Urban archaeology in Magdeburg: results and prospects

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Archaeological research on medieval towns is a comparatively young discipline. During the origin of prehistoric archaeology, the focus remained mainly on those eras of the past without writing, with excavations on early history taking place mainly only in the context of “construction research” for the uncovering of subterranean foundations mostly of known buildings.

Even before World War II, Magdeburg saw attempts at research on the town’s most ancient history employing archaeological means. Here I would like to point out the excavations by A. Koch, leading to the uncovering of a crypt in 1926 under the Remerergang in the angle between the choir of the Gothic cathedral and the east side of the enclosure.¹

After 1945, it was local researcher W. Priegnitz who at first began making records of the cellars remaining from Pre-War buildings, thereby creating an important foundation for all later preservation work on historical sites in the centre of Magdeburg. Priegnitz determined that the cellars’ construction was often based on the building activities of earlier centuries. Beneath Gründerzeit- and Baroque buildings were found Renaissance-age structures, moreover Gothic and even Romanesque substructions (though he was sure enough often mistaken in detail; it is not easy to positively identify these types of functional structure without any style of ornamentation alluding to their origin).

Since 1948, archaeological research excavations under the direction of the “Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Erforschung der Vor- und Frühgeschichte Magdeburgs” (archaeological consortium for the research of Magdeburg’s pre- and early history) began at first on the site of those buried cellars in which Priegnitz had identified a hall at the Buttergasse on the Alter Markt, the Old Market. From 1951 onward, work proceeded under the sole charge of the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (the Academy of Sciences in Berlin) under the direction of E. Nickel (until 1967), resp. H. Berlekamp (until 1968). Among the studies that took place during that time was research conducted on the site of the Old Market with the Johanniskirche and the Johanniskirchhof,² at the

¹ Koch 1926; see also Kunze 1930.
² Nickel 1964.
hall on the Buttergasse,\textsuperscript{3} several documentations on the foundation pits of Post-War buildings and, finally, the excavations on the Domplatz, the Cathedral Place (1959-1968).\textsuperscript{4}

Then, in the year 1959, digging was begun by the Institut für Denkmalpflege (institute for conservation, Halle branch) in the Magdeburg Dom. Findings from the Dom-excavation were later presented by J. Schneider, who also addressed the Domplatz’ chronology.\textsuperscript{5}

Since the dissolution of the branch of the Akademie, the town centre of Magdeburg, with conservation activities supervised by the then Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte in Halle (state museum for prehistory) and the Kulturhistorisches Museum in Magdeburg (museum for cultural history), ceased to be the focus of archaeological field work. Still, a restoration in the seventies of the monastery Unser lieben Frauen saw conservation accompanying,\textsuperscript{6} as did the routing of a heating duct under the Regierungsstraße in the year 1980\textsuperscript{7} and, one year later, the installation of a transformer substation on the Friedensplatz, finally, in 1985 exposures in the course of the reconstruction of the house Domplatz 5,\textsuperscript{8} yet these exposures under complicated working conditions were only able to supply a limited gain towards insight into the early history of the town.

A new situation arose with the initially erratically escalating construction activity after the political reunification. On the basis of agreements with the different constructors, the Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt (state department for conservation and archaeology) also supervises the exposures connected with lesser and greater developments located in Magdeburg’s historical town centre. The site, located between the Nordpark and Buckau, Westtangente and Elbufer, with its extensive historical (Baroque- to Gründerzeit-era) fortress construction was declared a memorial area. This then led to a large-scale documentation of such sites, in which any occurrence of medieval findings were not actually to be expected (from the ground plans of the sunken floor huts under the Friedensplatz to the early modern-age “pauper cemetery’s” graves along the front area of the Baroque fortress), moreover, to discoveries leading to a modification of the picture of Magdeburg’s oldest history. However, in the majority of these cases we owe the discovery not to any planned exploratory inquisitiveness on the side of the archaeologists in charge of the excavations, but to the genius loci of the respective site of construction – proceedings had to acquiesce to the requirements of earth moving planned for the respective building projects.

\textsuperscript{3} Idem 1960.
\textsuperscript{4} Idem 1965/66; idem 1973.
\textsuperscript{5} Schneider 1985.
\textsuperscript{6} Idem 1980.
\textsuperscript{7} Idem 1985, 299, Abb. 1.
\textsuperscript{8} Weber 1991a.
Among the most important discoveries to be expounded here of course such will be included that are able to help in the attempt of answering the town history’s as yet unsettled questions (Fig. 1).

Early medieval settlement history and the beginnings of urban development

“For more than a thousand years has the Magadoburg been mirrored in the waves gently lapsing at her feet; solely when she saw her image in them and who her builder was, these questions no research has yet been able to answer.” The famous two-volume history of the town, which begins with these words, gives an account of the then – as today – available written sources on the earliest development of the town. A first mention in the Diedenhofener Capitulary from the year 805 does not merely by chance refer to the fact that trade between the Saxons, who had been incorporated into the Frankish Empire in the course of the Saxon Wars (772-804) and their West-Slav neighbours was in due need of reorganisation. Thus, this Elbe-crossing is mentioned besides Bardowiek, Schezla (Hitzacker?) and Erfurt as a site for the exchange of goods. One year later, the Chronicle of Moissac relates that in Halle on the eastern bank of the Saale and opposite the town of Magdeburg (contra Magadoburg) two Frankish forts had been constructed. The location of these forts has long been puzzled over, even the word contra indeed necessarily referring to the opposite bank of the Elbe has been questioned. Similarly conceivable would also have been a location on the same – western – bank, together with a separation from the emerging town by a dry valley at the edge of the plateau.

