

## Andalusi sherds from Prague

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*Two fragments of lustre-glaze tableware excavated at the Týn merchant inn in the Staré-Město quarter of Prague, the archaeological deposition context of which may be dated into the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, represent products of Andalusi pottery workshops of 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The route by which this tableware service came to Prague is difficult to trace. It seems most logical to link the introduction of this luxury pottery with the wave of Andalusi products, especially precious textiles, supplying the highest circles of Bohemian society roughly between 1250 and 1320. This commercial operation might have followed up the trade ventures of Andalusi-oriented entrepreneurs furnishing customers of western Europe along the Atlantic coast with luxury items originating in Andalusi production plants. An alternative to this idea is represented by the possibility that the vessels came to Prague in the baggage of some of its Jewish residents.*

Middle Ages – Prague – commerce – Spain – Almohad empire

**Andalusíké střepy z Prahy.** Dva zlomky přepychové stolní keramiky s lustrovou glazurou, nalezené při výzkumu Týnského dvora v Praze v archeologickém kontextu uloženém nejspíše na přelomu 13. a 14. stol., představují výrobky andalusíkých dílen almohádského období Iberského poloostrova a byly zhotoveny nejspíše ve 12. či raném 13. století. Rekonstruovat cestu tohoto přepychového stolního servisu z Andalusie do Prahy není jednoduché. Nejlogičtější řešení tu představuje myšlenka transportu v důsledku almohádského obchodu se zeměmi západní Evropy podél jejího atlantického pobřeží až do oblasti Severního a Baltského moře. Druhou a stejně dobré představitevnou alternativou představuje přivezení souboru luxusního stolního zboží některým z židovských obyvatel středověké Prahy.

středověk – Praha – obchod – Španělsko – almohádské impérium

### The finds, their Prague context and description

Some time in 2001 or early 2002, the late Ladislav Hrdlička, whose untimely death is to be profoundly regretted, entrusted to the first of the present authors the task of analysis and interpretation of two sherds markedly differing from common medieval pottery of Prague which he had found in his excavations of the Týn merchant-inn precinct in Prague.<sup>1</sup> This contribution focuses on these pottery fragments, representing an addition to the hitherto very small number of vestiges of Islamic pottery in east-central Europe.

Both sherds, constituting the contents of bag No. 868/79, turned up in layer 229 according to section 26 (= layer 26 in section 30, see *Hrdlička 2005a*, 90 Plan 13 for the situation of sections) in the northern part of trench IV of the excavation in the Týn merchant inn of Prague at building plot No. 1065 in 1979 (*Beneš 1999; Hrdlička 1990, I/2, 70, 173; III, Plans 60, 73, 77, 90; IV/2, Plates 713–715; Hrdlička 2005a*, 162–198, in general 89–198; *Hrdlička 2005b*, 136 sub No. 586 with ref.). Layer 229/26, a thin, grey-brown, incoherent stratum of coarse sand with small quartz pebbles and *opuka* limestone (*Hrdlička 2005a*, 189, sub No. 437), came into contact with (might have been abutting a stake in) post-hole 226, and thus likely to post-date it in time. Together with feature 47, post-holes 226 and 227 it may represent a component of wooden civil architecture covering the inner area of Týn at the level of the „Gothic pavement“ of the turn of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century (*Hrdlička 1990, III, Plans 77 and 90*).

<sup>1</sup> It is to be greatly regretted that Mr. Ladislav Hrdlička passed away before he could see these research results published. As, however, he had not only found the sherds in his excavation, but he charged the first of the present authors with a mission to interpret them, we deem it just and proper to include him posthumously among the authors of this contribution.

