ However, the most extensive part of the oldest Jewish cemetery was unearthed during rescue archaeological research undertaken at Šerhovní street in 1998 by the Institute for Archaeological Heritage (Fig. 1:2).⁹ New

⁷ Prudká 1995, 63-64; Dokoupilová 2000, 76.

⁸ Procházková 1997, 2.

⁹ All information about archaeological features and stratigraphy concerning graves discovered in 1998 originate from unpublished excavation reports. See Čížmář 1999a; Čížmář

⁵ See Holasová 2019, 10-15.

⁶ Schap 1936, 3-4.

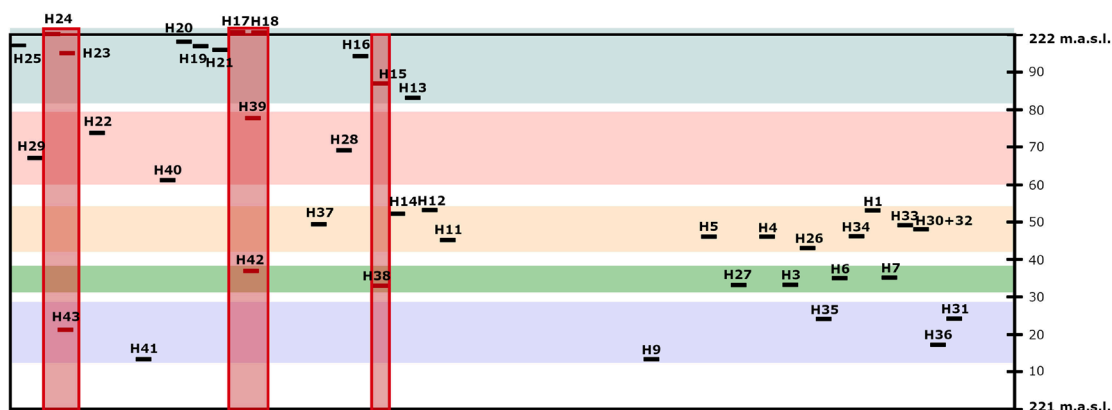


Fig. 3. Diagram of the vertical distribution of graves based on automatic level measurements. Graves located directly above each other are highlighted in red colour. Recognised artificial levels are marked in different colours. Graphic design: T. Holasová.

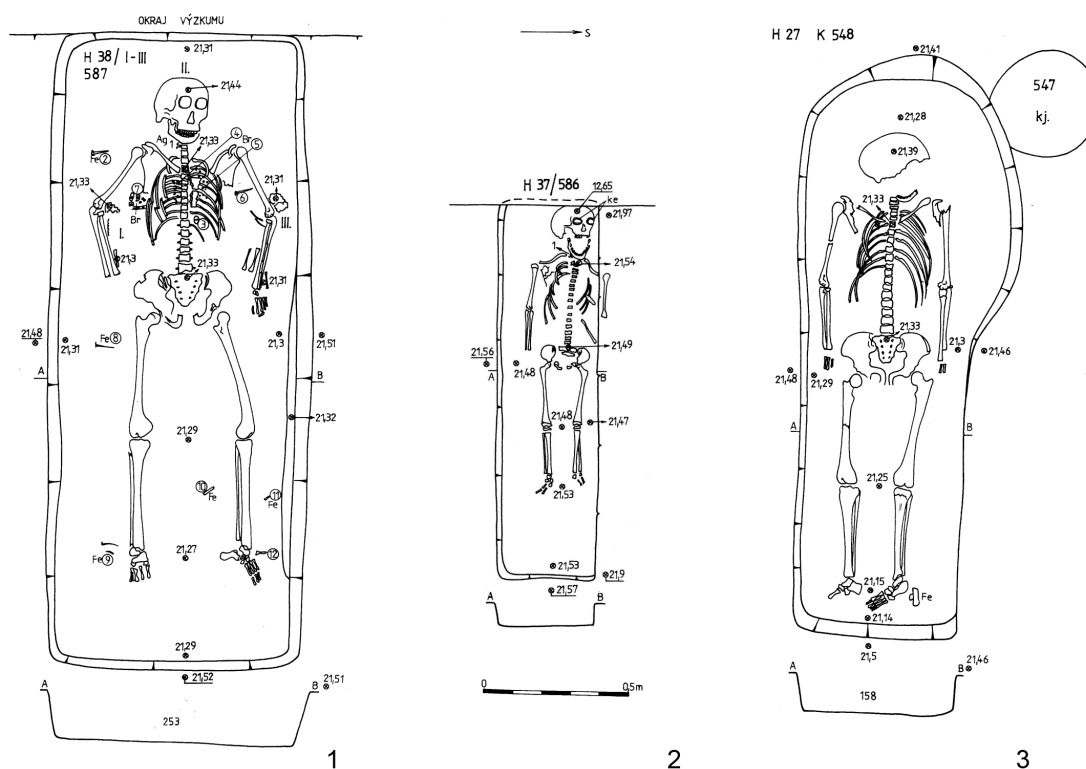


Fig. 4. Jewish cemetery in Prostějov: 1 – grave H38; 2 – grave H37; 3 – grave H27. Source: Čizmář 1999b; 119, 114, 109.

information about the history of Jewish community in Prostějov and their burial customs emerged due to the discovery of 43 burials located between the old town wall and the town moat.

LOCATION AND SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

Unearthed Jewish burials were discovered between the remains of the Olomoucká gate (with the rest of the walls) and the old town moat, which was constructed 5-6 m in front of the wall fortification.¹⁰ The excavated area was 12 m wide and ca. 5-5.5 m deep. The graves were labelled with the letter H, together with a number from 1-43 corresponding to the order in which they were excavated. Burials H6, H7, H11, H26, H27,

H35, and H36 extended into the already partly covered moat (Fig. 2).¹¹

The spatial location of the graves creates two artificially separated groups, one in the northern part of the excavated area and the other in the southern. The graves were arranged in rows and occurred in up to three horizontal sections above each other (Fig. 2:1 and 3). The graves can also be sorted into five artificial levels according to automatic level measurements (taken from the centre of the pelvic bone, if possible). These recognised levels might suggest individual burial phases (Fig. 3). The depth of soil between graves H42 and H39 (buried directly above H42) was 0.41 m. Over the grave H39 were later placed burials H17 and H18 (same level). The depth of soil between H39 and

1999b; Čizmář 1999c; Čizmář 1999d; Čizmář 1999e.

¹⁰ See Holasová 2019, 58-61.

¹¹ Čizmář and Šmíd 2000, 94.