E. Nickel thought to have uncovered the Magdeburg fortress in the form of two v-shaped ditches underneath the Domplatz, while J. Schneider refers these trenches to the sixth/seventh century due to the discovery of predominantly unadorned egg-shaped pots (Eitöpfe) therein. As is known, the ditches were overlaid by a large number of sunken floor huts. In another sunken floor hut with a cladding of stones set in clay, Nickel finally unearthed the floor plan he was to identify with the palatium of Otto the Great.

Which new insights into the earliest history of Magdeburg were thus gained, taking into consideration the state of research arrived at through the excavations of the last few years? The fortification ditches discovered by E. Nickel were again cut into, in profile beneath the entrance of the crypt at the south-eastern corner of the Domklausur, to the south and east of the Landtag (parliament) building on the north side

9  Hertel/Hülße 1885/1, 1.
10  Schneider 1985, 322-323.
12  Idem 1973, 126.
Fig. 1. Map of Magdeburg’s town centre, ca. 1900, marking important excavations and rescue excavations since 1990. Abbreviations: AM - Alter Markt (with the hall on the Buttergasse and the IHK-underground car park Alter Markt 7); B - Breiter Weg 5-7, 8-10, 213, Landeszentralbank; BN - Breiter Weg north section (east and west side); D - Domplatz and surroundings (roads to the south and east, houses/yards of Domplatz 1a, 1b, 2/3, 5, 6-9 (Landtag building), Remtergang, Domgymnasium); ECE - Allee-Center underground car park; F - Friedensplatz; J - Johanniskirche; K - monastery Unser lieben Frauen (with the new building at the Große Klosterstr./Fürstenwallstr., roadworks on the Große Klosterstr. and Gouvernementsberg); P - Petrikloster; Ra - Ratswaageplatz; S - St. Sebastian’s church; U - Universitätsplatz; WR - Walther-Rathenau-Str.
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of Magdeburg’s Domplatz and in plane in the course of the lowering of the southern segment of the Regierungsstraße. A third trench, running concentrically around the two mentioned above, was discovered passing from the south-western corner of the Domplatz in the course of the excavations for the new building sites of the Nord LB and the Hundertwasserhaus, the laying of conduits to the west of the Landtag building, through the examination of conduit trenches to the west of the Klausur building of the monastery Unser lieben Frauen and, at its most easterly extent, during the construction of an access way from the Große Klosterstraße to the Unterer Klosterhof. This trench, in some cases up to 7 m deep and 14 m wide (Fig. 2) can be regarded as identical to the finding already made in 1973 by J. Schneider beneath the entrance to the Klausur buildings of the monastery rebuilt after 1945.13 Recently, during the archaeological documentation of conduit ditches in the north section of the Regierungsstraße, directly to the north of the Große Klosterstraße a fourth trench was discovered, possibly in turn surrounding the already mentioned other three concentrically.

13 Schneider 1980.
As already mentioned, the dating of the ditches presents certain difficulties. While E. Nickel placed the two central trenches discovered by him into the age of Charlemagne without any explanation in particular (though surely in reference to historical tradition), J. Schneider was rather prone to relegate them – due to the typology of ceramics found – to the old Saxon age. New radiocarbon data (animal bones) taken from the 2004 outcrop of the inner (eastern) “Nickel ditch” immediately south of the Landtag have given, however, the indication that the first steps of the filling of this (and perhaps also of the outer, i.e. western) ditch had taken place already in the fifth/sixth century:14 Two charcoal pieces from a layer 70 cm above the base of the ditch filling gave calibrated radiocarbon dates from 416 to 598 AD, resp. from 418 to 595 AD (2 σ Erl-7677, Erl 7678). From the filling itself three dates were taken in stratigraphic order Erl-7676 (396-583 AD, 587-591 AD), Erl-7675 (558-671 AD), and Erl-7674 (434-490 AD, 508-518 AD, 528-645 AD). A final radiocarbon sample - Erl-7679 (774-992 AD) belongs to a lime kiln pit from the uppermost level of the ditch filling.

Therefore, Magadoburg – the “great castle” of the Franks first mentioned in 805, may have already borne its name 300 years before – in the period during which the region around Magdeburg received its own name, the Nordthüringgau. The upper layers of ditch refill should be dated to the second half of the sixth, resp. to the seventh century, representing the “Saxonian period” of Magdeburg’s settlement history. We shall have to wait for the publication of the finds (esp. of the pottery) reflecting this process.

For the ditch west of the Domplatz there are numerous finds which also reflect a temporal sequence of the fillings from the lowermost to the upper layers. The radiocarbon data, predominantly from animal bones, demonstrates a time span for the fillings of the oldest ditch construction of between 638 and 896 (5 data), resp. of between 768 and 1042 (2 data) and for that of a stratigraphically later feature (possibly repairs?) of between 663 and 897 (5 data). The uppermost filling (phase 3) can be synchronised with the time span between 798 and 1128 (6 data). Two older datings of between 1094-821 BC and 652-782 AD may be interpreted as outliers: possibly due to a contamination through older bones from pre-existing settlements of this younger archaeological feature.15 These data can be interpreted in the way that the filling of an existing ditch began in the seventh or eighth century, and that later – in the Ottonian period –, this ditch may simply have formed a flat depression in the growing town. It can therefore be assumed that this ditch may be synchronised with Magdeburg’s first mention in 805.

