

# Centres of Historical Towns as Open-Air Museums

## Some pluses and minuses in the presenting of archaeological finds in situ based on experience from the Czech Republic.

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When speaking about education, (re)construction and experiment in archaeology most people imagine an archaeopark. Is the presentation of people's life in prehistory and the Middle Ages restricted only to archaeological open-air museums? An alternative can be the presentation of architectonic remains in situ.

Architectonic remains uncovered during archaeological excavations are a specific category of heritage. Fragments or larger remains of buildings, which survive usually below the terrain level, are the subject of protection, stabilisation, conservation, presentation and long term maintenance in situ. These are building monuments from which only parts of the construction survived, usually parts of perimeter walls, sometimes various parts of vaults, paving and other elements. It is characteristic that the majority of the elements serving to protect the building from weather are missing. The constructions were for certain time covered by soil and after uncovering they are again, but this time in an incomplete and vulnerable form, open to weathering and other damaging influences.

Finds of architectonic remains presented in situ testify, for example, to how medieval people lived and cared for their town. They are a permanent trace of the care people dedicated to the surroundings of their houses, palaces and town quarters. The testimony of architectonic remains presented in situ compliments the evidence of movable archaeological finds documenting everyday life in a given place, but also the historical upheavals caused by a natural catastrophe or unexpected enemy attack.

Presenting architectonic remains in situ means that it is necessary to respect their specifics. During planning and realisation of conservation and presentation, technologies should be chosen which will protect the monument but at the same time allow its use without any substantial interference with its authenticity or art-historical values.

When an archaeological excavation, during which architectonic remains were discovered, is finished, there are several possibilities on how to proceed. The variant still most often chosen consists of removing the architectonic remains and replacing them with a new building. If it is not possible to preserve architectonic remains in situ it is possible to transfer them, especially the most precious parts, to a different place. This variant should not be a standard solution. In removing fragments of buildings from their original place they become only an exhibit without any context, or decoration of a new building.

The main aim of monument protection should be the preservation of archaeological sites with architectonic remains in situ so that they survive until it is possible to present them where they belong. If the conditions for presentation are not favourable it is better to re-bury the remains. Only when long-term protection and maintenance are ensured is it possible to make it accessible to the public. Depending on the type of find it is possible to divide the presentations into local, (where a building or a part of one is presented, e. g. a house, a tower, a church, a well, technical equipment, kilns...), linear (town walls, ditches, bridges, sewers...) or area (when a whole building complex such as a castle or monastery is open to the public). According to the intervention meant to stop further decay of the architectonic remains we differentiate between presentations of stabilised fragment in situ (preferably within the interior of a building), presentation of stabilised and



■ Fig. 1 Stará Boleslav. Foundations of the church of St George and Virgin Mary are marked in the pavement.



■ Fig. 2 Monastery of St Agnes in Prague, heating stove rebuilt into a bread oven presented under a protective construction



■ Fig. 3 Pardubice, library on the Pernštejn Square. Architectural fragments below readers' feet.



■ Fig. 4 Church of unknown dedication on the Chelčický Square in Žatec. Birth of the presentation of an archaeological find in situ.

partially reconstructed fragments (keeping within the character of the original find) or presentation of a full reconstruction.

After uncovering and documenting architectonic remains there are several possible ways to make them accessible to the public. The basis of every presentation should be an information board with text accompanying a plan of the site, drawing reconstruction of the building and pictures of finds. Presentation through an information board does not necessitate presentation of the surviving fragments. These could be reburied to preserve them. The board allows for presentation even in cases where the remains have been removed. The absence of basic information is an alarming deficiency on many presentations of architectonic remains. Without basic information even the best presentation falls into oblivion and eventually disappears.

Another way to present architectonic remains after they are reburied is to create a plan within paved or grassed area. An alternative of this is a mock-up reconstruction above the original masonry.

Until recently, a common although now mostly rejected, way of presenting architectonic remains is presentation of the original fragment in the exterior without any shelter. The reason for rejecting this is the problem of long term protection and maintenance of the unprotected masonry and damage caused by weathering, lack of regular maintenance or vandals. If the uncovered fragment

should be presented in exterior it is better if it is sheltered. It is necessary to remember that the shelter construction is a new formation which needs not to fit the environment into which it is inserted. Remains which lie under ground level can be made accessible under a concrete deck.

The most considerate presentation is showing architectonic remains within the interiors of historical buildings. The find can be presented by marking the plan in the floor. Another possibility is to make it accessible under a glass cover or under a wooden floor which can be opened. If it is possible the find can be stabilised as found.

An underused possibility is the presentation of architectonic remains within the interiors of new buildings. These can give the uncovered fragments the best protection thanks to the use of modern technologies. An interesting possibility is to present the historical layers in the form of a column, which can include some of the movable archaeological finds. This technique has not yet been used in the Czech Republic.

For the presentation of architectonic remains in situ to fulfil its function the public has to learn about it. The source of information can be by an active observation and research by those who are interested. The lead is a glass board or metal grate in the floor, plans of extinct buildings marked on a floor or on a lawn. Information boards introducing concrete presentations draw attention to finds presented in situ. Exhibitions, ideally accompanied by catalogues or exhibitions organised in spaces where the finds are presented in situ can inform on the finds. Internet or specialised publications can refer to presentations in situ. It is not often that presentation of architectonic remains in situ after the end of the archaeological excavations become objects of interest. Information is often not published and it is necessary to check the actual status on the spot.

