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The Rediscovery of a Labour Camp on the Construction Site of the Stalin Monument in Prague

Znovuobjevení pracovního tábora na staveništi pražského Stalinova pomníku

Abstract: The rediscovery of a labour camp on the construction site of the Stalin Monument in Prague in spring 2021 was the result of a construction project of the Municipality of Prague. Until then, the existence of this specific site had not been reflected neither in the historical memory of the place nor in the literature devoted to the monstrous monument (dismantled in 1962), which was both a superb work of art and engineering and the most significant material manifestation of the cult of Stalin's personality outside the USSR. The discovered remains of the camp's modest, purely purpose-built buildings, as well as the artifacts and ecofacts that illustrate the living conditions of its inhabitants, contrast sharply with the costly, expressive, and landscape-dominating monument. The results of the archaeological research make a distinctive contribution to the contemporary debate on the nature of the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia, as they thematise the bloodless yet pervasive aspect of the regime's repressiveness.

Keywords: archaeology, Stalinism, personality cult, forced labour, Czechoslovakia

Introduction: the story of the monster

> [...] Was it without his knowledge that Stalin monuments were erected in the whole country – these "memorials to the living"? It is a fact that Stalin himself had signed on July 2, 1951 a resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers concerning the erection on the Volga-Don Canal of an impressive monument to Stalin;

on September 4 of the same year he issued an order making 33 tons of copper available for the construction of this impressive monument.

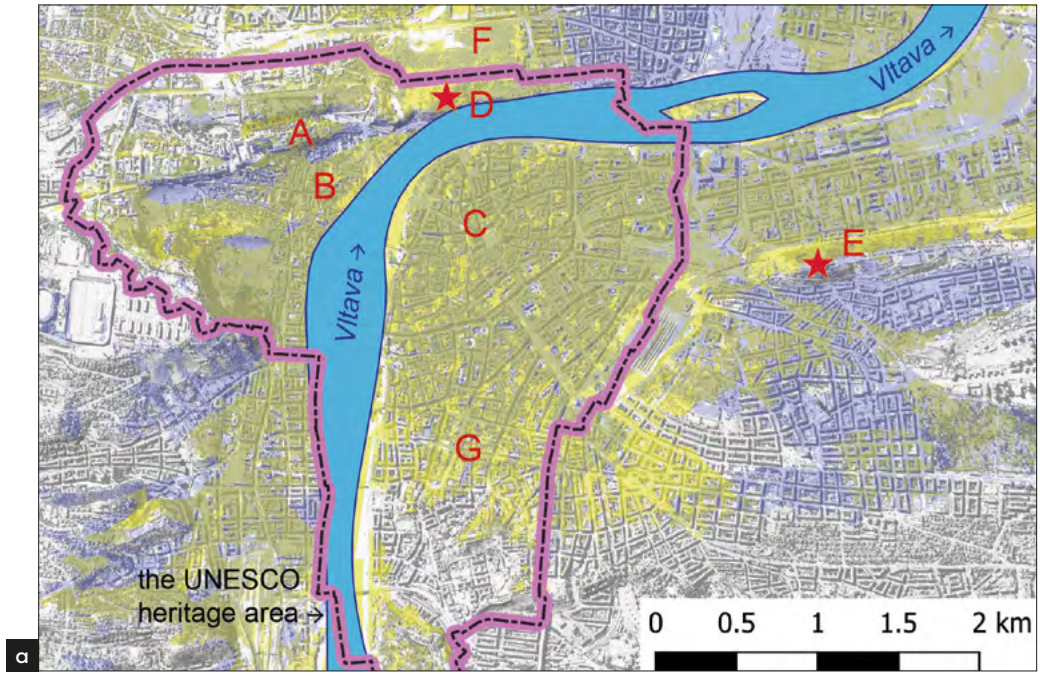
Anyone who has visited the Stalingrad area must have seen the huge statue which is being built there, and that on a site which hardly any people frequent. Huge sums were spent to build it at a time when people of this area had lived since the war in huts. Consider, yourself, was Stalin right when he wrote in his biography that "... he did not allow in himself ... even a shadow of conceit, pride, or self-adoration"? [...].

N.S. Khrushchev in the so called Secret Speech to the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 15 February 1956[1].

Fig. 1. J.V. Vuchetich (1908–1974), monuments on Volga – **(a)** Don Channel (1952), dedicated to Stalin, dismantled 1960 and **(b)** Lenin (source: https://volgavolgavolga.tumblr.com/ [27 IX 2022].

The development of specific architectural forms, the invasive treatment of cultural and settlement landscapes, and the control of public space by totalitarian regimes is now a well-developed topic in those disciplines that deal with the past from

1 *Nikita Khrushchev...* 1957: 56.



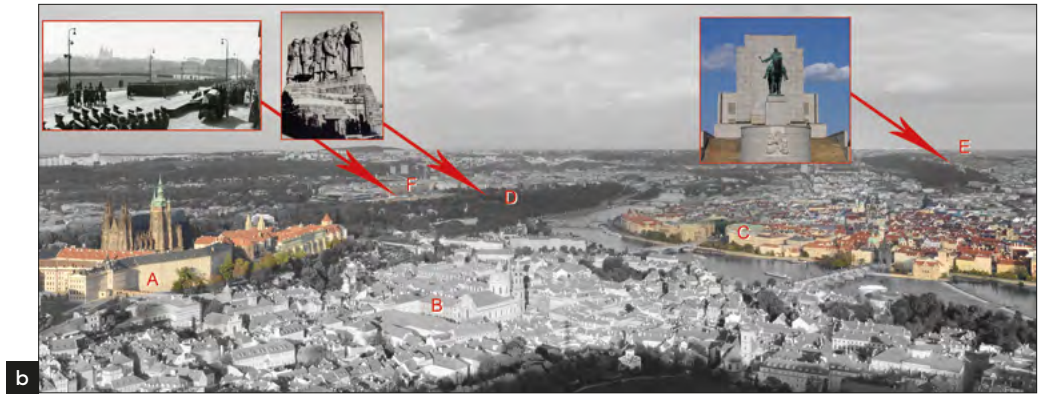


Fig. 2. "Cultic sites" of Stalinism above the city landscape of Prague: **(a)** the area of visibility of the Stalin monument on the slope of Letná (yellow) and of the National Memorial on the hill of Vítkov (= Gottwald Mausoleum, blue). Source: State Administration of Land Surveying and Cadastre; **(b)** panoramatic view of the city centre of Prague from the hill of Petřín (photograph by Z. Kačerová, compiled by J. Hasil).