14 Kuhn 2005, 52-53.
15 The deepest layers of filling only delivered few sherds, with combed ornament (Kammstrichverzierung) in a cross-hatch or chevron pattern, moreover some with combed lines, whereas the filling of the entire ditch probably only took place at a time in which “Kugeltöpfe” (ball-shaped pots) were already in use (I would like to thank B. Kunz for kindly providing me with this information). Kunz 2004.
The final ditch, if it indeed generally belongs to the three aforementioned enclosures, was only once cut into until now. Remains of an anatomically arranged canine skeleton resulted in a radiocarbon dating to the ninth century AD.\textsuperscript{16}

It therefore seems unlikely that all four ditches existed at the same time. Perhaps the two outer ditches (whenever the northernmost takes a course around the inner ditch below the Hundertwasserhaus, Nord LB, etc.) existed during the same, i.e. the

\textsuperscript{16} Ditmar-Trauth 2005c.
Carolingian period. They represent the Magadoburg – the great castle dating to the
year 805. The inner ditches below the Domplatz, firstly excavated by E. Nickel between
1959 and 1968, are obviously traces of a Thuringian fortress built in the fifth/sixth
century. Thus, we have two subsequent fortifications – the older one with a north-
southerly expansion of possibly 300 m surrounding an area of 3 or possibly 4 ha.

If we reckon with the concentric run of the outer ditch, we therefore arrive at
an expanse in its north-southerly dimension of between 500 and 550 m (between
the contemporary Fürstenwallpark beside the war memorial and approximately
the area between the Große Klosterstraße and the former Heiligegeiststraße) with it
thus probably having covered a surface area of between 10 and 12 ha, assuming an
approximately semicircular shape of the fortification and an eastern boundary of the
construction comparable to today’s eastern slope of the plateau of the old town (Fig. 3).17
However, in the case of all four trenches having belonged to one site, the utilisable
“interior surface” would have been a lot smaller: a north-southerly extension from the
Remtergang heading east of the Gothic cathedral to the monastery’s churchyard (ca.
250 m) is conceivable, resulting in an area of around 2.5 ha – disregarding the fact
that the required floor space of any buildings or fortifications (walls/palisades) above
ground level inside (i.e. east of) the central ditch would still have to be subtracted. A
comparable – albeit smaller, and as of yet undated – trench structure consisting of five
concentric ditches was discovered by J. Henning and his co-workers in 2003 around the
summit of the so-called “Weinberg” (vineyard) near Hohenwarthe (Jerichower Land)18
(Fig. 4: interior surface nearly 1 ha, total area ca. 3 ha).19

Among all these observations, the question of respective interior buildings sur-
rounded by the arrangement of ditches remains unanswered. In the course of the
excavation supervised by R. Kuhn on the east side of the Domplatz, immediately to
the west of the Staatskanzlei building (Domplatz 2/3; 1701) whose facade, as it appears
today was rebuilt in Baroque style, apart from an easterly continuation of the floor-plan
of the “palatium”, unearthed by E. Nickel, the remains of a series of older buildings at

17 On the area located between the monastery Unser lieben Frauen, the Große Klosterstraße
and the Fürstenwallstraße G. Ditmar-Trauth (2003, 220) describes a trench 4 m wide and
1 m deep with a level base, running in north-southerly direction directly to the west of
the high medieval location of the river bank of the Elbe excavated by himself. Here, a vat
had been embedded into the ground at the beginning of the twelfth century. The excavator
assumes the ditch to have been filled at the same time.
18 A piece of charcoal found in a drilling core from one of these ditches can be dated to the
first half of the first millennium AD. This does not exclude a synchronisation for such a
construction of an earth and timber bank perhaps destroyed by fire with the second half
of the first millennium. Henning (pers. comm.) refers to a number of early medieval or
Carolingian parallels (Fulda, etc.) which distinguish by several concentric sharp ditches.
19 Henning/Milo/Weber/Wegener in print.
the same location\textsuperscript{20} came to light, which cannot yet be definitely dated. Naturally one must assume that buildings outside of the system of fortification will have belonged to this Carolingian-age trading post on the border. In the course of the town’s promotion to an Ottonian residence, an explosive growth of settlement activity is to be anticipated, of which the large amount of sunken floor huts and few post-hole buildings bear witness.

\textbf{Settlement findings: palace architecture, churches, sunken floor huts and further edifices}

A trading post, as Magdeburg had been in the Carolingian age, naturally extended beyond the immediate surroundings of the fortified areas. Many sunken floor huts and several post-hole buildings can therefore possibly be regarded as being associated (Figs 5-6). Interestingly, these sunken floor huts from Magdeburg are smaller than the comparable features from the early Saxonian and the West Slavic region. Possibly this reflects the position of these – Magdeburg – sunken floor huts in a walled area.\textsuperscript{21} At first

\textsuperscript{20} Kuhn/Kunz/Ludowici/Pöppelmann/Puhle/Weber 2003, 40.

\textsuperscript{21} Weber 1991b.
glance, a precise temporal classification fails due to the small chronological relevancy of the early medieval ceramics. In many cases, it is not possible to distinguish between eighth/ninth century-findings and those from the tenth century (then possibly already located inside a fortified expanse). Still, in 2001 G. Böttcher and G. Gosch attempted to plot the finds – together with refuse pits, moreover individual findings from the Carolingian resp. Ottonian age within later levels – for the area of the historical old town of Magdeburg (between the Listemannstraße and Danzstraße). At closer scrutiny of this map,\textsuperscript{22} the majority of findings date from “around 800”, in an area between the Dom and the northern part of the Regierungsstraße east of the Breiter Weg, whereas to the west, north of the Johanniskirche they also appear in a rather looser distribution, beyond the expanse of the historical main road. Findings, both individual or in groups from “after 900” are likewise concentrated within the archaeologically intensively explored southern half of the old town; but also its central part (the former eastern area of the “Central Square”; the contemporary “Allee-Center”) and the area directly to the

\textsuperscript{22} Böttcher/Gosch 2001, 411, Abb. 7.
south of the Old Market was occupied. In this compilation the sunken floor huts (and
the stone buildings: apart from the building predating the Dom and the “palatium”,
also foundations set in clay of a timbered house to the west of the Himmelreichstraße)
have not been dated more precisely (although the symbols for sunken floor huts have a
colouring similar to those of tenth-century refuse pits).