The basic condition for quality presentation of finds of architectonic remains in situ is their accessibility to the public. If the find is not accessible at least for a short time it loses its importance and function to in-

form about the history of the place uncovered by archaeological excavations to those who do not normally visit museums and galleries. The presented find is accessible 24 hours a day and 7 days a week if it is within an open space, square, street or park. The accessibility of the majority of finds is restricted by the time when the building where they are situated is open to the public. These buildings are not just museums and galleries but also shopping centres, wine cellars, restaurants, office blocks and others. Some of the finds are accessible on demand. One way it is possible to see otherwise inaccessible architectonic remains is a visit to a theatre, concert hall or a church adapted as a concert hall. An infrequent occasion to visit normally inaccessible archaeological finds are Days of European Cultural Heritage or Days of Museums and Galleries. On these days 'treasures', often hidden in churches and monasteries are open to a broader public.

One criterion of democracy is the removing of barriers and allowing equal access to culture. When presenting architectonic remains in situ it is therefore necessary to pay attention to how they are accessible to people with special needs. Part of the presentation, especially those situated within historical buildings remain inaccessible to people in wheel chairs. However, to make these accessible could substantially damage the historical building monument itself.

Presentation of architectonic remains in situ is the easiest and most natural way to bring them close to the wider public. The find is situated within its context. Visitors can learn about the history of the place during a walk, visit to the theatre, shopping in a shopping centre or a get-together in a restaurant without the feeling that they are in a museum.

Presentation of architectonic remains should be an example for both owners of houses and spaces where they are situated and designers and architects trying to find a solution for the co-existence of a new building with an archaeological find. Well made presentation in situ accompanied by choice of movable finds is the best impulse for protection and preservation of similar finds.



■ **Fig. 5** Nymburk, malt house of the brewery with an oven preserved in the new building of the former Regional Council. The archaeological find is accessible for wheelchairs. Such presentation should be an example to other in situ presentations.

Preservation and protection of architectural remains in situ allows us to protect the yet untouched archaeological landscapes. It is certain that archaeology will in future gain more information from a medieval building than presently possible as long as the building is preserved. If the architectural remains are presented in situ the archaeological landscapes will be left to future generations as a 'tin' of yet unrecognised information about life in the given place tens, hundreds and thousands years ago. In the Czech Republic 200-250 presentations in situ are now recorded. It is impossible to overlook that in many cases the presentation is a source of problems rather than a chance to show unique evidence of the evolution and changes of the place where it is situated. It is a challenge for the National Institute of Heritage Protection to change the negative approach to the presentation of finds in situ. Otherwise archaeological sites in the centres of historical villages and towns will stay an underrated, neglected and disregarded source of information about our past.

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## Summary

### Zentren historischer Städte als Freilichtmuseen

Architektonische Reste, die während archäologischer Ausgrabungen freigelegt werden, sind eine spezielle Gruppe kulturhistorischer Überlieferung. Die Befunde architektonischer Relikte ergänzen die Erkenntnisse, die aus beweglichen archäologischen Funden vor allem zum Alltagsleben zu gewinnen sind. Die Präsentation baulicher Reste in situ ist die einfachste und natürlichste Weise, diese einer größeren Öffentlichkeit nahe zu bringen. Wenn sich der Befund in seinem ursprünglichen Kontext befindet, kann der Besucher während eines Spaziergangs, bei einem Theaterbesuch, beim Einkaufsbummel im Einkaufszentrum oder bei einem Restaurantbesuch etwas darüber erfahren – und zwar ohne das Gefühl, in einem Museum zu sein.

### Les centres des villes historiques comme parcs archéologiques

Les vestiges architecturaux découverts lors de fouilles archéologiques appartiennent à une catégorie spécifique du patrimoine. Les témoignages apportés par ces restes architecturaux viennent renforcer les connaissances sur la vie quotidienne apportées par les vestiges mobiliers. La présentation de ces vestiges architecturaux in situ est le moyen le plus facile et le plus naturel de les restituer au grand public. Une découverte présentée dans son contexte original permet aux visiteurs de découvrir l'histoire du site tout en se promenant, en visitant le théâtre, en faisant du shopping ou en allant au restaurant...sans jamais avoir l'impression d'être dans un musée.

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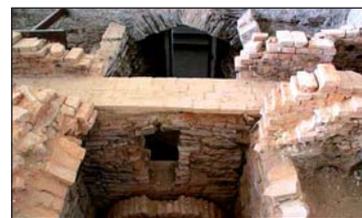
■ **Fig. 6** Brewery, Hradec Králové. Securing a bastion of the fortification during the building works before its opening to public.



■ **Fig. 7** Fragments of the Premyslide castle is an integral and valued part of the exhibition in the Archdiocesan Museum in Olomouc.



■ **Fig. 8** Monastery of Black Friars, Hotel Mandarin, Lesser Town in Prague. Archaeological finds presented in situ can be part of a luxury hotel.



■ **Fig. 9** Castle Vranov nad Dyjí. The medieval heating system, "hypocaust" reminds us about the medieval past of the castle.



■ **Fig. 10** Kunětická Hora, demarcation of parts of defunct fortification of the castle, gates and drawbridge in the paving of the road and surrounding lawn