The accompanying pottery (*Hrdlička 2005a*, 169, fig. 42) indicates a deposition date of our sherds sometime during the advanced 13<sup>th</sup> or, at the very latest, incipient 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The Týn merchant inn represents a Prague site most intimately connected with international trade activities (on the area and its archaeological exploration see *Hrdlička 2005a*, 7–16, and *Černá – Podliska 2008*, 252–253). First occupied most probably at the close of eleventh century or beginning of twelfth (*Hrdlička 2005a*, 8, 13 fn. 5) it experienced its *floruit* period in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent ages. All merchants visiting the markets of medieval Prague were under obligation to store their goods in the Týn precinct, and to offer them for sale there. A ditch enclosed its original area in the course of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century; at the close of the same century, when the area needed for the trade activities did not suffice, the enclosure received an extension in the eastward direction and from now on, a stone wall, built instead of the disused ditch, encircled the Týn precinct. In that time, but probably later, the area also received a supplement to the wheeling and dealing of its incumbents in the form of a „Gothic“ stone pavement, on which coins struck under king Wenceslas II (1283–1305) turned up (*Hrdlička 2005a*, 5).

The sherds represent one a fragment of a lower part of a small pedestaled jug (1), the other a body fragment of a similar – or even the same – pottery vessel decorated by plastic ribs on the outside (2). Are these vestiges of an ornamental pattern or of an inscription?

The maximum dimensions of the first fragment are 47.5 and 28.2 mm, the outer diameter of its pedestal amounts to 38 mm. The thickness of its wall equals to 9.8 mm while the bottom reaches the thickness of 4.0 mm. The colour of this fragment can be characterized as oscillating between white, light ochre and pinkish colours, and its material, of pottery character (not faience), fits the classification „fine“ (no visible clusters or condensation nuclei in the ceramic paste), tending to come off in flakes. The inside of this sherd bears a tin glaze of honey- to yellowish colour displaying *craquelure* in regular polygonal fields. Outside, the lowermost part of the body shows a white lead glaze. The highest surviving part of the vessel exterior boasts a horizontal zone of shiny, metallic lustre glaze of pink to deep red colour. The firing of this fragment falls within the category „medium“ (the sherd emits a sound but does not „ring“ when stuck) and its hardness into the category of „high“ (a steel point leaves hardly perceptible traces on it). As to technology, no safe judgments can be pronounced because of the fragment's small size and careful surface treatment, but to all appearances, the vessel might have been wheel-thrown.

The other, body fragment, the maximum dimensions of which amount to 40.5 and 26.0 mm and its thickness to 5.0 mm, also shows a colour oscillating between white, light ochre and pinkish, with the pinkish hue being more prominent. Its pottery (not faience) material also falls within the „fine“ category. Its inner part shows a lead glaze of honey- to yellowish colour displaying *craquelure* in regular polygonal fields, and its outer surface a white design in reserve on the deep red lustre. The firing and hardness of the body fragment can be designated as „medium“; the sherd emits a sound but does not „ring“ when stuck and a point of metal leaves visible traces on it. Again, the technology of its production cannot be assessed safely because of its small size and careful surface finish, but the parts protruding from the outer surface are matched by cavities on the inside. The vessel could thus have been mould-pressed, but no firm judgments can be proposed (for a description in Czech see *Charvát 2003*, 493–494).

### **What other imported finds from the Týn merchant inn?**

The Týn area yielded other finds coming from faraway lands but the evidence which they offer is far from clear. A Byzantine copper coin, *follis*, struck some time between 970 and 1030 and found in an archaeological context dating to the second half of 12<sup>th</sup> century, belongs to these (*Militký 2006*, 131). One of the excavations situated close to the Týn enclosure (house on plot No. 1064/I at *Týnská ulička*) has brought forth a tiny fragment of foreign glass bearing painted decoration in gold and enamel, of Byzantine (or Near Eastern?) origin, and probably of 12<sup>th</sup>-century date; now *Černá – Podliska 2008*, 240–241, fig. 7: A on p. 244 and pp. 245 and 251).

Does this indicate Byzantine connections for the resident (also Jewish) merchant elites?