There is no evidence so far concerning the extension of Magdeburg’s fortifications
in the tenth century and what these fortification exactly looked like. Only a few
months ago the excavations in the courtyard of the Industrie- und Handelskammer, the
Magdeburg Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Alter Markt 7) showed that a wall
resembling Peters’ (1905) so-called “oldest (Ottonian) town wall”, should be dated to
the late Middle Ages.\footnote{At a speech given on the 11th January 2005, B. Dahmen, in charge of the excavations at the
back yard of the Alter Markt 7 (construction of an underground car park for the Industrie- und
Handelskammer, the chamber of commerce) was able to demonstrate that the dimensions
and the shape of a wall established by her on the site and running in a north-southerly
direction, corresponded to a large extent with the one discovered in the year 1905 in the
foundation pit of the – current – new mayoral building located Bei der Hauptwache 4-6,
even if both findings are not actually aligned and the finding from the Alter Markt site north
of the foundation pit ends in an angling to the north-west.}
It must be added that excavations in the vicinity of the (late) medieval town centre have likewise produced evidence for historical sites (a fact already indicated by the authors). This especially includes the discoveries in the course of construction of an underground car park beneath the Friedensplatz.\textsuperscript{24} If similar finds (as of yet) only appear occasionally in the rest of the town centre, then the reason for this is to be seen first of all in the intensive claim on the remaining area of the town centre: in the first instance by the early modern- until Baroque-age fortification complexes, further by the intensive Gründerzeit-era building development (incl. development for traffic, i.e. trains and roads), resulting in selective exposure mainly only applying to disturbed features.

Clerical buildings naturally also belonged to the panorama of the early settlement. There have been different speculations as to the location of the Carolingian church consecrated to St. Stephen. Currently, there is no excavation finding (yet) which could compellingly be linked with that building. The floor plan of a church under the Gothic Dom, only reconstructed by the aid of scantly clues, probably dates from the tenth century; also belonging to this building are the (younger?) remnants of a crypt located directly to the east.\textsuperscript{25} Finally, the buildings discovered by E. Nickel, then further unearthed by R. Kuhn 2001-2003 after the discovery of a complex burial site – as already demonstrated by Ludowici (2001) on the basis of the records of the Akademie-excavations from the 60s of the last century – cannot have been those of the palatium of the Kaiserpfalz of Otto the Great, but of a monumental church building constructed in two phases. Due west, beneath the Renaissance-/Baroque-age cellar foundations, which had to make way for the building site of the new Nord LB, B. Kunz unearthed a square floor plan with four apses, a foundation executed in the opus spicatum technique, which must be dated to the tenth/eleventh century.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, the question of the location of the palatium of Otto the Great is again open; anyhow, R. Schmitt (1992) reports a probably secular, two-story stone construction surviving at the southern wing of the building of Domplatz 5 (with its orientation thus corresponding to that of the church buildings on the east side of the Domplatz), the face aboveground of which however belongs to the twelfth century.

In the course of the reconstruction of the Johanniskirche to the east of the Alter Markt, comprehensive conservational documentation was possible.\textsuperscript{27} Six phases of construction could be established, the two oldest of which are older than a probably twelfth-century Roman basilica, fairly well to be established along the lines of its floor plan, to which the crypt beneath the Gothic quire, unearthed through a bombing raid in 1945 also belongs (Fig. 7). These two oldest phases of construction are represented by the rests of two apses beneath the crossing of the aforementioned basilica and part of a western wall, discovered 26 m to the west, which, due to the analysis of their mortar,

\textsuperscript{24} Gercke/Weber 2000; Gercke 2005.
\textsuperscript{25} Schubert/Leopold 2001.
\textsuperscript{26} Kunz 2002.
\textsuperscript{27} Schröder 1996; Krecher 2000; idem 2005.
may possibly belong to the older (larger) of these two apses. The two apses overlay a burial site (with the interment executed according to Christian rites in an east-west-erly direction), according to its calibrated radiocarbon dating belonging to temporary intervals between 784-786/874-984 (1-σ-probability: 68.3 %) resp. 779-792/801-998 (2-σ-probability: 95.4 %). It is hereby important to note that Christian funerary practise already existed in the tenth century in the vicinity of the Johanniskirche.

Early medieval graves

Graves from the time of interest are – mainly – tied to those churches attested to in our written sources. Their dating is thereby often made more difficult due to a scarcity of grave goods according to Christian burial practise. Especially for the oldest funerals the problem is added that up until the construction of the Nordfriedhof, the northern cemetery in 1827, Magdeburg’s prosperous citizens were always buried in the same cemeteries, resulting in the older graves constantly being destroyed by later burials. Together with the impressive amounts of graves from the Middle Ages to the early modern era unearthed in the last two decades of research on the town centre, we can note that the oldest graves have only exceptionally remained intact.

