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## *The Slavníks and Saxony*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The issue of Bohemian duke Slavník and his family has been subject of long-time discussions of historians, archaeologists and numismatists since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has been focused on the interrelations between the both Přemyslid and Slavník noble families (Sláma 2000), the extent of their domain, the mint of Slavníks and last but not least on their relation to Saxony. Solving of some of the above mentioned issues can be based on rare but extremely important notes in contemporary written sources. First of all, there is a reference written by Bruno of Querfurt, biographer of the Saint Adalbert, concerning kinship of Adalbert's father Slavník to the German Emperor Henry II.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the young Saint Adalbert spent his school-years (972–981) in Magdeburg. Rather tight links of the Slavníks to the Saxonian ruling echelons are also reflected in manifestation of their own power and social position, for example in minting, since Slavníks was the only family in Early Medieval Bohemia that ran their own mint. Coins produced in mints in Libice, the seat of the Slavníks, and in Malín were inspired also by Otto-Adelheid denars (Petersohn 2003, 124). Special position of the rulers from Libice is also corroborated by the fact that Soběslav, son of Slavník, took part on campaign against the Obodrits and the Lutitzs in 995 with his own army as other imperial Counts (ebd., 113 ff.).

Relationship of the so-called Saxon Ottonian architecture and archaeological circumstances documented on the inner bailey of the Libice

stronghold belongs among rather frequently disputed issues of the Czech Early Medieval archaeology. This piece of work attempts to organize available current evidence and to set it in a broader context.

A ground-plan of a single-aisled, longitudinal church with a lateral aisle and an apsis was unearthed in the year 1950 during the archaeological excavations of the Early Medieval stronghold at Libice nad Cidlinou. Analogies for such structure that represents a unique architectural solution in Early Medieval Bohemia have been sought in the so-called Saxon Ottonian architecture (Turek 1966). While the Saxon influence on the architecture of the church as well as its Early Medieval dating is generally accepted in Czech historical research, there have been certain reservations concerning the dating and functional interpretation of its particular parts (Merhautová 1995; Merhautová/Třeštík 1984, 43 f.). Recently published summaries of the structural survey (Imhof 2006; Knapp 2006; Cramer/Breitling 2006) have provided new data that enable us not only to more closely identify the model for the Libice church but also to precise its dating.

### **The stronghold at Libice and the so-called Slavník's church**

The stronghold at Libice nad Cidlinou was founded on the confluence of Elbe and Cidlina rivers, approximately 60 km to the east of Prague. It is situated on two terrace islands (with the total area of 24 ha) surrounded by river floodplain. While the eastern part, the so-called outer bailey<sup>3</sup> is nowadays occupied by the centre of the Libice nad Cidlinou community, the western part of the stronghold, the inner bailey, is agriculturally

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2 '...qui rege tangit linea sanguinis, quem longa lateque iura dantem hodie tremunt, Henrici regi accessit proximus nepos.' Bruno, 596.