Fig. 5. Prostějov. Displays of Jewish burial customs: 1 – garment fastenings in grave H38; 2 – quarry stone in grave H26; 3 – shards on the eyes and mouth of the deceased in grave H43. Source: Čížmář 1999c, 38, 28, 41.



H17 and H18 was 0.23 m. The deepest layer of soil between graves located directly above each other was 0.74 m, between graves H43 and H23. The last two graves which were buried above each other are graves H38 and H15. The thickness of the soil between them was 0.54 m. Therefore, the average depth of soil between graves is 0.48 m, which suggests that halachic rules concerning safe distance between graves were followed. The stratigraphic situation – specifically the shallowness of several preserved burial pits and the presence of multiple burials above each other – suggests that the lower layers of graves were perhaps truncated and covered with an additional layer of soil in order to enlarge the burial capacity of the cemetery, as was frequently practiced in Jewish cemeteries due to difficulty acquiring additional burial space. Analogies of this practice can be found at the Prague Jewish Garden, where two horizons were discovered,¹² and at a Jewish cemetery in Slavkov near Brno (Vyškov District/CZ), where more than one horizon was discovered.¹³

BURIAL RITE AND BURIAL CUSTOMS

The dead were buried in wooden coffins reinforced with iron nails in oblong burial pits with average dimensions of 1.5×0.65×0.40 m. However, half of the remains were found without visible signs of a burial pit. Most of them were children up to the age of three years. All of the deceased were arranged in a supine position, with arms along the body or with slightly bent elbows. However, in a case of burial H38 of three individuals (presumed mother with two newborns) the adult individual had her arms significantly bent, indicating an embrace of the remains of the two presumed stillborn children located on either side (Fig. 4:1).

A few deceased had their head slightly tilted to the right and their left foot was missing. The prevailing orientation of the graves was W-E: the head oriented towards the West and the lower limbs pointed towards East. This is the usual orientation in Jewish burial rites, probably symbolising connection to the holy city Jerusalem. In some cases, the season in which the burial took place could influence the orientation.¹⁴

Wooden coffins or structures were recognised in eight graves. The presence of the wooden coffins is not only suggested by the presence of iron nails but also by a find of a presumed iron coffin fitting (Fig. 8:1). Simple plank coffins or structures were reinforced by iron nails; iron padlocks or quarry stones were found in some (Fig. 5:2). Burials in wooden coffins became more common in Moravia from the 17th century.¹⁵ The youngest individual buried in a wooden coffin or structure was estimated to be 1-2.5 years of age.

Jewish Ashkenazi burial rites are very uniform, usually without valuable grave goods, in order to not highlight a person's social status.¹⁶ However, there are certain exceptions – for example, a wire headband, a textile head covering, and metal belt buckles have been discovered in the Prague Jewish Garden.¹⁷ In the case of the Jewish cemetery in Prostějov, the burial custom of placing pottery shards over the eyes and mouth of the deceased was recognised in at least four graves. It is suspected the custom was practiced at higher rates, but at first was not recognised by workers during the rescue archaeological research due to the surprising nature of the discovery.¹⁸ The custom was performed on the burial of a newborn child from grave H29

¹² Cymbalak and Staňková 2014, 88.

¹³ Mikulková 2011, 32.

¹⁴ Wallisová 2009, 56; Bis and Więckowski 2017, 113.

¹⁵ Králíková 2017, 138.

¹⁶ Blanchard and Georges 2010, 52.

¹⁷ Wallisová 2009, 57.

¹⁸ See Holasová 2019, 25.

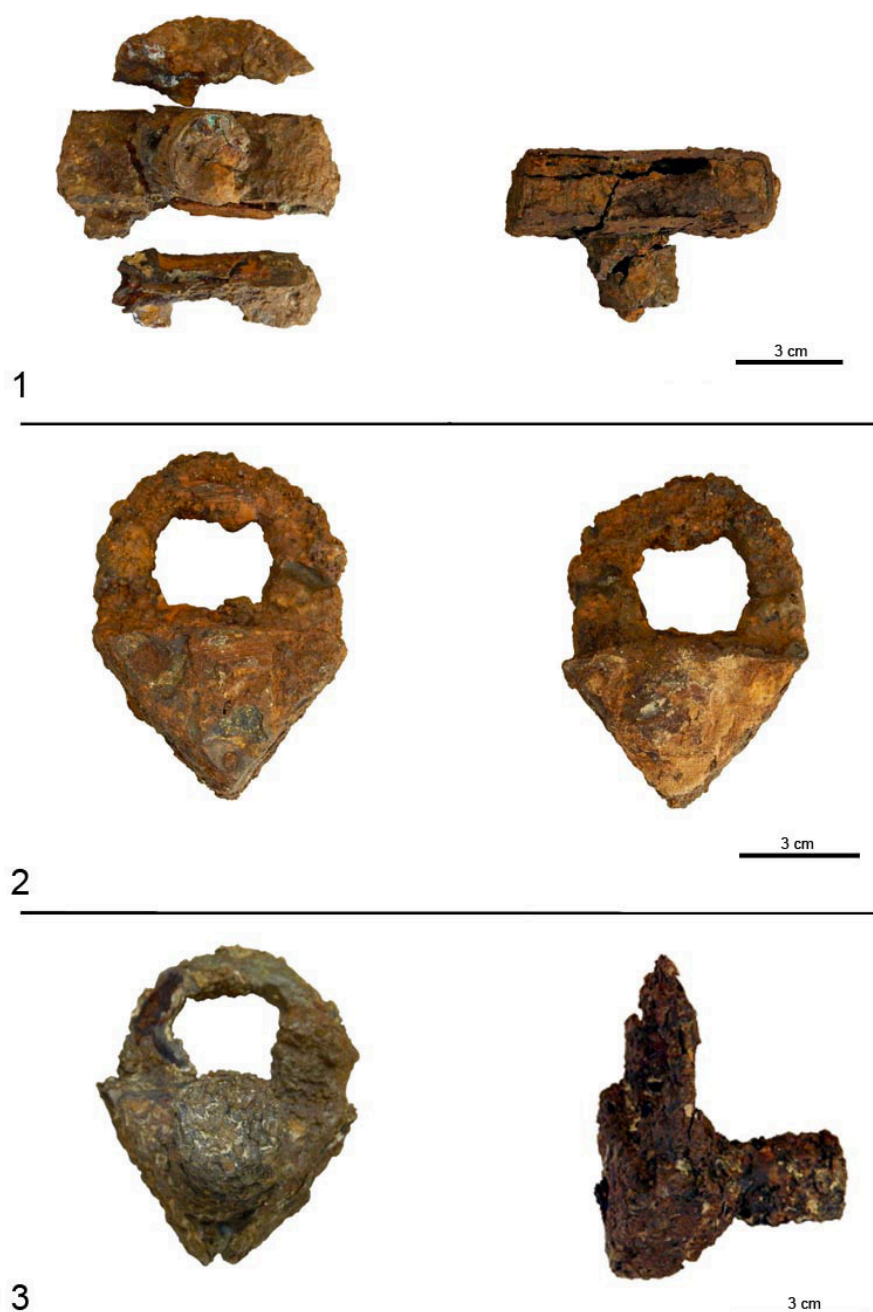


Fig. 6. Iron padlocks deposited in Museum and Gallery in Prostějov: 1 – grave H27; 2 – grave H30; 3 – grave H37. Photo: T. Holasová.