A – Prague Castle; B – Lesser Town of Prague; C – Old Town of Prague; D – Monument of Stalin; E – National Memorial on the hill of Vítkov (= Gottwald Mausoleum); F – plain of Letná; G – New Town of Prague.

a structural and spatial perspective[2]. They create a set of significant signs indicating deep social crises that complement narrative-oriented humanities (historiography, historical sociology, political science) and non-academic discourses (journalism, literature, audiovision) in their understanding of fundamental issues of recent historical periods. Indeed, in the first comprehensive description of the crimes of Stalinism by Stalin's accomplice N.S. Khrushchev, there is a short but suggestive fragment noting this aspect of the so-called *personality cult*. In his criticism, Khrushchev used the example of the larger-than-life Stalin monument at the entrance to the Volga-Don canal (Ptichnikova, Antyufeev 2018) by the regime sculptor J.V. Vuchetich, built in 1952 and dismantled in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Fig. 1a; in fact, it was a concept for a pair of monuments to J.V. Stalin and V.I. Lenin, whose statue still exists – Fig. 1b), but comparable monstrous projects were also created in Soviet satellite states, such as Czechoslovakia.

The reception of Soviet forms of monumental and expressive architecture in Stalinist Czechoslovakia was most intensely manifested in Prague, the capital city, where a pair of crucial, nearly "sacral" objects are known, both of which occupied dominant places in the cityscape (Fig. 2), and both of which represented important political assignments. On the right bank of the Vltava river, the construction of the National Memorial on the Hill of Vítkov, originally dedicated to the first (anti-Habsburg) resistance during WWI, was completed after 1948. It included not only a larger-than-life monument of Jan Žižka of Trocnov, a key figure of the Hussite movement, to whose social reforms and military traditions the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia was referring to intensely[3], but also a mausoleum. It was originally dedicated to important figures of the anti-Habsburg movement, however, the urns of prominent socialists and communists were deposited here. The most important person buried there on 5th December 1953 (and that in the form of the embalmed body!) was Klement Gottwald (1896–1953), a prominent Czechoslovak Stalinist and leader of the communist exile during WWII and the February 1948 coup, from June 1948 until his death the "first blue-collar" president of the state. For the presentation and maintenance of the mummy, a glass sarcophagus with an

2 For instance and illustration, from the perspective of historical geography *Geographies of the Holocaust*... 2014, from the perspective of archaeology *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism*... 2021, from the perspective of settlement development and spatial planning van Pelt, Dwork 2000.

3 The author of Žižka's equestrian statue was Bohumil Kafka (1878–1942), who completed it in the form of a plaster model shortly before his death at the time of the Nazi occupation, when the monument naturally could not be realized. It was thus cast and erected in a completely different socio-political context than that in which it was created. On the personality of Jan Žižka of Trocnov, see Čornej 2019, on his later reception, especially 596–607, on the monument Szczygieł 2020: 106–109.

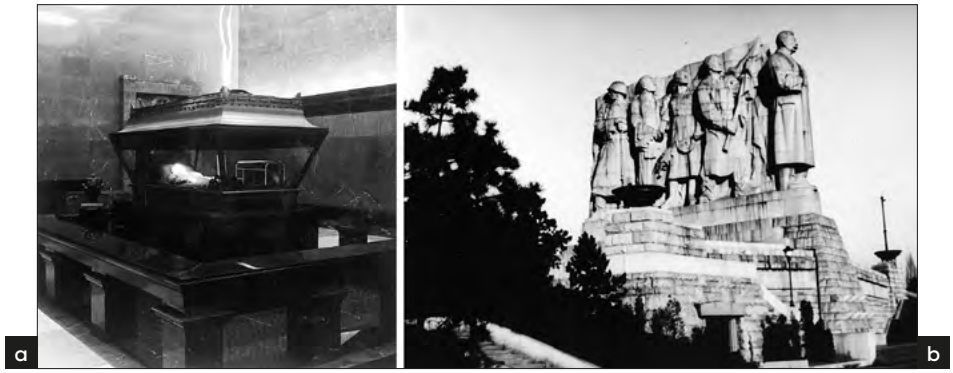


Fig. 3. **(a)** Sarcophagus with the mummy of K. Gottwald in the National Memorial on Vítkov Hill. Source: National Archive of the Czech Republic, fund Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – Central Committee (1945–1989), album Klement Gottwald II; **(b)** O. Švec (1892–1955), the Memorial of Stalin, shortly after its public inauguration on 1. May 1955 (source: Wikipedia Commons).

electrically extendable catafalque, a laboratory and an air-conditioning system was built in a record time of seven months (March–October 1953, Fig. 3a) following the recommendations of the Soviet experts who had cared for the body of V.I. Lenin and, at that time, J.V. Stalin too[4].

A completely new project was the larger-than-life monument of J.V. Stalin by Otakar Švec (1892–1955), which was built 1949–1955 in the Letná park above the left bank of the Vltava River (Fig. 3b)[5]. The design had been selected during a formal state competition, in which the top Czechoslovak artists were more or less obliged to participate. The aim was to look for a monument which could have been an expression of the Czechoslovak people's gratitude for their liberation from Nazism and a gift for Stalin's 75th birthday. The victorious project involved a sculpture of a group of nine figures showing Stalin as the leader of the Soviet

4 On the National Memorial on the Hill of Vítkov see Bartlová 2010, on the mausoleum there esp. Vacín 2012.

5 The search for a new architectural concept of the Letná hillside was one of the most important issues in Prague's urban planning in the first half of the 20th century (Brůhová 2018: 90–108). The history of the Stalin monument is systematically addressed by historian J. Šindelář (2009; 2010; 2019), from the journalist point of view by M. Szczygieł (2006: 71–93; 2020: 283–286) and R. Cainer (2008). There is only a brief and antiquated publication on the personality of the monument's author, written shortly after his death (Wittlich 1959). In terms of various aspects of Prague's (historical) topography, the monument is discussed by Z. Hojda and J. Pokorný (1996: 205–219), L. Jůn (2008: 39–41) and V. Cílek et al. (2008: 239–242). The reception of the Prague monster in the literature has been recently elaborated by H. Píchová (2014).

and Czechoslovak people. Among contemporary people of Prague, it was popularly interpreted as a *queue for meat*, referring, in an ironic way, to the contemporary supply conditions of the state.