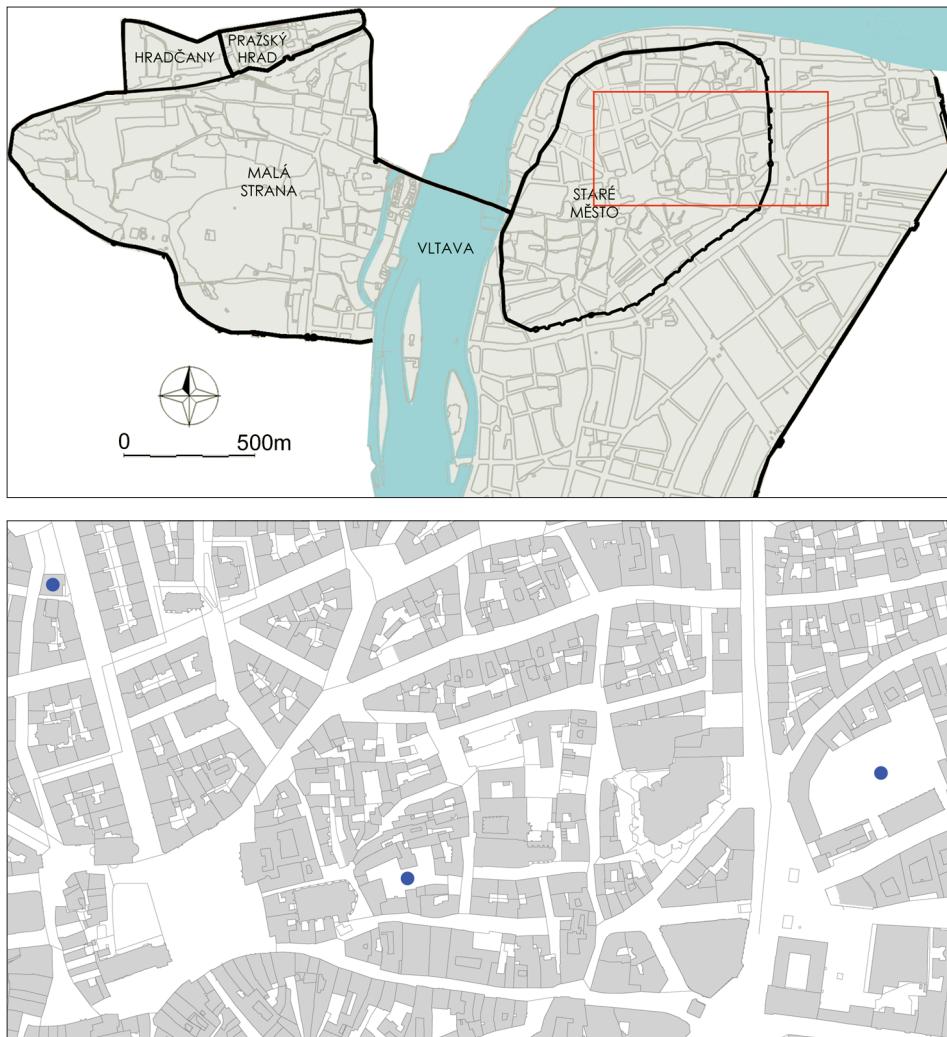


Fig. 1. Above: The northern part of the urban agglomeration of Prague in the Middle Ages. The area within the Old Town is indicated by the rectangular oblong. Below: the area of the Old Town of Prague with sites mentioned in the text plotted on (from left to right: the Old-New Synagogue, the Týn merchant inn, the Náměstí-Republiky area). Plan, based on a matrix supplied by J. Čiháková, drawn by Kateřina Vytejčková. Obr. 1. Nahoře: Severní část městské aglomerace středověké Prahy. Dole: plán relevantní části Starého Města pražského s označením míst uvedených v textu (zleva doprava: Staronová synagoga, Týnský dvůr, náměstí Republiky). Kresba: Kateřina Vytejčková na základě podkladů dodaných Jarmilou Čihákovou.

### The Andalusi connection

Two fragments of pottery decorated by means of metallic lustre glaze came to light during excavations in a commercial area of Prague. They come from closed pottery shapes, doubtlessly from a small jar or a small jug. The metallic lustre displays a red colour and at least one of the fragments has been pressed in a mold.