on whose skull was found a non-glazed fragment of pottery, as well as on the remains of the 4- to 8-year-old child from grave H37 (Fig. 4:2). In this case and case of 16- to 32-month-old child from grave H40 two fragments with inner glaze were placed over the eye sockets. One adult individual of 20–29 years of age from grave H43 had his eyes and mouth covered by non-glazed pottery sherds (Fig 5:3). These pottery fragments did not have any regular shape, but at other Jewish cemeteries fragments could be intentionally processed into trapezoids, rectangles, discs, or other shapes.¹⁹ Pottery was not the sole material used for this burial

custom: in the Prague Jewish Garden, the eyes and mouth of the deceased were covered by processed stone plates of slate.²⁰ From the eight fragments found on the skulls of the four deceased individuals, only the fragments from graves H37 and H40 are glazed. Although glazed pottery occurs already in the 15th century, the use of glaze is mostly characteristic of vessels from the 16th century onward.²¹ Occurrence of this burial custom is also prevalent among Jewish cemeteries in Poland, Lithuania, Germany, and probably France.²² The origin of this

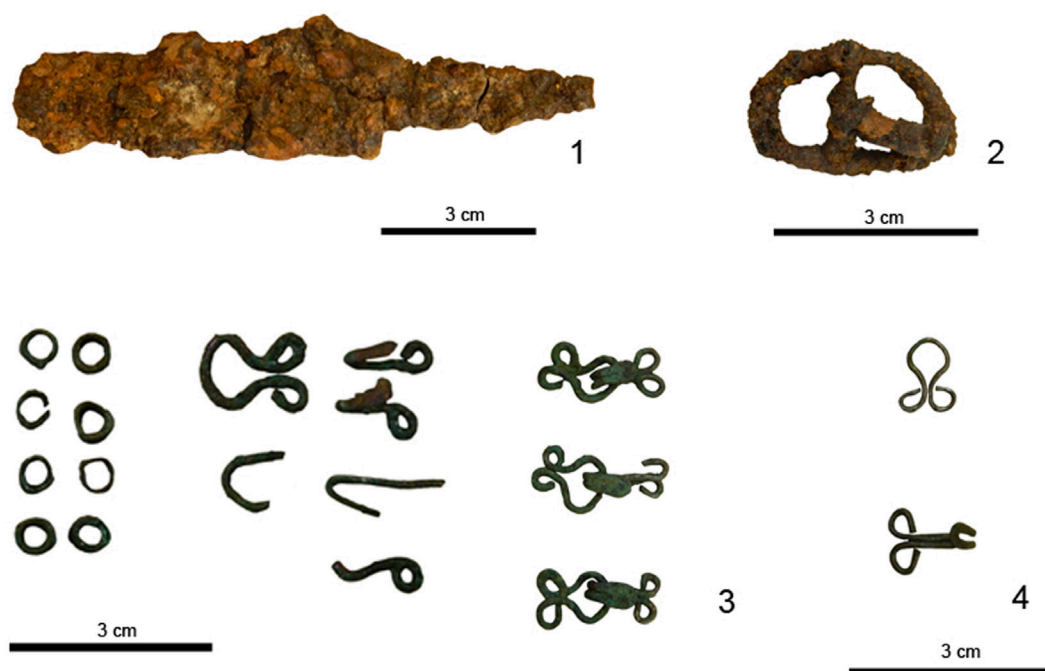
¹⁹ Fijałkowski 1989, 28.

²⁰ Wallisová 2009, 57.

²¹ Pájer 1983, 76.

²² Skóra 2016, 136.

Fig. 7. Prostějov. Iron knife and metal garment remains: 1 – iron knife from grave H38; 2 – iron buckle from grave H38; 3 – tinned copper garment fastenings from grave H38; 4 – tinned copper garment fastenings from grave H14. Deposited in Museum and Gallery in Prostějov. Photo: T. Holasová.



burial custom might come from folk beliefs.²³ Its meaning is probably connected to the sinful inclination of men's eyes or proximity to earth, from which the first man was created, according to the Tanakh.²⁴

Another important display of Jewish burial custom is placing padlocks in the grave. The inclusion of iron padlocks in graves is a typical burial custom prevalent in Central Europe and not solely practised by Jewish communities, but Christian as well. Several iron padlocks dated to the 15th and 16th century were found at the cemetery near the church in Kostolisko pri Poltári (Poltár District/SK).²⁵ The largest collection originates from Poland.²⁶ In Czechia iron padlocks were discovered at the Jewish cemeteries in Slavkov near Brno and Prostějov, both dated to the period around the 17th to 18th century.²⁷ An iron padlock of a rectangular shape was found in Prostějov in grave H27 near the left lower limb of a male 21 years or older (Fig. 4). A second triangular shaped padlock was placed in grave H30 which belonged to a female of 20–49 years of age. The last example of a triangular shape was discovered in grave H37 near the head of a 4- to 8-year-old child (Fig. 4). All three padlocks are

spherical with a shackle and turn-key mechanism. Their internal structure was probably made from copper alloy. Padlocks with brass or different copper alloy internal structures are known from the Jewish cemetery in Sanok (Sanok District/PL).²⁸ According to typology²⁹ created by P. Fijałkowski, the example from grave H27 could be marked as type 12 with construction elements of type 5 (Fig. 6:1). Due to damage caused by corrosion, its weight is only 89 g. The padlock from grave H30 can be classified as type 13 and has on its body a preserved imprint of a plain weave textile in corrosion layers (Fig. 6:2). The last padlock from grave H37, weighing 94 g, could also be assigned to type 13 with construction elements of type 5 (Fig. 6:3). Because padlock shapes have not dramatically changed since the Middle Ages, the shape is not a chronologically sensitive indicator. Spherical padlocks were in use from the first half of the 15th century until the Modern Period.³⁰ The placement of a padlock near lower limbs of the deceased, as in grave H27, could symbolise the ritual separation of the deceased from the world of the living.³¹ The placement of the iron padlock in the grave H37 near the head of the deceased might be interpreted as an intention to silence the deceased and prevent him from speaking about

²³ Skóra 2016, 134.