However, there was still a long way to go from the winning project to the final realisation. Incorporating the winning design into the Prague landscape meant reconciling not only urban planning but also geoengineering aspects. Jiří Štursa (1910–1995) and Vlasta Štursová (1912–1982) were made responsible for the urban-architectural adjustment of the monument. They designed a several-storey deep plinth embedded in the bedrock of the steep slope above the Vltava River, which placed the statue on the axis of one of the main avenues of Prague's Old Town, which made it sub-dominating on the panorama of Prague Castle. At the same time, the reverse side of the statue, which was designed as a stele with a celebratory inscription, faced the Letná Plain, which was the scene of annual military parades of the Czechoslovak army during the communist regime. The core of the 15.5 m high sculpture and its huge base, which was due to its ground plan referred to even in official documents as a *pentagon* (sic!), was made of reinforced concrete and covered with granite sculptural blocks and granite tiles. The construction documentation of the monument counted over 5 running metres of paperwork, including more than 2,500 numbered plans. The preserved materials showed that some special sealants and insulating materials were specially developed for this complex engineering work[6].

Although the foundation stone of the monument was laid in December 1949, the construction work itself did not begin until early 1952. Stalin did not live to see his 75th birthday and the completion date was subsequently postponed several times. It was only after dusk on 1 May 1955, just nine months before Khrushchev's unmasking of Stalin's personality cult, that the monument could be ceremonially illuminated for the first time in the presence of the top officials of the Czechoslovak regime. The author of the statue was not among the guests at this inauguration: O. Švec committed suicide a few weeks before this date for personal reasons.

With the gradual liberalisation in the USSR and Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s, the presence of the exalted monuments of the Stalinist era over Prague started to be unbearable for the society and even the regime, especially as the Gottwald Mausoleum and the Stalin Monument were increasingly becoming the subject of sharp popular humour. The leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party began to discuss the removal of these inconvenient symbols at the time of the XXII. Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where it

6 This extraordinary voluminous construction file is deposited in the Construction Archive of the Prague 7 district.

was decided to remove Stalin's body from the Moscow mausoleum on 1 November 1961 (Vacín 2012: 106–108). A similar decision was made in Prague in the spring of the following year. The mortal body of Gottwald was cremated and his urn was returned to the National Memorial on 9 October, where it remained as one of many until the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The granite body of J.V. Stalin was destroyed by a pair of explosions in the following weeks, on 19 and 28 October 1962 (Šindelář 2009: 190–191). Nevertheless, an archaeological structure *par excellence* still remains in Prague. The stairs leading to "nowhere" and the pedestal bearing "nothing". Currently this place, overburdened with symbolism and meaning, even sixty years after the demolition of Stalin's monument, can only be used for various, mostly ironic happenings…[7]

Labour camp: Stalin and the others

One of the symptoms of the deep crisis in society that Europe was going through in the 1930s and 1950s was the internment of a large part of the population in camps of various nature, which was accompanied by the economic exploitation of the internees, mainly in the form of forced labour[8]. All of this played a significant role in the war economy, the post-war reconstruction economy and the centrally planned, quasi-war economy of the Eastern states during the Cold War. Almost every strategic mining or production plant, as well as infrastructure constructions in Nazi or Stalinist times, depended on forced labour[9].

The monument to J.V. Stalin in Letná Park in Prague is no exception to this rule. Its construction site included a set of buildings that can be characterised as a labour camp (Fig. 4; 5). The discovery of the camp was made in connection with

7 Since 1991, the kinetic sculpture The Prague Metronome by Vratislav Novák (1942–2014) has been installed here as a "permanent" temporary art exhibition.

8 The statement that the camp is not only a mechanism of direct persecution, but an instrument of wider social experimentation and engineering, relates back to the analysis of totalitarianism by H. Arendt (1985: 305–482). In terms of studies of (historical) materiality, the HERA project *Accessing Campscapes* has demonstrated the variability of this phenomenon (https://www.campscapes.org/ [27 IX 2022]).

9 In Stalinist Czechoslovakia, for example, each of the power ministries operated its own system of forced labour. Thus, politically unreliable conscripts of the Czechoslovak People's Army served in the so-called (Auxiliary) Technical Battalions (for a Czechoslovak – Polish – Hungarian comparison, see Bílek 1997), the Ministry of the Internal Affairs set up Forced Labour Camps (Borák, Janák 1996), and the Ministry of Justice naturally used convicted criminal, retributive and political offenders, characteristically for uranium mining and processing for the needs of the USSR (Bártík 2018; Bauer 2019). Although these camps were ideologically covered by the Marxist notion of the humanizing and educational role of labour, they were primarily economically profitable activities.

