



What has been found underground

2010-09-15

An anthropomorphic knife hilt

An intricately made knife hilt in the form of a solid sculpture representing a man (?) (no visible bust) clad in a long and slightly pleated robe, adorned on the chest with a vertical woven sash. The waist is emphasised by a belt with a pouch bearing an oblique cross etched into it and hung on the right-hand side. The head is tilted slightly forwards, has realistic features and large, slightly protruding eyes, tight lips, and a small hole in the chin. The hair, divided by a parting in the middle of the head, flows down onto the shoulders and neck in six coifed strips. The arms of the sculpture are bent at the elbows, while its hands are thrust into pockets above the waist. The lower section of the hilt includes a modelled base (2.3 cm long) which is separated from the figure itself by a horizontal line.

This type of hilt is a rare find, and is associated with the upper strata of society. Such hilts have been found in the Polish castles of Bardo (a hooded woman), Będzin (a Franciscan) and Pułtusk (a falconer), and abroad – in Vienna (a woman with a lute), Bratislava (a royal couple), Tallinn and the town of Vysoké Mýto (the Czech Republic), to mention but a few. Some researchers argue that this type of hilt comes from the workshops of France and Northern Germany. The hilt found in Krakow most resembles the hilt from Bardo, the latter representing an ‘ugly’ woman standing on a similar base and clad in a long, slightly pleated, hooded robe, arms bent at the elbows and hands in pockets.

The Prague groschen of John of Bohemia (1311 - 1346)

The Czech Republic, Kutná Hora, 1311 - 1346

Silver, Ø 26.7mm, weight 2.30 g

Field inventory number W79/05

The coin was found in the 14th-century cultural stratum in the course of archaeological works carried out in 2005 in Krakow's Main Market Square.

As a consequence of the dynamic economic growth experienced in Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries, the existing monetary system, based on small Denar coins, ceased to be useful. A heavier, and consequently more valuable coin, was launched as early as the 12th century – the *denarius grossus*. In 1300, Wenceslaus II of Bohemia – the king of Bohemia and Poland – carried out a



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monetary reform of particular significance to the economy, remodelling the financial system and launching a thick coin minted from nearly pure silver. Because of the inscription on the rim of the reverse, reading 'GROSSI PRAGENSES', the coin was popularly known as the 'Prague groschen'. Production of the coin, tapping the extensive silver deposits in Kutná Hora, was quite extensive, as the European economic boom triggered a steady increase in the demand for such 'thick' money. Due to the high silver content and beauty of the coin (also known as 'the wide groschen'), the Prague groschen soon became the basis of financial operations in the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Silesia and Rus.

The fragment of text preserved on the obverse of the piece found in Krakow, reading 'IOHANNES PRIMUS, DEI GRATIA REX BOEMIE' (John I, the King of Bohemia by God's grace), refers to John of Bohemia. The groschen issued by this king preserved all features of their prototype, except for the name of the ruler (which was updated). In the 14th century the Prague groschen became the principal currency of Central Europe, and in Poland it was used as the prototype for the 'grossus cracoviensis' – a thick coin minted by king Kazimierz III Wielki (Casimir III the Great).