²⁴ See Holasová 2019, 19-20. Burial customs displayed at the Jewish cemetery in Prostějov will be discussed in greater detail in a separate article.

²⁵ Hrubec 1971, 72-73; Králiková 2007, 117.

²⁶ Skóra 2016, 136-137.

²⁷ Mikulková 2011, 32.

²⁸ Komski et al. 2014, 55.

²⁹ See Fijałkowski 1989.

³⁰ Slivka 1981, 241-242; Belcredi 1988, 497; Krajčic 2003, 83.

³¹ Komski et al. 2014, 60.

the world of the living.³² The position of the padlock in the grave H30 is not recognisable from the photographic documentation and drawings.

Iron knives are rarely found in Jewish graves. A small knife with a damaged blade and handle was discovered in Basel in the grave of male suspected to be *mohel* who performed ritual circumcision.³³ Another example comes from Brześć Kujawski (Włocławek District /PL), where two males, aged 30–40 and 40–50 years old, were discovered buried next to each other holding knives in their right hands. The presence of the knives in the grave of these men could be related to ritual slaughter.³⁴ An iron knife with a tang was found in grave H38. Its dimensions were 102.4×24.7×5.9 mm and it weighed 24 g (Fig. 7:1). Unfortunately, this artefact is not listed in the inventory of finds. Photographic documentation also does not make it entirely clear if the knife was an actual part of the burial or simply part of the grave backfill. In my opinion, it is possible that the knife was mistakenly recorded as an iron nail, though the find was most likely part of the burial. Presuming that the knife was a part of the burial, its presence could be explained as a symbol of ritual circumcision for stillborn children, or a symbolic tool used for cutting the umbilical cord interruption. Iron knives or scissors were often placed in the graves of medieval Christian women who died during childbirth.³⁵ However, there is also a possibility that the knife originated from a pit which was part of the earlier 14th century house plot that was disturbed by grave H38.

Due to the organic nature of the materials used for burial garments, no remains of textiles aside the imprint of a textile on the padlock from grave H30 were preserved in Prostějov. However, metal garment fastenings were preserved in several graves. Most of the garment hooks and loops made of tinned copper and copper rings with leather straps were present in grave H38 (Fig. 7:3). Hooks and loops were present on both sides of the ribcage, and copper rings were discovered between the right hand and right side of the ribcage of the deceased woman. An iron D shaped belt buckle was discovered under the left side of her ribcage (Fig. 7:2). The high rate of occurrence of metal clothing remains suggests the presence of a more complex and ornate garment than is usual for Ashkenazi Jewish burials. The uniformity of Ashkenazi Jewish burials is also customarily expressed by use of a simple

burial shroud.³⁶ However, in the case of death during which blood loss occurred, all components of clothing soiled with blood were buried with the deceased and the burial shroud was placed over the original clothing or just laid in the grave.³⁷ Thus, the woman buried in grave H38 might have died during or shortly after the birth of her two stillborn children, who were buried at her sides. Another tinned copper hook was found in grave H37 belonging to the 4- to 8-year-old child. A set of two hooks and one loop was also discovered in grave H14 belonging to a 7- to 11-year-old child (Fig. 7:4). The placement of the hooks near the wrist suggests they were used for fastening the sleeves of the garment. In the Jewish cemetery in Slavkov near Brno, burials with the presence of copper or bronze garment fastenings were also unearthed.³⁸ Garment hooks and loops were also present at Christian cemeteries.³⁹

The presence of wooden structures or coffins is indicated by finds of iron nails, which were used for reinforcement.⁴⁰ In total, nine iron nails and one presumed fragment of a nail shank originating from four graves are currently held at the Museum and Gallery of Prostějov. However, photographic documentation shows that in grave H38 there were originally discovered at least seven iron nails, though not all of them were preserved. Preserved nails can be assigned to different typological categories. The prevalent type of nails in the preserved collection is type IIIb, also called a ‘winged’ type with its head exceeding a rectangular-cut shank on both sides (Fig. 8:2). Other occurring types of nails are examples of ‘funnel-shaped’ Va type and type Vc. Type Va is characterised by triangle or funnel shaped head and a rectangular-cut shank (Fig. 8:3). Type Vc has a head rolled in an eyelet and rectangular-cut shank (Fig. 8:4).⁴¹ Iron nails were used to reinforce coffin construction and attach the coffin lid. Wood, as a perishable organic material, was not preserved, except for very small amount. Unfortunately, xylological analysis was not carried out.⁴² The presence of coffins might be also verified by discoveries of iron coffin fittings one of which was also probably found in context 134 (Fig. 8:1).⁴³

³⁶ Ehl et al. 1991, 7.

³⁷ Hořdo 2011, 21; Skóra 2016, 133.

³⁸ Mikulková 2011, 32.

³⁹ See Králíková 2007, 60.

⁴⁰ Skóra 2016, 135.

⁴¹ Krajč 2003, 66-67.

⁴² Pine wood was likely the prevailing wood type used for Jewish burials in Prague, however regional differences could be expected. See Wallisová 2009, 56.

⁴³ Skóra 2016, 137.

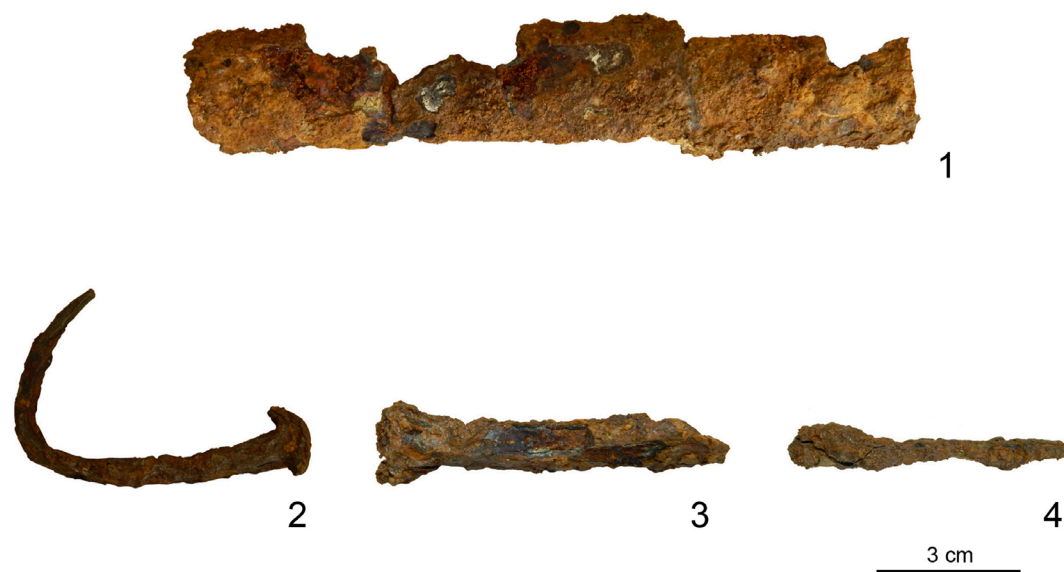
³² Komski et al. 2014, 61.

