

Abstract

Three wooden cellars from the middle of the 15th Century in the “Schlosskirch-street” in Cottbus, Province of Brandenburg

In 1994 an excavation took place, in the southeastern part of the old city center from Cottbus, between the “Schlosskirch-“ and the “Burg-Streets”. This city center excavation, between the 25th April and 11th November 1994, was undertaken by the archaeological company “*Wurzel Archäologie und Umwelttechnik GmbH*” on behalf of the Berliner and Dresdner banks. In a 2,400m² area, some 2,200 features and 65,000 finds were documented and secured.

A previously prepared expert opinion by the “Monuments Authority” suggested poor feature preservation, but instead about half of the area showed impressive settlement features from the first third of the 13th century to the beginning of the 16th century. Owing to the report by the “Monuments Authority”, with far too little time and personnel requirements, the excavation team could hardly do justice to the quality of the archaeological features. Instead of a qualitative scientific excavation, the project degenerated into a watching brief or an emergency excavation.

Although preliminary reports, as well as a dissertation by Sebastian Heber (online-publication Heber 2019), have focused on part of the outstanding persevered features (in particularly the wooden cellars with preserved wooden walls), a detailed evaluation and reconstruction has failed to materialize. For this reason, it was the personal responsibility of the author, as one of the original excavators and scientific leader of the archaeology company, to evaluate the features that were documented 27 years ago and submit them in printed form. Now, thanks to the “*Archäologische Quellen*”, every reader can form his own opinion about the project, the catastrophic conditions created by the “Monuments Authority”, the finds material and the reconstructed cellar features.

In three of the cellars (feature 130, 131 and 1093) in the “Schlosskirch-Street”, stood up to 1.5m high preserved wooden walls that revealed that they fell victim, along with the floors above them, to a fire disaster. The rubble subsequently fell into the cellars, so that the fire was extinguished and the cellar walls, with installations, were carbonized and preserved. The dendrochronologi-

cal examinations have shown that the cellars were built around 1458 and destroyed only 10 years later in the year 1468 by a city fire-catastrophe. Consequently all the objects found in the cellar originated from this time window of just 10 years: 1458 to 1468. The coins found also confirm this time window. It was an extraordinary stroke of luck that, in the following 500 years after this city fire, only houses without basements were built again and again in the “Schlosskirch-Street”, so that the complete late medieval cellar inventory remained, as a time window, untouched.

As part of the investigations presented here, the building features and finds are presented in detail. The cellars are examined with regard to their construction and are graphically reconstructed. All the cellar constructions basically shown to be a framework consisting of swell beams with corner and wall stands placed on them, with the swell beams being repeated in the substructure of the next floor. The wall-claddings consist of raised wall planks that were only fixed by backfilling the construction pit. Consequently, this form of constructed wooden box is hard to beat in terms of simplicity and efficiency. Presumably, with regards to the construction process, as seem for example in the old town from the city of Lübeck, specialized construction crews were at work, that built the cellars according to the clients individual needs and budget.

Both the cellar 131 and the incompletely examined cellar 1093 were, presumably for security reasons to prevent theft, only accessible via a hatch in the hallway on the ground floor (Fig. 162). The much smaller cellar 130, only around 9m² in size, is different in that it has a basement neck in the form of a steep staircase with a floor paved with cobbles. Evidence for the installation can also be discerned here, with the reconstruction showing nine barrels and what was probably a chest. In addition to this, several items were placed in the area between two of the barrels which provide evidence of agricultural activity: a three-pronged fork, multiple axe heads, an axe, scissors, whetstones, and a possible plow. A number of military-finds, such as a sword, chainmail, spurs and

