

ON THE INTERPRETATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS FROM THE EQUIPMENT OF ARISTOCRATIC HOUSEHOLDS IN EARLY MODERN PRAGUE

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Social changes in the course of the 15th and 16th centuries increased the purchase power particularly of lower social classes. Consequently, more goods appeared in the households and the equipment of urban classes became similar to that of higher society. Simultaneously, distances between producer and consumer grew, which is witnessed by items not only from neighbouring countries, but even from other continents.

In the Early Modern Ages, the unification of the pottery and glass production and its availability blurred the differences in the equipment of urban households. The social status therefore mainly depends on the dwelling quality, which is determined by the size and facilities (heating, water supply) of the house, its location and household goods that usually appear in last wills. One or two – in our view luxurious – items or imported goods cannot be automatically associated with a higher social milieu. Since archaeological find assemblages contain only a portion of the original items of daily usage in the early modern households, we can only hardly draw an accurate image of the past appearance of a feature, household or area from the perspective of our present view of society based merely on archaeological finds.

Particular examples of find assemblages from Prague-Hradčany are presented to answer the following questions. To which extent are the finds of material culture a relevant source to determine the social status of their owner? What are the risks of using the limited informative value of archaeological finds for the interpretation of a certain finding?

Keywords

Early Modern Age, social status, Prague, pottery

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