³³ Alder and Matt 2010, 33.

³⁴ Borowska-Strugińska 2005, 235-236.

³⁵ Unger 2002, 47.

Fig. 8. Prostějov. Metal remains of coffins:
1 – coffin fitting from context 134; 2 – iron nail from grave H30; 3 – iron nail from context 134 iron nail from context 134.
Deposited in Museum and Gallery in Prostějov.
Photo: T. Holasová.



Some of the graves and the area between the graves also contained animal bones, daub fragments, unidentifiable metal fragments, two glass fragments, and a few pieces of plaster.⁴⁴ However, animal bones and daub fragments most likely originate from the disturbed agricultural features belonging to the grounds of the 14/15th century house discovered beneath the Jewish graves.

CERAMIC COLLECTION

A pottery collection consisting of 244 fragments has been recovered from graves, grave fills, and the area between the graves. As no unbroken vessels were preserved, the collection is highly fragmentary. The fragments found in the graves' backfill (124 pcs.) and the fragments placed over the eyes and mouth of the deceased (8 pcs.) formed 132 pieces; an additional 112 fragments were collected from the area between the graves. The ceramic material was analysed and divided into 15 ceramic classes (Fig. 9). Each class is characterised by macroscopically determinable properties, which consist of the structure of the ceramic material (amount, size and nature of temper), surface (texture and modelling, type and extent of surface treatment), firing (hardness and type), and colour. The most represented ceramic class is Pr5010 (Fig. 9:10), followed by reduction smoke-fired material from ceramic class Pr4002 (Fig. 9:2) and Pr4003 (Fig. 9:3), and lastly by the oxidation-fired glazed ceramic class Pr5011 (Fig. 9:11).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See Holasová 2019, 37, 46-48.

⁴⁵ For overview of all the ceramic classes see tables in Holasová 2019, 99-103.

The collection of 244 pottery fragments was distributed into seven categories according to the morphological type: atypical fragments; atypical fragments: base; typical fragments: application; typical fragments: undecorated rims; typical fragments: undecorated rims with handle; typical fragments: decorated rims; typical fragments: decorated.

The 244 pottery fragments (with the addition of a ceramic spindle whorl) were classified according to their forms.⁴⁶ Due to high fragmentation of the collection, however, most of the shards could not be classified. The most represented type of vessel in the collection is a pot (Fig. 11:2) that comes in two sizes: with a mouth diameter within the range of 10 to 14 cm and 17 to 24 cm, although most specimens are pots with the smallest and the largest mouth diameter. Pottery fragments with a mouth diameter under 10 cm are labelled as mugs. Massive storage jars with a significant admixture of graphite and brick clay are the second most represented type (Fig. 11:1). Another type of open vessels is a jug (Fig. 11:8-9). Bowls, mostly with a plate-type border-edge, were the third most represented pottery form (Fig. 11:13). Diameters of the bowls range from 18 to 32 cm. Lids are represented by a bell-shaped lid form (Fig. 11:3) and a domed lid form (Fig. 11:4). Only three tripod pipkin fragments and two fragments of plate have been preserved (Fig. 11:7). The least represented forms are a roof tile fragment (Fig. 9:14), a spindle whorl (Fig. 11:15), and a fragment of a burner (Fig. 11:6).

⁴⁶ Probably inclusion from features disturbed by graves.



Fig. 9. Prostějov.
Examples of ceramic
classes.
Photo: T. Holasová.

From the total of 58 rim fragments, the most represented is the proto-collared and collared rim group (Fig. 10:9-21). Abundantly present are also different versions of clubbed rims (Fig. 10:23-33). Thickened and squared rims occur on storage jars (Fig. 10:1-4). Other types of rims found are collared-grooved rims (Fig. 10:5-8), different types of rolled rims, and everted rims (Fig. 10:22, 35-41, 47). Rims with a flat top and a vertical outer edge are also represented (Fig. 10:42-46). Lid rims are symmetrically and asymmetrically thickened (Fig. 10:51-53). Sparsely represented rim groups include straight-edged with a vertical outer edge (Fig. 10:50), bevelled (Fig. 10:48-49), and crenelated (Fig. 10:34) rim types.

Horizontal combing is the most represented type of decoration, most frequently placed on the body, neck, or rim area (Fig. 11:2). Soft grooving of the vessel surface was not only decorative – it could also have a practical function, facilitating grip and manipulation of the vessel.⁴⁷ In the collection there are also some fragments decorated with incised wavy lines (Fig. 11:1). Finger grooving is also present in one case. Grey ware resulting from reduction-firing is decorated with single or double roller-stamped motifs (Fig. 11:16). Painted decoration occurs as a motif of red coloured horizontal lines. However, this type of decoration is present only on the oxidation-fired pottery class Pr5010 (Fig. 9:10). A unique white glazed fragment with a blue horizontal stripe and blue dots above, probably an imitation of faience, belongs to the separate ceramic class Pr5013 (Fig. 9:13). Ceramic class Pr5012 contains a fragment glazed with lead green glaze on a white slipped surface with a yellow painted ring motif (Fig. 9: Pr5012). A fragment of a bowl with a plate-type border-edge

and a glazed yellow ring with dark inside glazing, which belongs to the same ceramic class as the latter fragment, is also painted (Fig. 11:14).

Fragments decorated with a roller-stamped motif belonging to the ceramic classes Pr4002, of reduction grey ware material, and Pr4005, of fine clay reduction-fired pottery, date to the 14th century.⁴⁸ Roller-stamped decoration is typical for pottery occurring in the late Middle Ages, with its peak in the second half of the 15th century.⁴⁹ Pots with bevelled rims and grey ware pots with collared-grooved rims can be also dated to the 14th century (Fig. 11:10,11).⁵⁰ Reduction firing started to appear at the turn of the 13th and 14th century, but its expansion was regionally specific.⁵¹ Pots with a proto-collared rim and an incised wavy line or horizontal grooving decoration are also dated to the 14th century (Fig. 9:7).⁵² Combing is a decorative technique used during the Middle Ages up to the second half of the 16th century and is used mainly on closed vessel forms.⁵³ Storage jars were also typically used in the Middle Ages. In Loštice (Šumperk District/CZ) and the surrounding region, storage jars were out of use by the 15th century.⁵⁴ Jugs with a red linear painted decoration and collared rim could be dated to the 14th or 15th century (Fig. 11:9).⁵⁵ Glazed pottery was not yet extensively used in the 15th century, but became common among the lower classes between the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century.⁵⁶ The earliest occurrence of tripods is estimated to be at the

⁴⁸ Čížmář and Šmíd 2000, 91.