It can be safely assumed that the graves discovered in the course of excavations at the east side of the Domplatz belong to the pre-Gothic era, except for the “vault”, dendrochronologically dated to the third quarter of the tenth century, moreover those burials immediately to the south of the construction inside it. Irrespective of the possibility of their either being interred while the building around them was still intact, or only after its demolition (resp. the demolition of the older phase in the robber trenches from the foundations), they always exhibit the same orientation as the “palatium” (and the building predating the Gothic Dom). This is true for all of the burials north of the roadway on the southern side of Magdeburg’s Domplatz. In contrast, the graves located

Fig. 7. Magdeburg – Johanniskirche. Romanesque crypt beneath the Gothic quire in the course of excavations before its reconstruction (twelfth century)
beneath the adjacent pavement area to the south are orientated like the Gothic Dom, thus probably belonging to a date after 1207.

A burial site in the vicinity of St Johannis existed at least from the tenth century onward (radiocarbon dating of the grave under the two apses) and of course in the following centuries: The characteristic graves with head alcove (Kopfnischengräber) in the neighbouring Johanniskirchhof to the north and inside the Gothic church (Fig. 8) already date from the twelfth century.

The town on the Elbe

Magdeburg’s location on the Elbe is a factor of marked influence for the history of the town. After all, even its first mention on the eastern border of the Frankish Empire refers to it and in the history of the tenth century, Magdeburg formed the most important
starting point for Otto the Great’s imperial policy bent on “eastern expansion”. The town’s development on the west bank of the Elbe has so far only undergone scarce archaeological scrutiny – during the building work in the Möllenvogteigarten in the substructure of the ablated north section of the Fürstenwall erected in 1525, immediately to the east of the Dom area, and especially during construction of an underground car park on the site Große Klosterstraße/Fürstenwallstraße (Fig. 9)28. A complex sequence of levels of river sediment (transgression sands and peats), moreover anthropogenic earth deposits were uncovered here, bearing witness to the changes between flooding and low water levels, moreover finally of a permanent “land reclamation” in the high Middle Ages. Due to the absence of air, also organic objects (wood) were preserved through ground water, including a facility of tanner’s vats (Fig. 10). An embankment of the area had been executed with the aid of sharpened pickets and was apparently still

in use in the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{29} In 1525, the so-called Fürstenwall farther eastwards was erected as the eastern boundary of the old town – firstly as an outer ward between two walls, then, beginning in the early eighteenth century, being filled with excavated soil, as one of Germany’s oldest civic parks. Excavations for the new underground car park of Magdeburg’s Allee-Center shopping mall at the northern end of the former Fürstenwallstraße/Am Alten Brücktor hold the promise of further interesting discoveries in the near future on the interaction between the town and the river in the Middle Ages. During the twelfth century, this area changed from an occasionally flooded river zone to an integral part of the old town – as we are able to see from the dendrochronological dating of wooden planks from corduroy road.

Comparable remains (posts of a bar or bridge construction) in the course of the Klusdamm in the eastern part of the valley of the Elbe around Magdeburg, secured during flood control work in the autumn of 2004, were dendrochronologically able to be dated to the period between 1565 and 1802 – with traces of repairs made nearly up to the rebuilding of the Berliner Chaussee during the Napoleonic period (1810).

Contributions of urban archaeology to the history of the high/late Middle Ages and early modern age

In discussion with constructors, but also with other experts, the question on the validity of occasionally rather complex studies on the high and late Middle Ages and the early modern age is raised. It has to be pointed out that, along general lines, the history “is already known anyway” and that only a limited increase in knowledge is thus to be expected from such excavations. Doubts are raised on the validity of excavations in the course of which, for instance, merely that picture is verified already known to us.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Idem} 2003, 219.
from seventeenth-century prints by Merian. To this argumentation one should note that such studies undertaken for reasons of conservation can only ever represent the *ultima ratio* in the face of pending destruction due to ground removal. Moreover, older findings – “worthy of documentation” in the sense mentioned above – on the same do not *a priori* exclude any discoveries from a more recent date (and especially not during the planning stage of an excavation). In many cases, in the course of a single survey one will arrive at an ascertainment of completely heterogeneous older and younger findings. Through an interdisciplinary approach we are thus able to achieve an “agglomeration” of the historical picture, especially for the more recent periods known only through meagre outlines from written sources on historical events: statements as to the use of the land through pedological scrutiny, on dietary habits by means of archaeozoology, on questions of crafts and technology via chemical and physical analysis of the find material, etc. Some rather exemplary instances particularly for discoveries on the more recent ages shall be presented below.

Discoveries must not always lead to such spectacular findings as was the case with the conservational surveys accompanying construction on the north side of the Gouvernementsberg in the autumn of 2003. Here, the old boundary of the monastery area (Klosterkirchhof) towards the Gouvernementsberg, cut into the eastern slope of the plateau was to be reconstructed again – through the clearing of rubble of houses destroyed in 1945 from the remains of their cellars along the road and the exposure of a revetment, abutting these plots against the elevated monastery’s church yard. The wall at first appeared to be made of brick in a large-scale – in this case probably Baroque – format characteristic for monasteries. Yet horizontal drilling into the wall showed that another wall made of roughly hewn stones was located behind it, resulting in the decision to dismantle the brick wall facing. Hereby it was found that quite a number of medieval *spolia* had been immured into the natural-stone revetment behind the brick wall; the most striking of which was a 1.10 m high Gothic female statue from around the turn of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century. The figure consisted of two parts – head and torso, frontally immured into the wall “in an anatomically correct position” (Fig. 11). The other fragments of statues, moreover of pieces of *epitaphia* and late Romanesque altar panel had been used as building material for the wall, irrespective of their facing. With these finds, the factor is of special importance that several of the objects retained substantial remnants of their medieval colouring – remains that would have long ceased to exist in the case of the statues centuries-long installation outdoors or even in closed rooms.