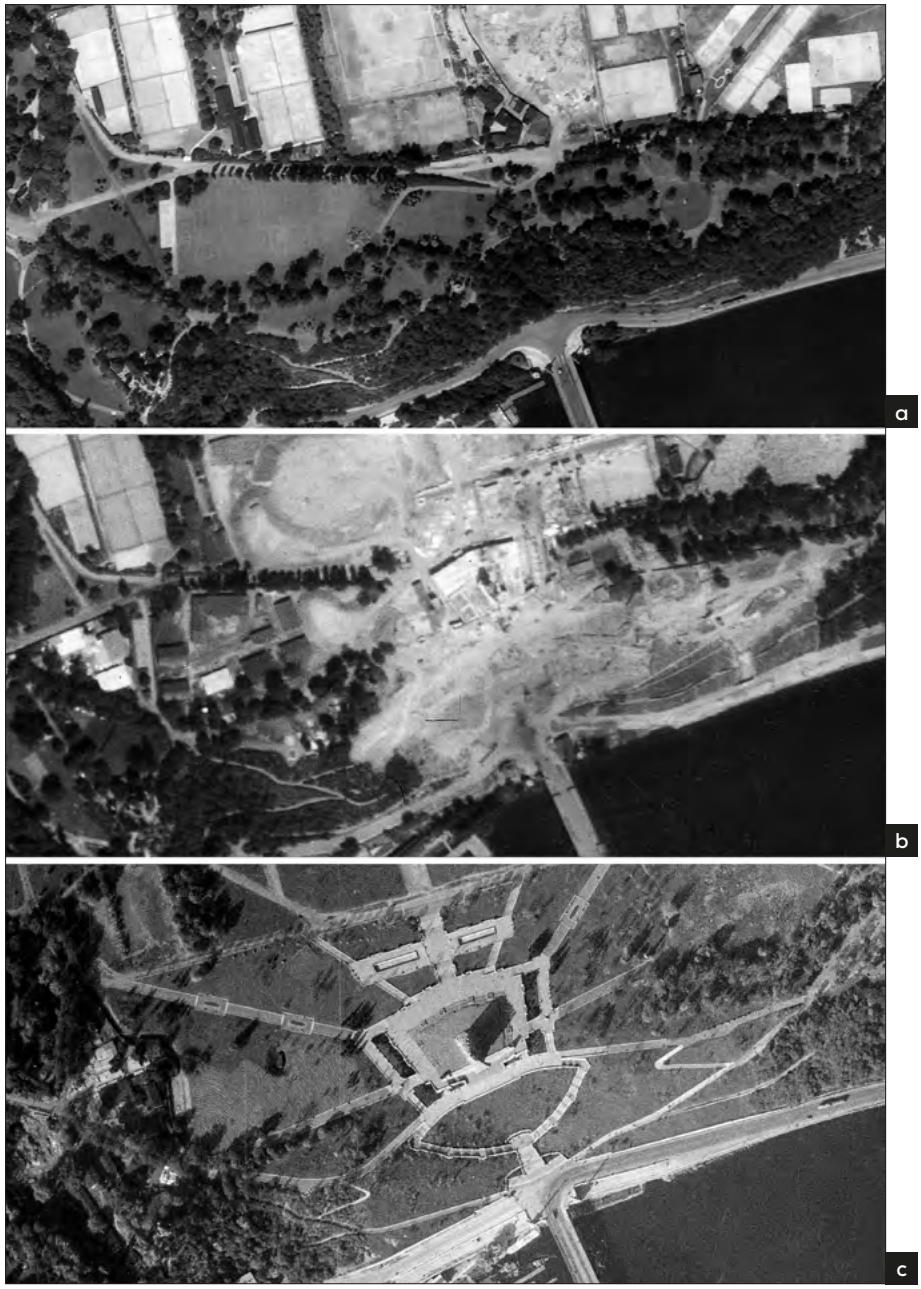


Fig. 4. Vertical photographs of the Letná area: **(a)** 1949; **(b)** 1953 (the red arrow marks the labor camp); **(c)** 1957 (source: The Military Geographical and Hydrometeorological Office of the Czech Republic).

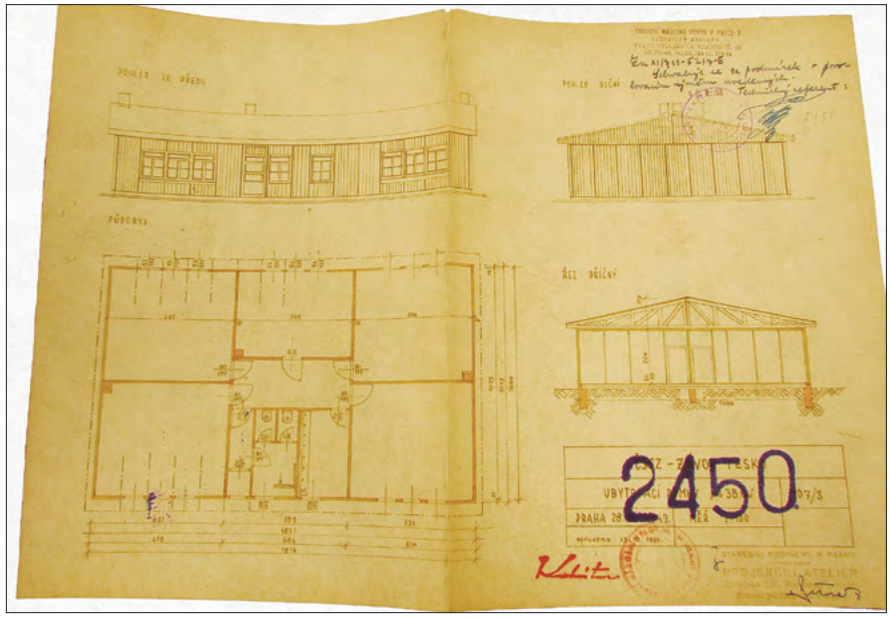


Fig. 5. Example of plan documentation of a standardized dwelling barrack (source: Construction Archive of the Prague 7 district).

rescue excavations in the spring of 2021, related to the construction of a recreational water reservoir. The primary objective of the excavations was to search for relics of the auxiliary field fortifications added to the Prague Baroque bastion fortification. It began to be systematically built after the Thirty Years' War and was completed during the reign of Emperor Charles VI, but the Austrian Succession Wars (1740–1748) showed its weaknesses[10]. The most critical of these was the steep slope of Letná above the left bank of the Vltava, where artillery batteries could be placed to bombard the New Town of Prague on the opposite bank from there, as the King of Prussia Friedrich II the Great did in September 1744. In each subsequent war conflagration, when Bohemia threatened to become the scene of war operations (the Seven Years' War: 1757, the Fifth Coalition War: 1809, the Sixth Coalition War: 1812–1814, and most recently in the Revolution of 1848), the edges of Letná were occupied by artillery placed in temporary fortifications. Unfortunately, the remains of those structures were not been uncovered by our excavation, because they obviously disappeared completely after 1859, as the grounds were bought by the Prague Municipality, which reconstructed the whole area into city park.

10 On the sieges of the Prague bastion fortress in the 18th century see Kupka 2008, esp. 242–338.

Archaeological research in the spring of 2021 could (thus, for the first time in a Prague UNESCO World Heritage Site) focus on issues related to the archaeology of the dark 20th century.