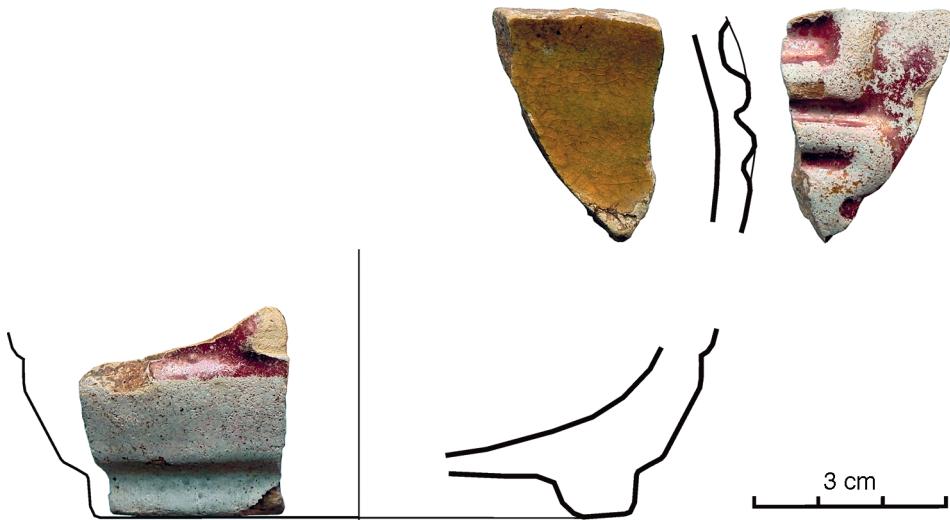


Fig. 2. Praha, Týn merchant inn, plot No. 1065, layer No. 229. Below left: Fragment No. 868/79 (1), obverse and section. Above right: Fragment No. 868/79 (2), obverse, section and reverse. Drawing and photos by Karel Nováček.

Obr. 2. Praha-Týnský dvůr, parcela č. 1065, vrstva 229, dva importované keramické zlomky. Vlevo dole zl. 868/79 (1), lícní strana a profil. Vpravo nahoře zl. 868/79 (2), lícní strana, profil a rubní strana. Kresby a foto Karel Nováček.

The items belong to a production category of limited extent. Pottery creations of this kind came from masters of al-Andalus active between the middle of 12<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Iberian peninsula was dominated by the Almohad empire. Workshops turning out this kind of tableware include those of the port city of Almería in the southeastern part of al-Andalus (*Muñoz Martín – Flores Escabosa 2005; Muñoz Martín – Flores Escabosa 2007*), and, without any doubt, also those of the port of Jerez de la Frontera (*Martín Patino – Garrote Martín – Fernández Gabaldón 1987–1988*), which blossomed into a most important city during the Almohad age because of the burgeoning of maritime traffic linking the "two capitals" of the empire, Marrakesh and Sevilla.

Most of the juglets bearing mould-pressed metallic-lustre decoration have been discovered at al-Andalus, frequently in port cities situated along its coastal regions: Alcacer do Sal, Mértola, Cadix, Málaga, Sevilla, Jerez de la Frontera, Almería (*Cavaleiro Paixão – Faria – Carvalho 2001; Gómez Martínez 2001*, 126, cat. No. 34; *Gómez Martínez 1997; Cavilla Sánchez Moreno 2005; Gómez Moreno 1940; Fernández Gabaldón 1986; 1987; Flores Escabosa – Muñoz Martín – Lirola Delgado 1999*), but, in a few cases, also in the mainland, at Córdoba and Granada (*Martínez Caviro 1991*, 71, Nos. 47 and 48). A sprinkling of items of this kind came to the day at Morocco and isolated examples turned up as far as the Egyptian sites of Cairo and Alexandria (*Rosser-Owen 2010*, p. 43, cat. No. 28; *Dectot – Makariou – Miroudot 2008*, 79, cat. No. 53; *Mehrez 1959*, 399–401; *Martín 1929*, lám. 12; *Baghat 1922*).