On the north side of the Breiter Weg, between the Ratswaageplatz and the Universitätplatz, two excavations took place in the last couple of years. In the course of the enlargement of the business district and the creation of parking areas behind

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30  Besener 2005a.
the high-rises on the western side three confined areas could be surveyed under the direction of B. Kunz. Under a post-War earth deposit about 1.5 m thick, rests of the buildings destroyed in 1945 came to light, including cellars dating to before the date of the destruction in 1631, whose filling with rubble had already taken place in the wake of the Thirty Years War. The result of the study within this area, extremely densely populated until 1945 and then thoroughly reshaped, most of all consisted of the establishment of the fact of the existence of archaeological material going back all the way to the Middle Ages.31

On the east side of the road excavations in the course of the construction of a new canalisation were to be accompanied. A first segment under today’s Ratswaageplatz yielded the remnants of a graveyard from the thirteenth/fourteenth century underneath the foundation trenches of the old town weighing house (alte Ratswaage) demolished in 1866, which currently cannot be associated with any known church.32 On the contrary,

31 Kunz 2005a.
32 Besener considers if this could be the cemetery of the Franciscan monastery located to the west of the Breiter Weg, but which then would have been separated from the actual buildings by the main road, probably already highly frequented in the high Middle Ages. Besener 2005b.
over the entire north-southerly extension of the following excavation under the direction of A. Pieper,33 the northern town wall from the time of Archbishop Wichmann34 failed to be detected, as opposed to the discovery of a prehistoric trench extending in north-southerly direction over a length of 50 m further to the north underneath the Breiter Weg, possibly having surrounded a settlement located to the west (!). Directly below the modern-day road level, one of the cellars on the east side of the road north of the Katharinenkirche (= the former “Haus der Lehrer”, the house of teachers) displays good-quality, probably Romanesque masonry (Fig. 12). Again this observation, if not alone, not only very impressively demonstrates, how important building substance remained preserved only little below the level of the modern road, but moreover also hints at the possible existence of early stone architecture in an area which, according to our written sources, only belonged within the walled old town of Magdeburg since the early thirteenth century.

The new construction of a Catholic community centre north of the Petrikirche (Fig. 13) occupied an area which had belonged to a monastery of Augustinian friars during the Middle Ages, the large hall church (Hallenkirche) of whom had survived the destructions of both 1631 and 1945. Even if the church had served the Wallonian Reformed parish since 1694 and the monastery was converted into an old people’s home in the nineteenth century, excavations brought to light both prehistoric and high medieval findings, far predating the monastery proper (ca. 1285).35 The historical tradition of the town here locates the fishing village of Frose, first documented in 937, with its parish church of St Peter’s, whose tower still dates back to the twelfth century. In the course of a supposed northern enlargement of the Wichmannstadt under Archbishop Albrecht (1205-1232) – transcending a boundary wall which, although repeatedly mentioned, has so far never been recorded in its stratigraphic context (thus also in the course of the excavations on the eastern side of the northern section of the Breiter Weges; see above)

33 Pieper 2005.
34 Comp. e.g. Mrusek 1966, 50, fig. 28.
35 Ditmar-Trauth 2005b; idem 2005c.
the medieval old town extended to this area. Findings from this excavation – i.e. from a limited area – can naturally neither confirm nor disprove this hypothesis in detail. Yet at least they demonstrate the existence of settlement activity both in the pre-Gothic time, as in the time after the early thirteenth century, the boundary of a period which approximately complies with introduction of Blaugraue Keramik (blue-grey ceramics).

The oldest medieval findings are refuse pits from the tenth/eleventh centuries, among those such with datable ceramics with waved decoration (Wellenband) ornamentation and large amounts of animal remains, including not only the bones of meat stock, but also shells, fish scales and fragments of eggshells, which, similar to the stones of different fruit also discovered, await further, archaeozoological or archaeobotanical processing. A house pit and a well, probably only abandoned and filled in the course of the thirteenth century, both probably date to the twelfth century. Two deep, rectangular shafts, from which finds dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries recovered, are rather to be already classed as belonging to the late Middle Ages. In the northern part of
the west side of the excavation area a massive wall, contaminated/disturbed by modern findings (and thus perhaps to be dated in the sense of a *terminus ante quem*) was to be detected, which must be regarded as the back wall of one of the wings of the Augustine monastery. A cellar, filled in the course of the building of the wall covers an older stone construction at the location. Possibly the red sandstone wall belongs to the Wallonic era, and the older cellar into the period of the monastery (after 1285). The destruction during the Thirty Years War is manifest in the shape of a well probably filled in 1631, containing amongst other things painted pieces of broken glass from drinking vessels (Fig. 14).