While the artistic values, urban planning context and political aspects of the construction and further destruction of the monument to J.V. Stalin on Letná is a well-known topic among Czech scholarly and journalistic texts, the practical issues of its construction – and thus the existence of the labour camp – have never been answered or even opened. The camp itself was rediscovered only during an archival survey of all available sources for the development of the area of interest of the planned rescue research, including vertical aerial photographs and subsequently the project documentation of the monument. On the basis of these documents, it was possible to get an impression of the very simple, inexpensive and temporary character of the buildings and the layout of the roads and surrounding areas, the function of the individual buildings (see Fig. 6), corresponding to the barracks lifestyle of a manually working community, as well as their mutual spatial relationships i.e.: the perimeter development, the retained expansion area in the north-west corner of the site, orientation to the strategic construction site. The hypothesis that the Letná building complex originated as a labour camp was thus expressed purely because of its formal characteristics.

Except for a single marginal note within the construction documentation – *residential area of* (military?) *work unit* – there is no direct written record of the labour camp's operation at this time. Indirect published references to inadequate accommodation for skilled labourers from the advanced construction phase could relate to this compound. Due to the obligation to conclude the field documentation in the obligatory form of a finding report, no systematic approach could be taken to the collection of memories of witnesses or contemporary photographs. However, it will be possible to formulate a number of hypotheses for future research steps (mainly in relation to the identification of the communities housed there, their living conditions or standard of supply), based on knowledge of their material level as established by the rescue excavation. This opens up a unique opportunity for archaeology to restore a proper place in our view of the past to "the others" – the nameless workers[11] who remained literally in Stalin's shadow.

11 The identification of these communities and the individuals of which they were composed is a future task for historical research. At the moment, the fates of two men who, for reasons of political persecution, worked on the construction of the memorial are known and may have been among the involuntary inhabitants of the camp: JUDr. Jan Decker was a law student who joined the anti-Nazi and anti-communist resistance. After his unmasking, he was banned from his studies and, after serving in the military labour units, had to accept manual labour, including on the Stalin monument (https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/decker-jan-1928 [27 IX 2022]). JUDr. Jiří Dohnal was an established Prague attorney

Results of field research

Archaeological features

The archaeological features can be associated with individual buildings, whose basic parameters such as location, dimensions, construction and function were known from the archival studies. However, there are not any records of the infrastructure or fencing. The area of the excavation strictly respected the extent of the earthworks for the future water reservoir. Thus, the western part of the camp area was investigated, specifically the three dwelling barracks built according to a unified project, the building of the camp kitchen (the attached dining hall tract was already located outside the investigated area), as well as a pair of sewer inspection shafts and a well in the northwest corner of the camp (Fig. 6). The state

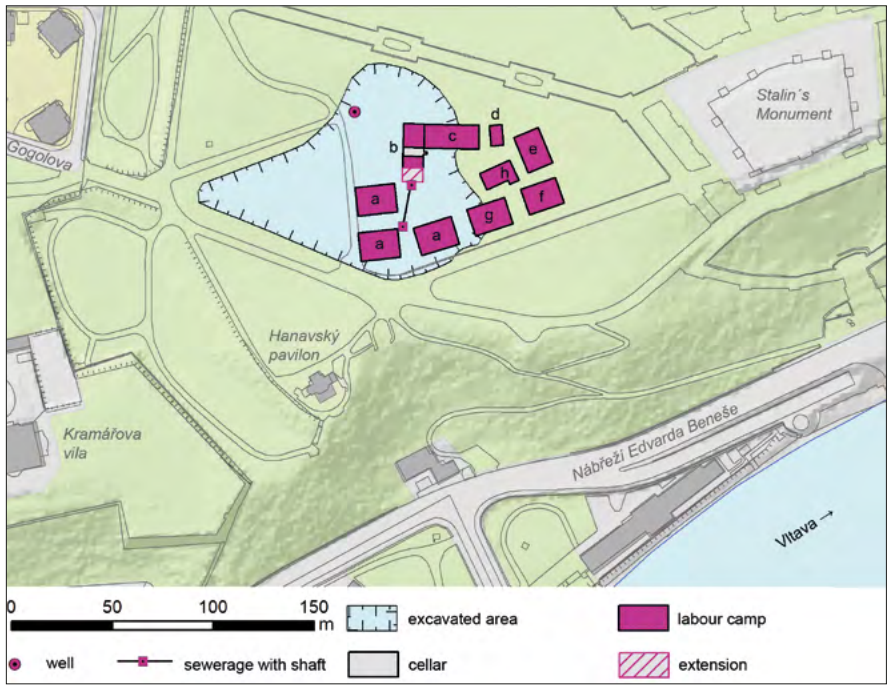


Fig. 6. Plan of the labor camp at the construction site: a – dwelling barrack; b – kitchen with annex and basement; c – dining hall; d – power station; e – administrative building; f – locksmith's workshop and forge; g – cloakroom; h – washroom (source: State Administration of Land Surveying and Cadastre).

who decided to emigrate shortly after February 1948. His escape was unsuccessful and after a stay in custody he had to accept manual labour as a form of forced social rehabilitation (according to the testimony of his son RNDr. J. Sehnal, a leading Czech geophysician).

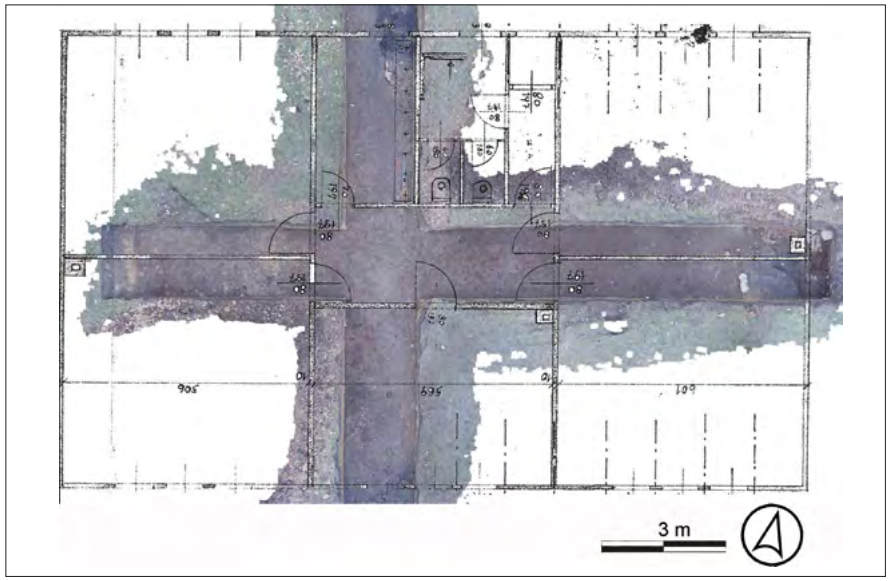


Fig. 7. Excavated remains of a dwelling house in the sw corner of the camp projected with the original building plan (see Fig. 5).