⁴⁹ Pajer 1983, 23.

⁵⁰ Čížmář and Šmíd 2000, 93.

⁵¹ Scheufler 1972, 49.

⁵² Čížmář and Šmíd 2000, 93.

⁵³ Pajer 1983, 64.

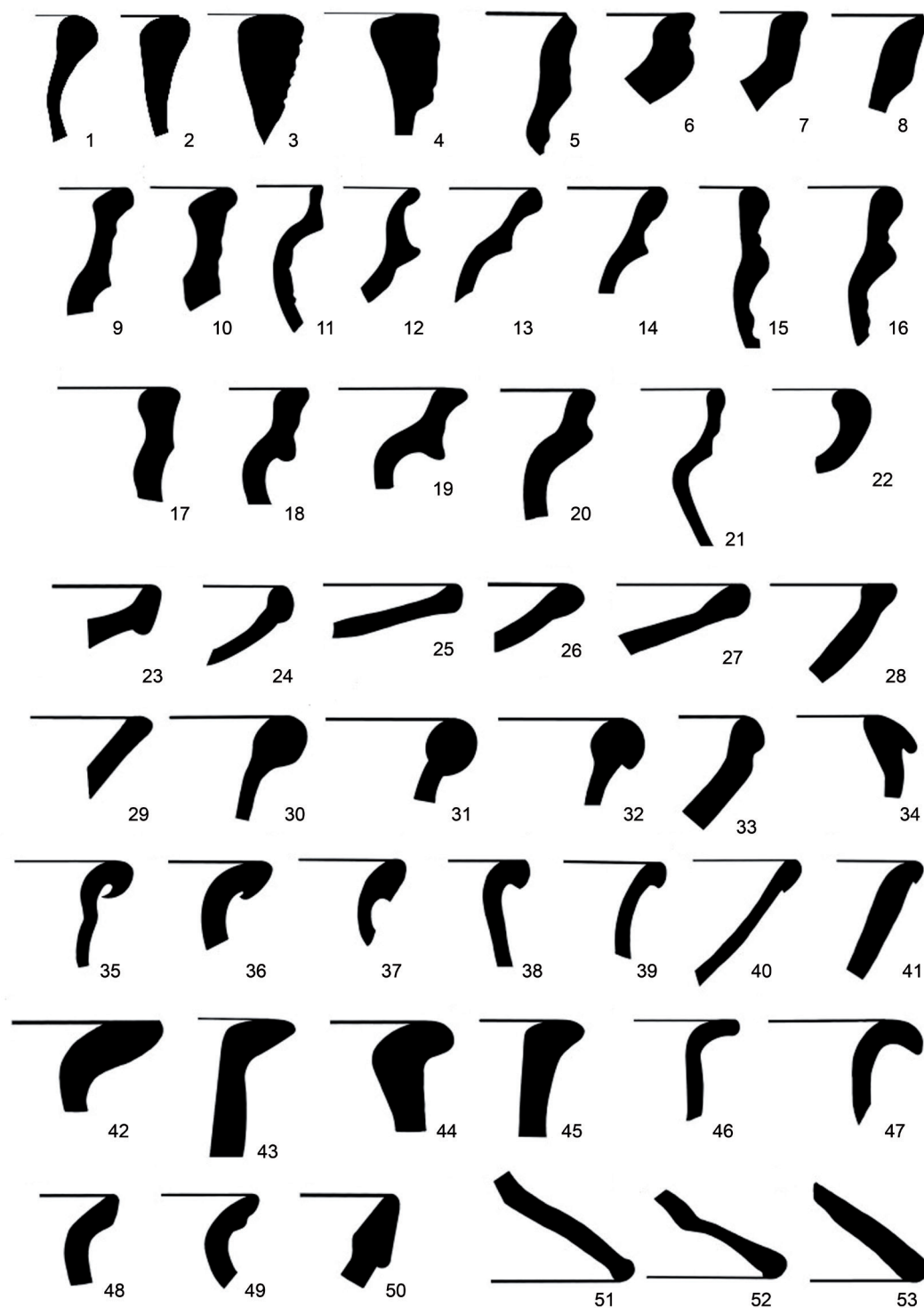
⁵⁴ Goš 2007, 70.

⁵⁵ Goš 1978, 138; Nekuda and Reichterová 1968, 145.

⁵⁶ Pajer 1983, 76.

⁴⁷ Scheufler 1979, 208.

Fig. 10. Prostějov.
Representatives of rims.
Museum and Gallery in
Prostějov. Graphic design:
T. Holasová.



end of the 14th century.⁵⁷ Bowls with a plate-type border-edge occurred from the end of the first third of the 16th century. A white glazed example with blue painted decoration resembles high quality Moravian Anabaptist pottery, though it does not match its production excellence. The fragment can be dated to the 17th century at latest.⁵⁸ Two sherds can be dated to the second half of the 16th century: a pottery fragment with white slip,

dark brown-purple glaze and yellow dots (glaze) and a sherd with white slip, green glaze and yellow ring (glaze).⁵⁹ The latter fragment might have been damaged in production. Though plates appear from the second half of the 16th century, their extensive use is typical from the beginning of the 17th century. Two examples from the collection are glazed (Fig. 11:5). Bell-shaped lids were typically used in the Middle Ages. Their size gradually decreased and their border-edge

⁵⁷ Pajer 1983, 30.

⁵⁸ Holasová 2019, 45.

⁵⁹ Pajer 1983, 70.