After the political reunification, the hall in the Buttergasse already mentioned above, discovered in the ruins from the War became the subject of archaeological research for a second time. The flat building constructed over the vaulted cellar was removed; a modern business building of larger dimensions, extending further especially to the south and west was to be erected. Earth movements in the course of construction also enabled a scrutiny in the interior, underneath the floor. It was hereby possible to verify a hypothesis of E. Nickel, who had pointed out the different designs of the pillars in

36 Köther 2005.
37 Nickel 1960, 36.
the interior: Thus, the central column of pillars, made of carefully processed trimmed stones was to belong to an older phase of construction, probably dating to the twelfth century, during which the hall had been covered by a timbered ceiling. A vaulting carried out in the thirteenth century no longer allowed a bridging of such distances as from between the central column of pillars and the north and south walls, resulting in the erection of additional secondary columns of pillars, distinguishable by the ashlars of smaller size employed in their construction. This hypothesis was then later confirmed due to the establishment of a stratigraphic overlapping of two building pits – with one of those of the central column of pillars having been intersected twice by that of the neighbouring exterior pillar to the east.38

Several interesting findings were also unearthed outside the hall: Apart from three market stalls,39 probably from the fourteenth century south of the building on the approach from the Breiter Weg to the Alter Markt, a square of medieval paving from the Buttergasse to the east came to light. To the west, at the former Schwertfegerstraße, two stone wells were excavated, which, according to the finds salvaged from them, had been filled in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth/fifteenth century. It is conspicuous that practically all of the finds from the excavation – at least in the case when they can be unambiguously associated with contemporaneous findings – are of a later date than the masonry of the hall.

The collegiate church St Sebastian’s, today’s cathedral church of the Catholic diocese of Magdeburg, south of the old town to the west of the Breiter Weg, was to be again furnished with an ambulatory – as it had actually already once had during the Middle Ages, to the north of the nave. In the year 2002 altogether a number of 27 burials were able to be established in an area of only 15 m², with only eight of these however not having been disturbed. The graves will not all have been those of collegiates themselves; a number of (small) infant burials also occur. In the absence of grave goods, the dating of the findings can only be established indirectly: In the burial pit belonging to one of the graves from the deepest layer, some single blue-grey sherds were discovered; while on the map of Matthäus Seutter (around 1740) the cemetery was also marked as such, it is mentioned by name only by the chroniclers Berghauer (1800-1801) and Hoffmann (1803), as on the town map by Cammer (around 1860). But

38  Köther 2005, 158.
39  The stalls moreover contained rich amounts of finds of such wares as were seemingly traded therein: One contained rests of bone workmanship, including pre-worked blanks of dice, a second one copper/bronze sheets, wires, needles, rivets, hinge joints, buckles, fittings probably mounted on leather (which is no longer in existence). In the third one finally, pieces of glazier slag, together with molten glass and small fragments of drinking vessels were found. The excavator presumes that this could represent traces of glass recycling, with the sparse fragments – also found elsewhere in town – of small glass rings and a small smoothing stone (for smoothing seams) having been the possible products aimed at.
after the construction of the new municipal cemetery, the Nordfriedhof, in 1827 at the latest no burials will have taken place at this site.

A finding of particular anthropological interest is represented by the discovery of a cemetery on the site of the yard of the house Wallonerberg 5, rebuilt in 1995/1996.\textsuperscript{40} The excavations became necessary, as the premises, located opposite the deeply incised Wallonerberg and partly elevated over 3 m, were to be lowered for the construction of an underground car park. From 1694 until the beginning of the nineteenth century, this area had been the burial site of the Wallonic Reformed parish. After having been forced to flee their homes in the course of the French king Louis XIV’s abolishment of the Nantes Edict of Tolerance in 1685, they began to constitute an autonomous political structure in the then still rather devastated town of Magdeburg, moreover at first also representing a genetically isolated population. In the course of the excavations, a limited area of less than 70 m\textsuperscript{2} yielded a documented number of more than 130 graves. They were arranged in several tiers, with partial differences in height of up to 3 m, thus making it impossible to salvage all of the burials. Moreover, extraordinary large amounts of organic rests, such as hair, cloth or the padding material of coffins, but also insect pupae were contained in the graves. – All this material still awaits an anthropological processing which could also provide important contributions towards an elucidation of the town history (i.e. palaeopathology, life expectancy, dietary habits, etc.).

Surveys in the vicinity of the high-medieval old town: fortifications and suburbs

The spatial development of Magdeburg is characterised by the fact that the area of the old town – aside from small corrections at the Krökenator town gate and in the Elbe-foreland – practically did not change from the beginning of the thirteenth century until after the war in 1870/1871. Up until the destruction in 1631 the suburbs of Neustadt and Sudenburg lay immediately outside the town gates; belonging to Brandenburg since 1680 and expanded into becoming Prussia’s strongest fortress especially in the course of the eighteenth century, the area of fortifications was to exceed the actually fortified area of the town by far. The suburbs had to make way at first for the walls and ramparts of the fortress, then to provide free fields of fire before the stronghold, resulting in the Sudenburg moving further and further south and the Neustadt towards the north. This process became most markedly manifested in the Napoleonic era in the complete relocation of the Sudenburg to the location of today’s Halberstädt Strasse and the large-scale destruction of the (old) Neustadt and the rebuilding of a (new) Neustadt on the Lübecker Straße.

\textsuperscript{40} Rathje/Weber 2005.
These circumstances must therefore be taken into consideration when construction in the vicinity of today’s town centre outside of the former medieval centre is to be conservationally accompanied. Naturally, in such an area characterised by the building of fortifications, Gründerzeit-era urban expansion and modern traffic constructions (train tracks, motorways), conditions for any survival of medieval findings are especially unfavourable, with the destruction through bombing raids in the course of World War II further contributing to the loss of building fabric. And yet, the meticulous accompanying of excavations in the areas mentioned, surrounding the historical old town in a belt ca. 1,000 m wide, demonstrates that findings worthy of documentation have indeed survived (thereby explicitly excluding the cellars of Gründerzeit buildings destroyed in the War).