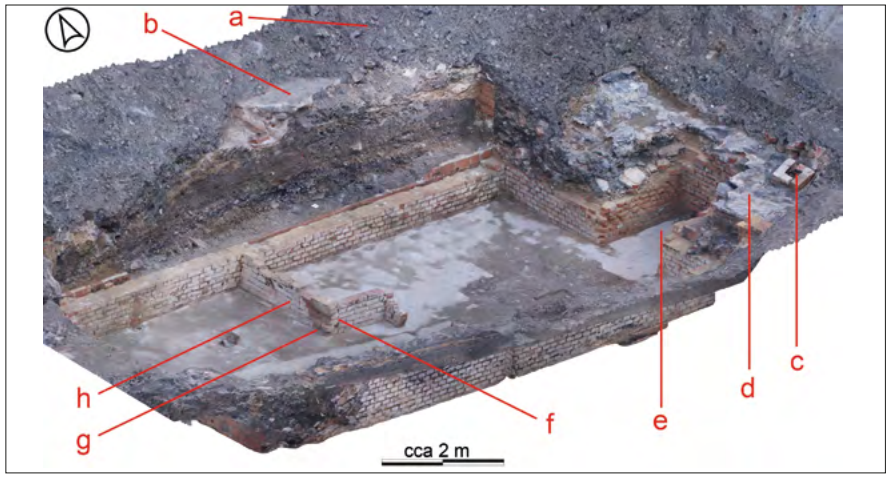


Fig. 8. Axonometric view into the uncovered basement of the camp kitchen: a – overburden overlying the camp relics; b – concrete floor of the ground floor of the kitchen building; c – the building's brick chimney taken down along with the roofing during the demolition of the building; d – dropped roofing asphalt; e – storage shaft extending to the surface of the yard outside the above-ground plan of the building; f – incorrectly executed masonry corner of the cellar partition; g – imprint of a wooden or iron staircase in the cellar paintwork; h – lime painted cellar paintwork, in which several penciled inscriptions have survived, perhaps related to the recording of stored goods.

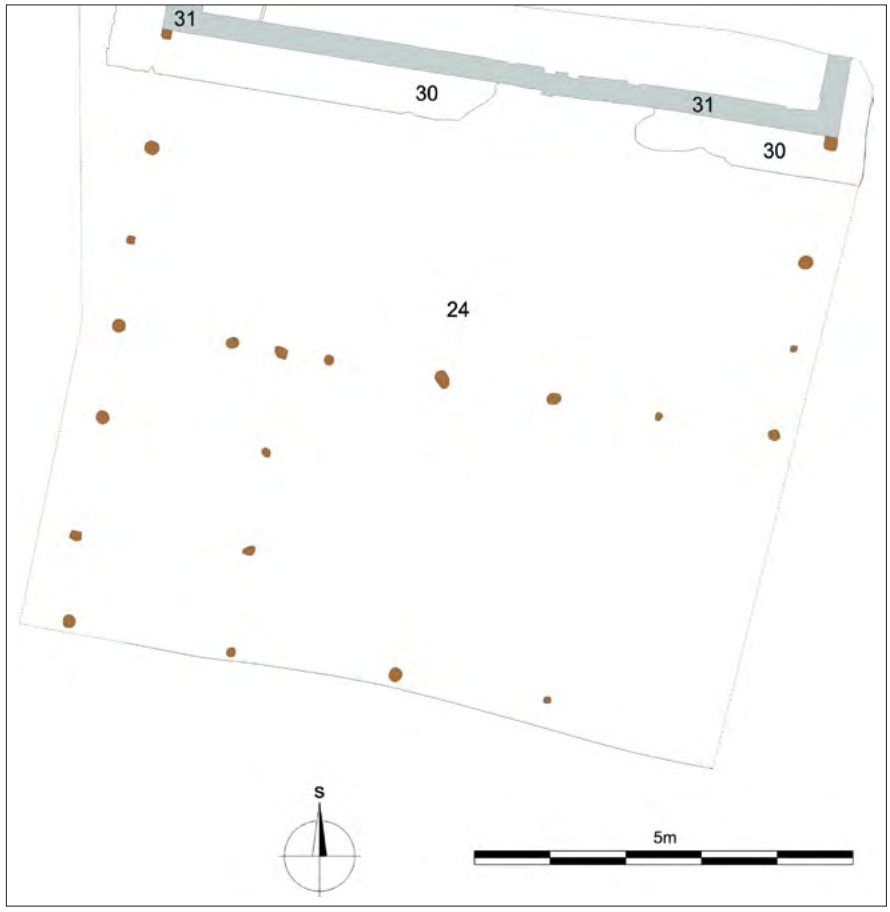


Fig. 9. Ground plan of the wooden extension of the camp kitchen, attached to the south wall (layer 30) and passing through the original concrete threshing floor (layer 30).

of preservation of the above-ground structures can be characterized as very poor, because after the camp's closure in the summer of 1954, it was apparently cleared out in a controlled manner, some reusable parts of the buildings were probably dismantled[12] and the rest of the camp was dredged in-depth, using heavy machinery. Immediately after the demolition of the camp, its remains were covered with several metres of backfill on which the park area around the monument was set, which was completed by the inauguration date of 1 May 1955. The embankment

12 Based on an unconfirmed hypothesis, they may have been donated to the Prague Zoo, where they were used to build the first giraffe barn in Czechoslovakia.