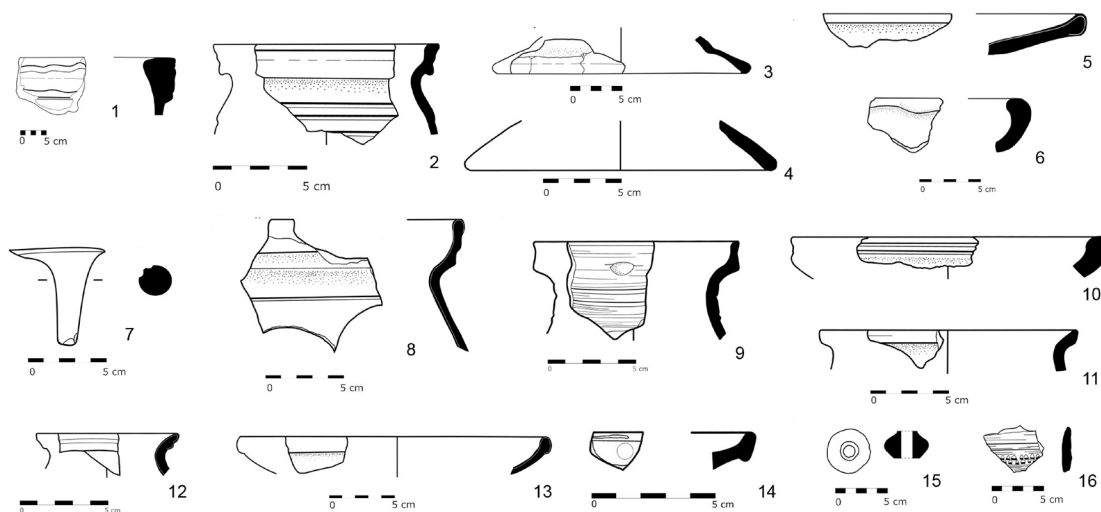


Fig. 11. Representatives of ceramic forms: 1 – storage jar; 2 – pot; 3 – lid; 4 – lid; 5 – plate; 6 – burner; 7 – tripod pipkin; 8 – jug; 9 – jug; 10 – pot; 11 – pot; 12 – mug; 13 – bowl; 14 – bowl; 15 – spindle whorl; 16 – fragment with roller-stamped motif. Graphic design: T. Holasová.



Fig. 12. Prostějov. Spatial distribution of graves based on age of the deceased. 1 – Indefinable; 2 – Adults; 3 – Children. Source: Čížmář 1999b, 5. Graphic design: T. Holasová.

area expanded.⁶⁰ Domed shaped lids with symmetrically thickened rounded rims are typical for the Early Modern Period.

Dating this highly fragmentary collection could be problematic – ceramic material dated to the 14th century as well as late medieval examples from the 15th century up to the 16th century and onward can be distinguished. Most of the collection thus dates to the High Middle Ages, Early Modern, and Modern Era.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

43 individuals⁶¹ were identified through anthropological analysis.⁶² In two instances additional

individuals were identified together in the same grave.⁶³ The remains of an 0-6 months old infant were recognised during the analysis of grave H13, together with an adult. In grave H24, remains from three individuals were distinguished: two foetuses of 40 weeks gestation and one 12-18 month old individual. The second individual in grave H13 could be explained as a result of a grave disturbance. In the case of grave H24 it could be the result of a disturbance of an older grave, a common grave, or a mishap during or after removal of the remains.

From the total of 43 analysed individuals, children make up 53% of analysed collection. The remains from graves H1, H10, and H32 were not analysed, but their approximate age category determination is included in the excavations report.⁶⁴ Graves H1 and H32 belong to children and grave H10 to an adult individual. Figure 12 shows the distribution of graves according to age category. Also,

⁶⁰ Pajer 1983, 37.

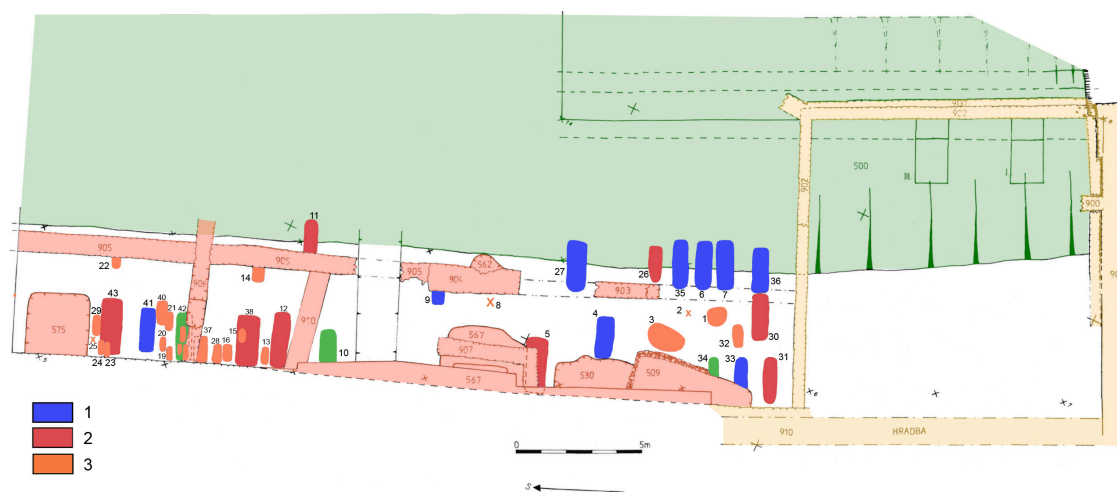
⁶¹ Remains from graves H1, H2, H4, H8, H10, and H32 were not part of the analysed collection due to their absence in the anthropological repository. Remains of two individuals were labelled as part of grave H7, but with a different grave pit identification number (517/H7 and 529/H7). Remains labelled as 529/H7 most likely originate from grave H4. The incorrect labelling is probably the result of accidental substitution during or after removal of remains.

⁶² For the original anthropological report see Šínová 2019.

⁶³ Those individuals are counted in the total number of anthropologically analysed individuals, unlike in the original report.

⁶⁴ Čížmář 1999a, 54-56.

Fig. 13. Prostějov. Spatial distribution of graves based on sex of the deceased. 1 – Male; 2 – Female; 3 – Indefinable. Source: Čižmář 1999b, 5. Graphic design: T. Holasová.



the most upper layer of burials is made up of children's graves (Fig. 3 and 12). All age categories for children are present except the *Juvenis* 14–20 years. However, most of the children likely died during or very soon after birth. Only two children's remains belong to the age range of 4–11 years. The rest of the children did not exceed three years of age.⁶⁵ The burial of preterm foetuses is not a religious duty according to *halacha*. However, due to risk of ritual defilement of *kohens*, burial was practiced.⁶⁶ These and children's burials in general were often concentrated in special sections called *nefele* as is the case of the cemetery in Prostějov. Adults are represented by 20 individuals and make up 47% of the analysed collection. Adult individuals were further divided into age categories (*Adultus*, *Maturus*, *Senilis*). Most of the adult individuals (7) fall into the *Adultus-Maturus* category (20–50 years), three individuals to the *Adultus* category (20–40 years) and four individuals to the *Maturus* category (40–60 years). Two individuals were assigned to the *Senilis* category; the last three individuals do not have a specific category, but their age is over 20 years.⁶⁷

Sex determination analysis based on morphological and anthropometric methods was successfully performed on 19 individuals (44%) from the collection of 43 individuals. The sex of the remaining 24 individuals could not be determined. The representation of both sexes is fairly balanced, however females are slightly more predominant with 10 individuals (23%) over males (9 individuals, 21%).⁶⁸ The spatial distribution of graves according to sex determination is visible in figure 13.