Mention has already been made of the fact that surveys undertaken on the Friedensplatz yielded findings dating back to the time of the tenth/eleventh centuries. Unfortunately, the graves underneath the Gesellschaftshaus in the Klosterbergegarten cannot yet be securely dated, while skeletal finds in the Glacis parkways to the east of the Magdeburg Ring on the Editharing, in front of the former excavation office of the Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie (state department for conservation and

41 Engel 2005.
archaeology) on the Editharing 2, moreover in one of the front gardens in the Richard-Wagner-Straße, probably belong to one of the Baroque-age “paupers’ cemeteries”, formerly located within the area of the fortifications. Settlement findings – including ceramics from the time between the tenth century until the early modern age – were unearthed in the front garden of the Ökumenisches Domgymnasium (Hegelstr. 5) together with an early modern find in the form of a well projecting into the Rotliegende (Upper Permian) of the rock foundation of the Dom underneath the building of the Landeszentralbank, to the west of the Kulturhistorisches Museum (museum for cultural history).\textsuperscript{42} It was possible to date its filling to the sixteenth century due to a multitude of green-glazed stove tiles.

Similarly, outside of the medieval (old) town – in the southern part of the medieval Old New Town (Alte Neustadt) – on the building site of the Fakultät für Informatik of the Otto-von-Guericke-Universität on the Walther-Rathenau-Straße, apart from a segment of the Baroque battlement, a trench running from the north-west to the south-east had been constructed, standing out in the northern profile of the foundation pit and its spit (Fig. 15). Its filling can be dated to the thirteenth/fourteenth century and contained, beside dated ceramics, also non-ferrous metal slag and greenly discoloured animal bones, resp. artefacts made of bone (Fig. 16). The workshops of an artisan working with non-ferrous metals will therefore have probably been located nearby. From the heritage manager’s point of view, this discovery indicated that even in an area referred to archaeologically as a “desert” (medieval settlement followed by the Baroque fortification complex and subsequently the dense Gründerzeit-development, then destroyed in 1945) the occurrence of expressive findings can still be expected.

Also of special importance are the results of archaeological research on early modern and Baroque fortification construction. Naturally, we can also today see expansive overground edifical remains from the time when Magdeburg had been Prussia’s mightiest fortress. And yet, in contrast with other towns, in the eyes of the

\textsuperscript{42} Weber 1997, 28-30.
public these – as of yet – still play only a minor role. Mainly they originate in the final phase of construction of the fortress, the second half of the nineteenth century. Apart from few exceptions (the Bastion Braunschweig in the former Luisengarten, the current Geschwister-Scholl-Park; Bastion Halberstadt on the Erzbergerstr.) the oldest Baroque buildings are no longer visible in today’s cityscape – although this does not mean they do no longer exist. Thus, several years ago during tunnel excavations under the crossing Otto-von-Guericke-Straße and Ernst-Reuter-Allee, the late medieval/early Renaissance-age town wall under the easterly pedestrian walkway in front of No. 105 of the Otto-von-Guericke-Straße was excavated to a depth of ca. 6 m. Finally, in the year 2004, a projected tunneling in east-westerly direction of the University Square from the direction of the Walther-Rathenau-Straße led to excavations of several months’ duration. Among others, the Bastion Hessen (constructed between 1688 and 1709), adjacent to the site of a medieval quarry for greywacke, was hereby excavated. This had been levelled in the course an expansion of the town during the Gründerzeit – also meaning that, due to the filling, the subterranean site remained. Thus the impressive facade of the Bastion with its ornate limestone quoin (Fig. 17) only had to give way to the demands of twenty-first-century traffic.

Summary and outlook on future research

The excavations during the last few years have provided evidence for a vast amount of archaeological findings. At present, first of all efforts on the scientific processing of discoveries documented in the course of these endeavours and of the findings resulting therefrom must be increased, to actually get the material to “talk”. Besides a systematic scrutiny of the archaeological remains, especially of ceramics, this includes the analysis of animal bones as direct evidence for human nutrition of that time, an ascertainment of vegetable remains, pedological research on the genesis of the find levels and, finally, a scientific dating and material scientific analysis of metal and stone utilised in construction to perhaps gain knowledge on their manufacturing technique and origin. The graves await anthropological scrutiny using employing modern processes of analysis, e.g. palaeogenetics. This task has already been begun for certain key areas of the ex-

43 In the meantime, within the scope of interested Magdeburg citizens there are initiatives to popularise this part of the historical heritage, e.g., guided tours are offered in the expanse of the conserved fortress. In 2005, the town organised an international congress on the “Preservation and use of major historic fortresses of the 19th century”. The “Mark” barracks, situated in the northern part of the old town not far from the university are to be developed into a “cultural fortress”. A new footpath now emanates from between the Liebknechtstraße and the Damaschkeplatz in the Künette-Graben, along the Glacis as a component of the “green belt” all around the old part of the town.

44 Ickerodt 2005.
cavations, e.g. the “palatium”. And yet, compared against the multitude of possible methods of analysis, the amounts of finds, of necessity, nearly always emerge—excavations is practically unmanageable. Detailed analysis of this vast amount of material leads us to hope for many new conclusions.

Moreover, work on the sites proceeds. At the time this article was written (summer of 2005) the excavation works on the site of a new underground car park for the “Allee Center” shopping mall and in the area of the former Heiligegeistkirche, demolished in 1959, has been completed and the work around the monastery Unser lieben Frauen have brought ditches and sunken floor huts from the ninth and tenth centuries to light. Immediately west of the Alter Markt, the former “Marietta-Block”-area will be covered by a new commercial building: Excavations show a medieval paving of the Breiter Weg (ca. 1200). The cellar of the Haus der Romanik east of the Domplatz is be drained – and in this central area we can expect new discoveries, new mosaic stones creating a more precise picture of Magdeburg’s early medieval settlement.

(translation: David Toalster)

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