Fig. 10. Revision shaft at the camp sewerage close to the kitchen building: **(a)** temporary covering of the shaft with secondary used beams that were poured with a thin cement mixture, which is already removed on the field photograph (photograph by D. Pilař); **(b)** plan and southern profile of the shaft.

was also a deposition place for various construction waste from the surrounding area, which contained debris of buildings from the period from the 17th to the 20th century. Finds from layers above the demolition horizon are thus practically worthless in terms of archaeological interpretation.

The two dwelling barracks on the western part of the camp were demolished down to the level of the foundations, so their position was only known from the contamination of the subsoil with tar-cork waterproofing. Thus, only the pipes and the foundations of the chimneys remained below the foundation level, proving that the buildings were constructed according to the preserved plans (Fig. 7). Only 30% of the third dwelling house on the south side could be excavated. Here, the concrete floors of the washroom and urinal, and the dry-laid brick substructure of the wooden walls have been preserved. Even based on these few remains, differences from the original plan could be noted: in particular, it can be stated that the foundations were made even more modestly than originally designed, and that the inhabitants of the house decided to deal with the basic design

flaw – the absence of heating in the washroom and toilet area. This was evidenced by the pile of coal deposited just in the urinal. All three residential buildings were built according to the same project, but the contemporary vertical aerial photographs show the use of different roofing materials (Fig. 4b); therefore, partial modifications of the project or later reconstructions cannot be excluded, which, due to the state of preservation, are missing in the archaeological record.

The camp kitchen building (which was founded on foundations) and especially its basement part were slightly better preserved. Here, too, a low level of construction standard can be observed (unconnected corners of the cellar wall – Fig. 8f). Also here during the use of this structure, a significant modification was made to the warming and heating of the building. A columnar wooden extension was added in front of the southern facade serving as a coal store – Fig. 9. In the case of the camp kitchen, we can speak of its consequent clearance. The brick construction could not have been dismantled and taken away and there some remains of the roofing and the brick chimney were preserved, even though the building was demolished with the use of heavy machinery (Fig. 8 c and d).

Regarding the infrastructure remains, it is necessary to mention the components of the overhead and underground power lines, but these were relocated during the demolition and its course cannot be reconstructed. On the other hand, the backbone of the sewerage system, visible in the GPR data, is well locatable, and was revealed in the field by a pair of inspection shafts (Fig. 10). In the case of the northern one, an improvised repair of the destroyed cast-iron capping (its remains were found at the bottom of the shaft) with a layer of secondarily used beams poured with thin concrete was demonstrated. The site also included a well in the north-west corner, which reaches a depth of 7 m. It can be connected to the camp due to the use of identical bricks as in the other buildings; unfortunately, the mechanism of pumping and possible water distribution has not survived. Available archaeological records also didn't allow us to answer the very important question regarding the fencing of the whole area.

Archaeological finds

Although a significant number of finds and ecofacts were recovered during the rescue excavation, only a minority were recovered from contexts that have clearly defined interpretative potential within the archaeological method. Namely, the assemblages of lost objects (from the layer beneath the wooden floor of the dwelling house bedrooms, lost objects from the drainage ditch around the camp kitchen), a collection of one-off, discarded and fire-disposed components of dwelling house furnishings, or a long-discarded assemblage of kitchen discard. Other items come from the demolition and embankment horizons.

Fig. 11. Examples of lost items (photograph by I. Hrušková).

Fig. 12. Dump under the camp kitchen window during the evacuation (photograph by D. Pilař).

A – brick foundation of the north wall of the kitchen; B – concrete threshing floor outside the building; C – concentration of duck remains; D – detail of duck skull, bones, feathers and beer glass *in situ*.

Among the lost objects (Fig. 11), items of little value and minor dimensions (coins, buttons, combs, small fragments of table, container and table glass, small fragments of tableware), and among them there was also a large amount of food waste (small bones from poultry, a peach core). This non-intentional assemblage provides insight into the materiality of daily consumption of the camp's inhabitants, while the presence of female buttons opens up the discussion of the presence

Fig. 13. Beer glasses **(a)** and plates **(b)** from the labour camp at Stalin's monument (photograph by I. Hrušková).

of women on the site[13]. The opposite spectrum of finds is represented by an intentionally selected assemblage of table glass and pottery, enamelled vessels and probably furniture, textiles or plastic products, which were found immediately outside the camp boundary in a shallow pit (what is striking about this assemblage is the selection of intact vessels and the exclusion of certain categories of objects,

13 The presence of female staff is safely linked to the discovery of damaged jewellery recovered from the kitchen waste dump. Here, however, it cannot be ruled out that this may be evidence of civilian employees and not the internment of women.

Fig. 14. Duck skulls (dorsal view of neurocrania) recovered from the dump under the camp kitchen window (photograph by I. Hrušková).

clearly non-ferrous metal products, whose material represented some value). The feature in which the objects were consistently stacked appears to have been again intentionally created. Its walls showed signs of having been burnt over at high temperature, as did the remains of organic and plastic objects within. These are clearly traces of a one-off event (hypothetically a hygiene measure) that led to the targeted disposal of valuable equipment.

Long-standing habits in the handling of kitchen waste are evidenced by the landfill that was established immediately below the window of the camp kitchen (its apparently long-term existence is itself testimony to the conditions prevailing in the camp – Fig. 12). A considerable amount of table glass and porcelain was recovered here, the fragmentation of which was relatively low (evidence of their immediate deposition *post mortem*). The recurring type spectrum (Fig. 13) points to the central supply of the accommodated communities and thus again to the barracks way of life. The packing glass was found intact or only minimally damaged, suggesting that it was discarded (i.e. thrown through a window into the soft fill of the dump) immediately after the depletion or deterioration of the contained commodity.