Graves of women and children occurred mainly in the northern part of the excavated area. In the

southern part of the excavated area were located predominantly male burials, however four women's burials were also present (Fig. 12 and 13).

Cribra orbitalia is one documented pathological trait present on the remains from graves H14 and H37 (both children). This occurrence of a porous texture on the upper part of the eye socket is linked to vitamin C and iron deficiency. Inflammatory processes in the form of periostitis were also noticeable on the skeletal remains of children. Signs of long-term joint overload and degeneration such as spondylosis (8 cases), enthesopathy (8 cases), arthrosis (3 cases) and Schmorl's nodes (3 cases) were documented primarily on the remains of older adults. Structural changes in the bones of three individuals suggest healed fractures. Porous changes connected to tuberculosis are visible on the remains of an individual from grave H30 and probably also on remains from grave H14. Documented denture pathologies include dental cavities, enamel hypoplasia, and apical processes.⁶⁹

DATING

Graves discovered during excavations in Hlaváčkova sq./Šerhovní street and in Hradební street respected the course of the town walls.⁷⁰ Deceased whose remains were discovered near the cartographic office were buried while the town moat was still in use.⁷¹ In contrast, however, graves H6, H7, H11, H26, H27, H35, and H36 found near Hlaváčkovo sq./Šerhovní st. were buried in the already partly filled moat (Fig. 2). Construction of the main town wall was finished in the year 1510, and the rest of the fortification was completed in the 1630s at the latest.⁷² Thus, the discovered

⁶⁵ Šínová 2019, 108-109.

⁶⁶ See Anonym 1953.

⁶⁷ Šínová 2019, 108.

⁶⁸ Šínová 2019, 108.

⁶⁹ Šínová 2019, 109.

⁷⁰ Prudká 1996; Čižmář 1999a; Čižmář 1999b; Čižmář 1999c; Čižmář 1999d; Čižmář 1999e.

⁷¹ Prudká 1996, 63-64.

⁷² Kuča 2004, 62-63.

graves cannot be dated earlier than to the beginning of the 16th century. As was already stated, a group of seven graves were buried in the already partly filled moat, which was dated by ceramic material found at the bottom of the moat to the first half of the 16th century.⁷³ The backfill of the moat contained ceramic material dated from the 16th to the 18th century.⁷⁴ For example, grave H36, whose lower half was present in the already partly filled moat, was located above stratigraphic layer 128, which formed the backfill of the moat. Unfortunately, the context sheet of the layer 128 was absent from the excavation report. However, stratigraphic relations show that layer 128 was located above layer 129, dated by ceramic material to the course of the 17th and 18th century. Grave H36 could be thus dated to the 17th-18th century. According to automatic level measurements, grave H36 belongs to the lowest level of graves, so it can be assumed that graves located above it are younger.

Based on the analysis of the stratigraphy, we can see that burial pits were dug into layer 134. This contextual layer was created in order to cover agricultural features connected to the grounds of the medieval house and was dated to the 17th-18th century.⁷⁵ Part of the material which dated this context is, for example, a fragment of a bowl with a plate-type border-edge from grave H5, which is an imitation of Anabaptist faience production and can be dated to the 17th century at earliest (Fig. 9:13). Also, the technique of decoration used on the fragment of bowl with the plate-type border-edge from grave H7 – with painted decoration on the white slip – began to be used in the second half of the 16th century (Fig. 11:14). Bowls with a plate-type border-edge are dated to the end of the 1630s at earliest. The glazed plates found in context 134 (cleaning between graves) appear at the beginning of the 17th century. The above-mentioned ceramic material can be considered the chronologically youngest examples originating from the graves, backfill of graves, and the area between the graves. Pottery dated to the 14th century occurs surprisingly abundantly in the backfill of the graves, as a result of the presence of agricultural features belonging to the medieval house in the layers below Jewish graves, which disturbed them.

Some of the graves were disturbed by walls built above them or which were built above layer 134 (Fig. 2:4). Wall 906 was built over graves H37 and H17 and is interpreted as one of the inner partition walls of the house built on Šerhovní street, probably in the 18th or 19th century.⁷⁶ Grave H9 was

disturbed by wall 904, which constituted a perimeter wall probably belonging to the former bakery. The latter wall is dated to the 18th-20th century.⁷⁷ Likewise, wall 905 disturbed grave H14 and was constructed also above graves H11 and H22. Walls no. 907 and 908 were also built in the 19th century. Grave H5 was discovered under the former. Wall 908, made of stone, was probably a boundary wall of a cess pit or part of a stone cellar.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

The presumed first Jewish cemetery established in Prostějov was not well known until the discovery of its archaeologically excavated part located in the area of today's Hlaváčkovo square/Šerhovní street. New analysed archaeological data derived from research of the 43 unearthened graves bring fresh knowledge about Jewish burial rites. The occurrence of pottery shards placed on the eyes and mouth of the deceased, the absence of the remains of complex garments (except of a woman presumably deceased during or after childbirth), the placement of iron padlocks in the graves, the presence of quarry stones, the occurrence of wooden structures or coffins reinforced by iron nails, and the general orientation of the graves and the positioning of the deceased are all fascinating displays of Ashkenazi Jewish burial customs and rites.

Dating of the graves could be assigned to the course of the 17th and 18th century on the basis of analysed ceramic collection, artefacts present in grave, and stratigraphy. Written sources mentioning the oldest Jewish cemetery correspond with archaeological finds, as the last burials are listed for the year 1802 and a new Jewish cemetery was established on Lidická/Studentská street in 1801.⁷⁹ Supporting this conclusion, Mordecai Benet wrote in *Parashat Mordecai* (The Explanations of Mordecai) that the cemetery was filled to its capacity at the end of the 18th century.⁸⁰

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

⁷³ Čižmář and Šmíd 2000, 83.

⁷⁴ Čižmář 1999d, 19.

⁷⁵ Čižmář 1999d, 46.

⁷⁶ Čižmář 1999e, 201.

⁷⁷ Čižmář 1999e, 199-200.

⁷⁸ Čižmář 1999e, 202-203.

⁷⁹ Dokoupilová 2000, 76.

⁸⁰ Benet 1899, 46-47.

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