By their rather extensive diffusion area, finds of this exquisite lustreware fall within the dynamics of both mainland- and maritime commercial enterprise within the Almohad empire, and, in a more general fashion, within such ventures of the coeval Mediterranean area. The same age witnessed the imports of other Spanish products into Cairo, such as pottery bearing the *cuerda seca* decoration.

The presence of such items at Prague is thus also likely to be understood in the context of international trade. Much as in other cases of imported-ware finds distant from the production area and situated within the European mainland, they represent isolated finds.

### Which way from al-Andalus to Bohemia?

In the original publication (*Charvát 2003*), one of us pondered long upon a possible Italian, specifically Venetian, mediation in the bringing of these tableware items from the shores of the Mediterranean to the distant central European country. This author believes now that another possibility, at least as viable as that of the Venetian link, may be presented focusing upon the evidence of Almohad trade with western Europe along its Atlantic shores as far as the Northern and Baltic seas, as indicated in one of his earlier works (*Charvát 1998, 25–26*). It seems that after its initial *floruit* period, the Almohad empire encountered obstacles which its managers chose to remedy by wholesale exports of luxury goods to consumers within twelfth-to-thirteenth-century Christian Europe, only too eager to demonstrate their (in many cases newly acquired) status by conspicuous display and consumption of exotic dress, fashion articles and foods (see now *Fromherz 2009*, esp. 47–52). The route of this trade is marked by material vestiges of Almohad wealth left behind in lands of western and northern Europe.

In a stained-glass image from the Chartres cathedral of northern France, the Magi bring, among other gifts to the newborn Jesus, coins struck by Almoravid rulers shortly before 1147 (*Stenon 1998, 136–138*). Golden Almohad coins, re-worked into precious ornaments, have turned up in the Netherlands and northern Germany (*Koers – Lanting – Molema 1990; Lanting – Molema 1993–1994; Schultze-Dörrlamm 1992, 437, No. 9*), from the area of which we also know of textiles from al-Andalus (*Jaacks 1993*).

This connection may have been of great interest to Bohemia of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, which had by then maintained traditional commercial links to the Baltic area for some two centuries already (see especially *Tomková 1996*, and more recently *Novák 2010*). Some notable facts reveal that this connection lived, and was well, throughout the (at least earlier) thirteenth century. First and foremost, in the year 1205 king Přemysl Otakar I of Bohemia deemed it worthwhile to marry his daughter Margaret, who subsequently became queen Dagmar, to Waldemar II Sejr, ruler of Denmark (*Cawley – FMG 2006–2011*). Queen Dagmar died as early as 1212 or 1213 and her remains found the last refuge in St. Bendt church of Ringsted, where a Byzantine-style cross was found during an examination of her remains (*Pavlik 1993, 18–20*).<sup>2</sup> Only later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century did the focus of Bohemian contacts with the long-distance trade networks shift by 180° to Italy (see *Charvát 2003*, and, most recently, *Charvát 2008*).

A substantial amount of evidence gathered during recent years especially thanks to the research of Ms. Milena Bravermanová shows that the volume of textile imports from al-Andalus into Bohemia in the advanced 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century was far from negligible. Luxury textiles of Andalusi origin turned up in the tombs of Bohemian king Přemysl Otakar II (1253–1278), Austrian duke Rudolph (died 1300) and Bohemian king Rudolph (died 1307, *Bravermanová 2002*), situated in the cathedral of St. Guy at the Prague Castle. Other garments of such materials appeared in tombs of at least some bishops of Prague, laid to rest in the same shrine, the most prestigious funerary site of medieval Bohemia. Such items constituted parts of sepulchral attires of bishops Nicholas (died 1258, *Bravermanová 2004, 604–610*, and *Bravermanová 2007*) and Tobias of Bechyně (died 1296, *Bravermanová 2004, 603*). Finds of Andalusi or possibly Andalusi woven matter from saintly tombs present more difficulties to chronological classification, as the most prestigious objects and structures within St. Guy cathedral underwent repeated refurbishments and repairs in different periods of time. Some textiles of probably medieval origin, imported from the Iberian peninsula, came to light among fragments from the tomb of St. Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia (*Bravermanová 2010a, 156 fn. 41* and *158–159; 2010b, 192–194*).