A remarkable component of the assamblage is a set of animal bones. The archaeozoological finds contain common dietary remains, such as fragments of vertebrae of pigs or other mammals. However, alongside this is a striking accumulation of repeated unfragmented or rarely fragmented anatomical elements of the same bird species, the domestic duck , reflecting – same as glass and porcelain finds – immediate deposition post mortem (Fig. 14). The preliminary survey sorted 89 skulls (without beaks), 78 upper beaks, 366 bone elements or fragments from skulls and lower beaks, 142 cervical vertebrae, 3 right and 5 left distal ends of tibiotarsi, 26 right and 22 left tarsometatarsi, 64 ossified tendons and 150 small phalanges, i.e. a total of 945 duck bone finds. Also unusual in an archaeological context is the preservation of soft tissues, specifically the remains of skins and feathers. Interestingly, the remains of feathers inform us about the white colour of the ducks consumed. It should be emphasised that only meatless body parts were found, which can be considered as primary (butchery) waste. Due to the complete absence of bones from fleshy body parts, we have to reckon with the strict separation of this primary waste from the (archaeologically undetected) remains of consumption. The neurocrania and most of the cervical vertebrae are undamaged, without incisions. The tarsometatrsi are mostly complete, but all the tibiotarsi are cut up at the end. These observations make it possible to determine the butchery procedures: the hind legs were severed in the distal part of the tibiotarsus and the head some distance behind the skull in the cervical spine. On the other hand the ends of the wings are not found in our material, which implies that were not primarily severed. The number of skulls indicates a minimum of 89 ducks, but the actual number of individuals included in the assemblage may be higher. The uniformity is also relatively high from a zootechnical point of view. The documented ducks are similar in size and age, with fusing or just fused cranial sutures and proximal tarsometatarsi, which means age ca. 1.5–3 months. So mainly they are sub-adult or just adult, presumably all animals of typical slaughter age. These findings indicate that this must have been a large and planned delivery of selected animals, maybe a one-off delivery from a poultry farm. The nature of the skeletal material suggests a short-term accumulation, possibly a one-off discard of fresh waste associated with a larger collective consumption. This observation correlates with contemporary propaganda texts, which repeatedly mention the various ways in which the construction of the monument was supported by military units and manufacturing plants, not only in the form of "voluntary" labour brigades, but also through the supply of various goods.

Conclusion

The archaeological rediscovery of a labour camp in the centre of Prague, which had been lost from the historical narrative and historical-topographical memory, highlighted aspects of Stalinism (or any totalitarian regime) which have so far

tended to have largely slipped from professional and public attention in Central Europe. Historiographical research in Czechoslovakia or the Czech Republic in the period after November 1989 focused either on the epic, mostly tragic events of those dark years, or the narration was overwhelmed by the so-called social-historical perspective, which pointed to social modernisation and the question of the consensus or at least the coexistence of the majority population with the regime[14].

The reason for the assignment to forced labour was not necessarily only a case of political persecution, but it could be presented as a variety of other, so-called honourable or seemingly voluntary social institutions. Temporary, but by definition forced labour was in some cases a prerequisite for social rehabilitation and i.e. a condition for the possibility of continuing of a professional career or of being admitted to study. Perhaps an even more significant aspect of forced labour, apart from its revolutionary social engineering (preventive internment of 'unreliable' citizens, propagandistically exploited transfers of office personnel to production, etc.), was its economic yield. In sum, therefore, the general threat of social degradation and labour abuse is a neglected, if criminal, aspect of the everyday reality of any totalitarian system and, naturally, of the lived reality of Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s. The labour camp at Stalin's monument cannot be compared to the 'GULAGs' where those inconvenient and hostile to the regime of Stalin's USSR and its satellites would have been isolated and eliminated, but was a means of disciplining and economically exploiting communities which, under the conditions of the first half of the 1950s, had no opportunity to deny it.

The excavation of the labour camp at Stalin's monument on Letná has shown the ability of archaeology to document such components of the social reality of Czechoslovakia in the first half of the 1950s, which historiography tends to miss under the surface of contemporary propaganda or in the shadow of heroic or demonic figures of the time. Previously unexploited sources such as archaeological finds, structures and images of these structures recorded on historical maps and plans alloved us to identify and describe unambiguously the scene of one of the forgotten crimes of the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia and to demonstrate

14 The peculiar "Czechoslovak way to Stalinism" contributed to this situation in a part of present Czech historiography and public discourse. In countries that experienced the Soviet terror in its exogenous and authentic form, such as Poland, the numerous Soviet crimes are viewed much more unambiguously and so it is not surprising that they became the subject of archaeological study much earlier and more widely (cf. Kola 2011; Demkowicz et al. 2011, from the methodical perspective Konczewski et al. 2013). This is also the core of the significance and actuality of the archaeological research of the labour camp in the centre of Prague, which, in conjunction with the monument of the eponym, documents the repressive nature of its time, even though we are not talking here about the connection with capital crimes.

unequivocally the instrumentalization of the communities that were its victims. It is now a task for interdisciplinary, but especially historiographical, research to name these communities and to unravel the fates of the individuals by whom they were constituted. This is a reversal of common practices, whereby it is usually historiography that sets the agenda for archaeological research. By uncovering the relics of the labour camp, it was also possible – again through purely archaeological approaches – to reconceptualise the remains of the Stalin monument. It represents the eminent archaeological artefact. It has been removed from its original use and purpose, yet it has not lost its symbolic significance, which is also underlined by the expressiveness of its location in the Prague urban landscape (Fig. 2a, b). At the same time, it complementary corresponds with meanings of the labour camp, both of which can be characterised by this set of specific oppositions: permanent/temporary; eternal/unstable; costly/miserable; dazzling/dismal; triumphant/obscure; super-human/non-human… This is the way in which archaeology, through its silent sources, contributes to the general understanding of the dark periods of modern human history.

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Shrnutí

Znovuobjevení pracovního tábora na staveništi pražského pomníku J.V. Stalina na jaře roku 2021 bylo následkem stavebního záměru pražského magistrátu. Existence tohoto specifického areálu nebyla do té doby reflektována ani v historické paměti místa, ani v odborné literatuře věnované monstróznímu památníku (odstraněnému v roce 1962),

který byl zároveň špičkovým uměleckým a inženýrským dílem i nejvýraznějším materiálním projevem kultu Stalinovy osobnosti mimo území SSSR. Objevené zbytky skromných, čistě účelových budov tábora, stejně jako artefakty a ekofakty, které dokreslují životní podmínky jeho obyvatel, ostře kontrastují s nákladným, expresivním a krajinně dominantním památníkem. Výsledky archeologického výzkumu tak jsou svébytným příspěvkem do současné diskuse o povaze stalinistického režimu v Československu, neboť tematizují nekrvavý, nicméně všudypřítomný aspekt represivity režimu.

Klíčová slova: archeologie, stalinismus, kult osobnosti, nucená práce, Československo

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