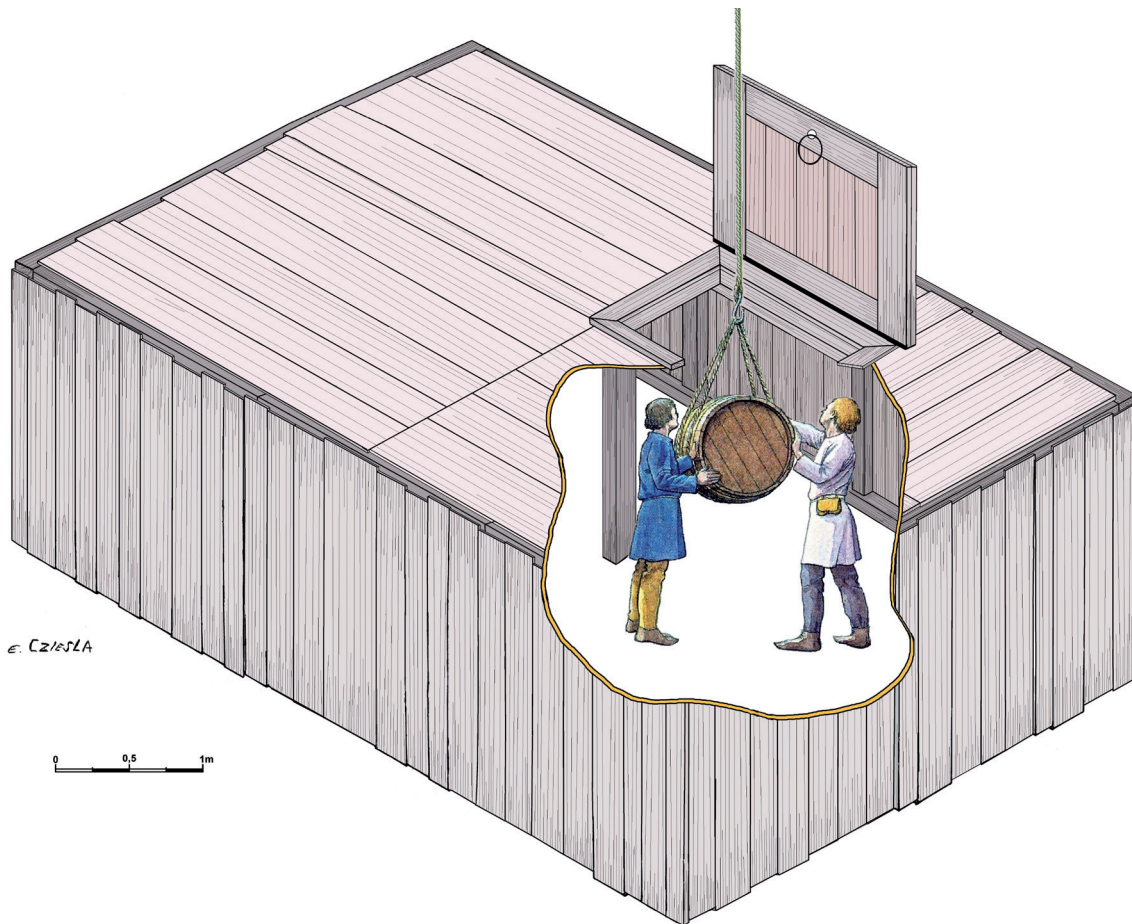


Fig. 162 Life picture of the reconstructed cellar 131 with access only from the ceiling hatch (the drawing of the two men with the barrel comes from Isenberg 2020, Fig. 708; modified)

ammunition bullets also need to be highlighted. On the floor and presumably on a shelf stood 30 ceramic-pots (Fig. 163). Together with the possible barrel contents, these small and large clay pots can be interpreted as storage containers. These supplies must have been well stacked on Monday 19 September 1468, the day of the fire catastrophe, only a few days before harvest Thanksgiving.

There is no doubt, however, that the importance of these three cellars in Cottbus is in the composition of the ceramic finds, which were of the same age and in current use from a time interval of only 10 years. Each cellar has delivered two to three dozen pots, in which there are two size categories: vessels that are often surprisingly small with a height of 8 to 10 cm, as well as some pots without handles (or hanging pots) and handled jugs with a height of 16 to 20 cm. Some special vessels are also noticeable. Within cellar 131, there was a jug with crest-like applications (possibly “Waldenburger” provenance), as well as a shard from a face jug. As well as these, there are

also ceramics with combed wavebands, with an identical vessel also in cellar 1093. Within cellar 1093 was also a grey earthenware beaker with a convoluted edge, a large jug with lead glaze and finally, the highlight of all the finds, a highly decorated Late Gothic stoneware bulbous jug with a three-dimensional decoration of a male head with forked beard. These special vessels, especially the late gothic stoneware, could at least be an indication, even when living space in the houses was limited, that the poorest did not live here. This point is also supported by finds of tiled stoves and glass windows.