<sup>2</sup> Another indication is offered by the *Oriente iam sole I*, a Bohemian Christian legend of the second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century describing the life and deeds of Saint Wenceslas, a martyred duke of Bohemia († 935). Here king Erik IV Plovpenning of Denmark (1241–1250), seeking penance for his deeds from Jesus Christ, received from Him in a dream an instruction to establish and build a monastery dedicated to St. Wenceslas. This the king duly accomplished, having founded a St. Wenceslas's church at Reval (present-day Tallinn, Estonia) and endowed a community of Cistercian nuns there in 1249 (*Nastalska-Wiśnicka 2010, 168–169, 327–328*).

All this points to the conclusion that importation of luxury weaves of Andalusi origins into medieval Bohemia falls in between, by and large, 1250 and 1320, and indicates the chronological range most probable for the introduction of these items of lustre-glaze tableware into some of the prominent households of Prague.

### Any alternatives for the Atlantic route?

The above cited observations seem to point logically to a conclusion that the lustre-glazed fragments from the Týn merchant inn actually came into the country in consequence of international-trade activities linked to the ways of diffusion of Almohad-empire luxury goods. Let us, however, not be blind to other possibilities of transport of such precious and ostentatious display wares through other channels, and by other carriers and carried agencies. One of the alternatives that springs to our mind almost automatically is the introduction of fine tableware by wealthy and independent merchants of Jewish origin; a recent review of Muslim-Slav commerce in which Jewish entrepreneurs figure prominently has been provided by *Ahmad Nazmi* (1998). Can we marshall any arguments for this trajectory?

Written records describing the stormy events at Prague linked with the passage of the first crusader armies in 1096 make it plain that at that time, Prague (BRGA) was not only known to the Jewish communities of Europe, but that it denoted by then the settlement focus in the area of the later Staré-Město (Old Town) along the entire right bank of the Vltava river, from the residence of Bohemian dukes at Vyšehrad as far as the bridge, replaced later by the Judith- and Charles bridges (*Haverkamp 2005, 39–41, 260–261, 466, 482*). It thus seems that after the year 1000, this area did, in fact, host the major Jewish settlement, subsequent to the earliest Jewish establishment on the left bank of Vltava under the ramparts of the Prague Castle (at present-day Malá-Strana, or, the Lesser Quarter), which might once have extended its hospitality to the Andalusi traveller and diplomat Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb (on the medieval Jewish community of Prague see most recently *Doležalová 2007*).

Current archaeological information gives the time around 1100 as the very first occupation period of the Týn merchant inn (*Hrdlička 2005a, 8, 13 fn. 5*). The same age, at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, saw the beginnings of Judaist-oriented settlement in the Josefov quarter of the Old-Town area, the traditional Jewish ghetto of Prague (*Dragoun 2003*).

Also, the Týn merchant inn lies at a walking distance from *náměstí Republiky*, a major Prague square in which the recent archaeological excavations documented elite residences of late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Among other finds, these excavations have yielded an eleventh-to-thirteenth-century ring of gold with a Roman cameo depicting the goddess of victory, and bearing an inscription in Hebrew characters giving a personal name, Moshe bar Shelomo (*Zavřel – Žegklitz 2007; Kašpar – Žegklitz 2009*).

The chronological range of initial contacts between central Europe and al-Andalus after 1000 A.D. is hinted at by a set of eleventh-century Andalusi ivory carvings mounted on the binding of codex CLM 23 630 (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München), originally perhaps belonging to the Salzburg archbishopric (*Plaschka – Drabek 1991, 548–549*).

From all this it follows that the right-bank area of the Vltava river, including quarters close to the Týn merchant inn, had been hosting a Jewish population at least from the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. This population included wealthy and influential citizens who could well afford luxury tableware brought to the Bohemian capital from Andalusi workshops.