The three, in 1994 documented, wooden cellars in the “Schlosskirch-Street” in Cottbus, give a unique glimpse into the late medieval living conditions. Although I was able to push the reconstruction of the wooden cellars quite a long way, and can even present images of life (Fig. 162 and Fig. 163), there remains numerous unanswered questions with regards the analysis of the ceramics and all other finds. These questions could be

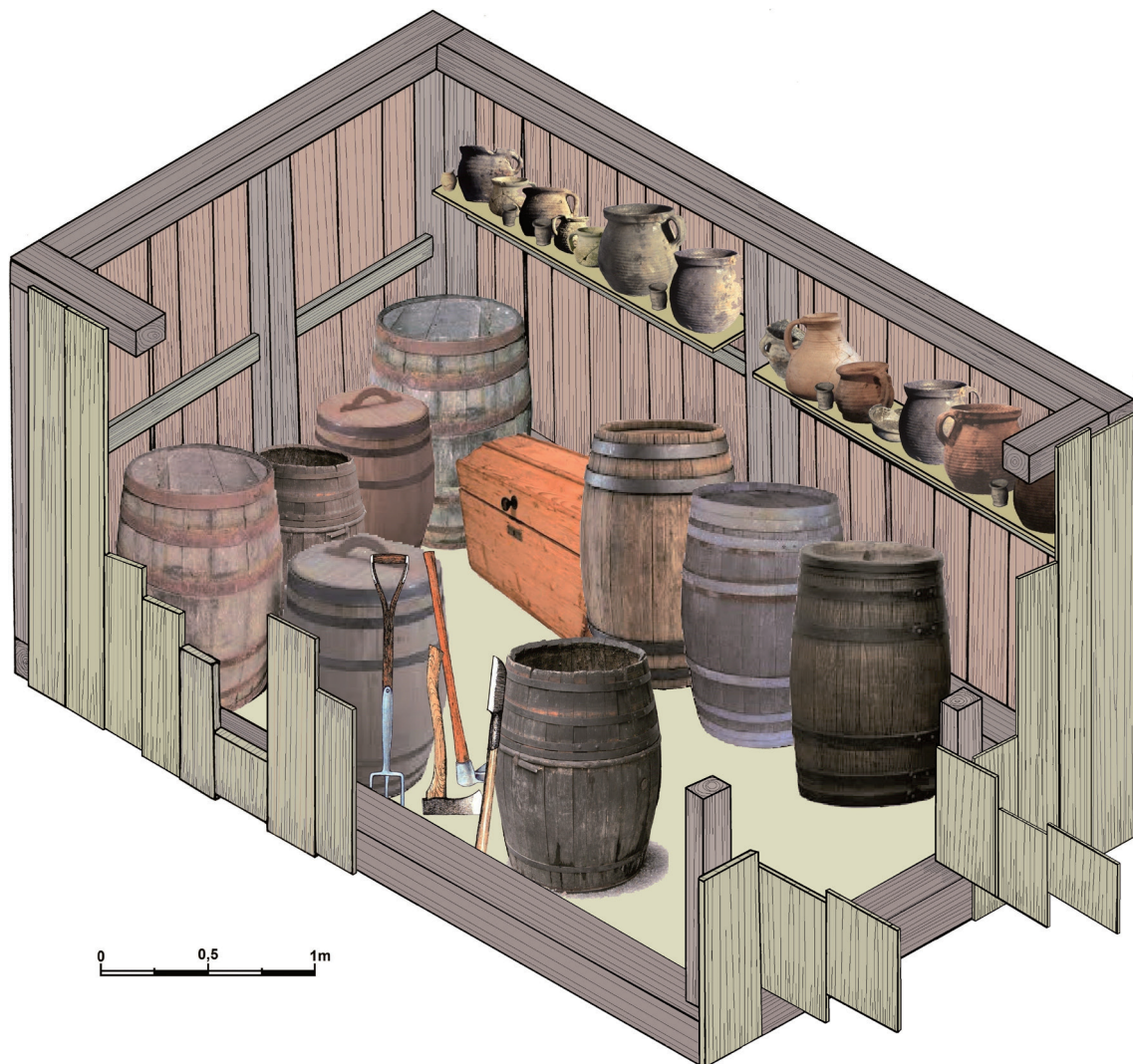


Fig. 163 Life picture of the reconstructed cellar 130 with nine barrels, a chest and agricultural items between barrel h and i. Further ceramic storage vessels are on the selves. In the front right the begin of the steep staircase.

answered in the context of various studies regarding the provenance, the design, the ornamentation etc., as well as with regards to the socio-cultural conditions, that these three wooden cellars can reveal. The bulbous jug of richly decorated East-German stoneware from the late Gothic period with a three-dimensional decoration is the best-dated find of this type. There is no doubt

that the three cellars will become a time marker in the future, because of the unified inventories from the years 1458 to 1468 are unparalleled. Any further involvement with these unified inventories will please me very much.

(Translated by Jacob Hogarth;
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