### Conclusions

Two fragments of lustre-glaze tableware excavated at the Týn merchant inn in the Staré-Město quarter of Prague, the archaeological deposition context of which may be dated into the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, represent products of Andalusi pottery workshops of Almohad age, falling to 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The route by which this tableware service came to Prague is difficult to trace. It seems most logical to link the introduction of this luxury pottery with the wave of Andalusi

products, especially precious textiles, supplying the highest circles of Bohemian society roughly between 1250 and 1320. This commercial operation might have followed up the trade ventures of Andalusi-oriented entrepreneurs furnishing customers of western Europe along the Atlantic coast with luxury items originating in Andalusi production plants. An alternative to this idea is represented by the possibility that the vessels came to Prague in the baggage of some of its Jewish residents. The Jewish community of medieval Prague, residing in the Staré-Město area at least from about 1100, definitely included citizens wealthy and influential enough to give expression to their status by dining on exquisite tableware never seen before in Prague.

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## Andaluské střepy z Prahy

Dva zlomky přepychové stolní keramiky s lustrovou glazurou, nalezené při výzkumu Týnského dvora v Praze v archeologickém kontextu uloženém nejspíše na přelomu 13. a 14. stol., představují výrobky andalusských dílen almohádského období Iberského poloostrova a byly zhotoveny nejspíše ve 12. či raném 13. století. Jde o ukázky velmi luxusního stolního zboží, které se objevovalo v pobřežních městech Andalusie s výraznou vazbou na mezinárodní obchod. Pražský výskyt těchto zlomků představuje po lokalitách v Portugalsku (Mértola), Maroku a Egyptě (Alexandrie, Káhira) čtvrtý doložený případ jejich přítomnosti mimo hranice almohádských držav muslimského Španělska.

Rekonstruovat cestu tohoto přepychového stolního servisu z Andalusie do Prahy není jednoduché. Nejlogičtější řešení tu představuje myšlenka transportu v důsledku almohádského obchodu se zeměmi západní Evropy podél jejího atlantického pobřeží až do oblasti Severního a Baltského moře. České země udržovaly s Pobaltím velmi živé kontakty po celý raný středověk, a tamní dovážená zboží se tak mohla postupně dostat až do Prahy. Připomeňme jen, že se pohybujeme v období, kdy Přemysl Otakar I. provdal svou dceru Markétu, pozdější „dobrou královnu Dagmar“, za dánského krále Valdemara II. Sejra (Vítěze). Právě sem náleží též údaj pozdní svatováclavské legendy *Oriente iam sole I o* zázračném zjevení Krista kajícímu dánskému panovníkovi Eriku IV. Plovpenningovi, v němž Vy-kupitel nařídil vládci v odplatu za své hřichy založit klášter ke cti sv. Václava. Podpůrný argument pro toto domněnku představují doklady o poměrně výrazném zásobení přepychovými textiliemi andaluského a španělského původu v prostředí nejvyšších společenských špiček české vládnoucí vrstvy zhruba od poloviny 13. do počátku 14. století. Díky rozborům Mileny Bravermanové je dnes známe z pohřbu jak královských (Přemysl Otakar II., vévoda Rudolf Habsburský, král Rudolf I.), tak biskupských (Mikuláš, Tobiáš z Bechyně) a rovněž z tumby svatováclavské.

Druhou a stejně dobré představitelnou alternativu představuje přivezení souboru luxusního stolního zboží některým z židovských obyvatel středověké Prahy. Příslušníci pražské židovské diaspy obývali nejpozději od přelomu 11. a 12. stol. též území Starého Města včetně dnešního Josefova. Nedávno nalezený zlatý prsten s hebrejským nápisem z výzkumu na náměstí Republiky dokládá bohatství a vážnost židovských obyvatel středověké Prahy, z nichž některý si mohl opatřit nevídáně přepychový stolní servis až z oblasti almohádského impéria.

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