3 For the topographical situation of the Early Medieval agglomeration of Libice nad Cidlinou, cf. Mařík 2008.

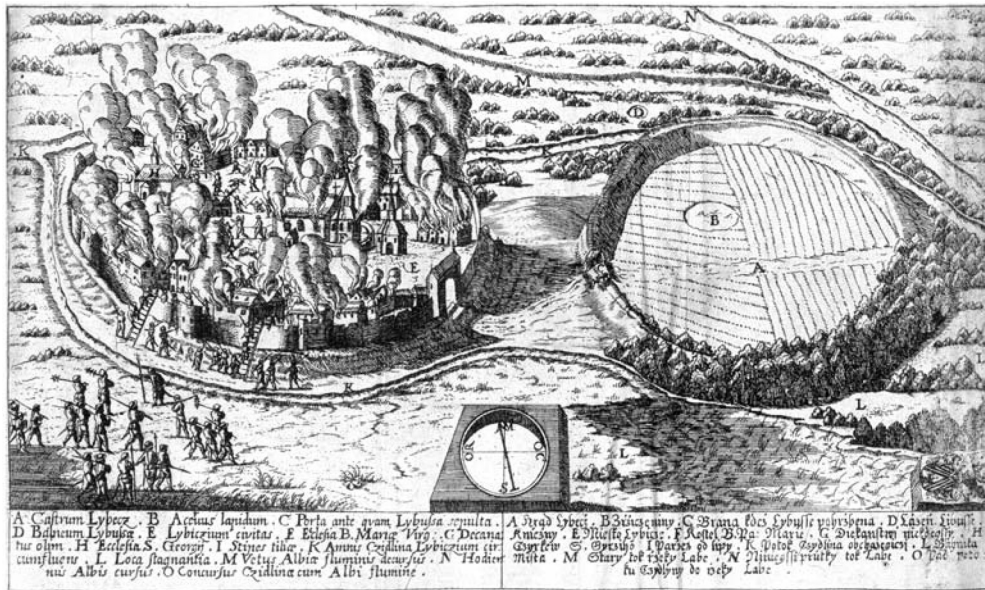


Fig. 1. Libice nad Cidlinou around the year 1668 (after Bolelucky 1668).

used (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> Libice has awakened the interest of historians and archaeologists already in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stronghold is considered to be the seat of the Slavníks noble family among whose members was also the second Prague bishop Saint Adalbert. This family ruled over Libice from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century until September 28<sup>th</sup> 995, when the majority of its members was slaughtered by the soldiers of the Přemyslid Duke Boleslav II.

Systematic archaeological investigations have begun in the year 1949 when R. Turek excavated the inner bailey (also called the acropolis). He paid his attention mainly to the bailey's eastern part, where concentration of cretaceous marl stones had already been visible before start of the excavations. This feature was also documented on the earliest depiction of Libice nad Cidlinou (fig. 1: B) dating to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (after the year 1668). This place has been very probably used as a source of building stones at least since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was recorded by Jan Vavák, a local chronicler (Turek 1981, 1).

After the removal of the cretaceous marl stones rubble, the ground-plan of the entire church was revealed (fig. 2). However, nearly none the original walls remained and the ground-plan was possible to trace mainly on the wall's negatives. In the entire interior of the church except its presbytery a plaster floor was documented. And precisely at this level, the archaeological excavations were put to an end. The plaster floor within

the church was disturbed only on three spots. Two square features measuring 1.54x1.63 m, and 1.47x1.66 m respectively (fig. 2) were placed along the lateral aisle axis. Turek held them for pier foundations of the emporae that he imagined in the southern as well as northern wings of the transept (Turek 1981, 12). Furthermore, a circular pit (fig. 2) of 1.9 m in diameter that Turek interpreted as church cache was dug into the plaster floor in the middle of the transept. Post holes documented in the presbytery should, according to his opinion, have served as bases for setting of the ciborium altar (Turek 1981, 9). In addition to an extensive cemetery (Turek 1976), it was also possible to trace other remains of plaster floors in the close vicinity of the church. The best preserved rectangular area measuring 21.8x8 m (fig. 2) that is situated to the south of the church was interpreted as foundations of a wooden palace. R. Turek based his dating of the church and the adjacent palace purely on available historical accounts. He supposed that it was Adalbert from, the later bishop of Magdeburg, who had consecrated the church on the occasion of his missionary journey to Kiev Russia in the years 961–962 (Turek et al. 1981, 15). Turek was convinced that the structure had to be completed before this date. However, since no written evidence refers explicitly to Adalbert's visit at Libice, this dating remains purely speculative. Thus, any further analyses and evaluations ought to be based on stratigraphic observations obtained during archaeological excavations. This dating method is complicated not only by the way how the church was published in the 1980's but also by the state of preservation of the field documentation. Although R. Turek left within the interior of the church two check blocks running through

<sup>4</sup> The earliest depiction of Libice (fig. 1) exemplifies that the inner bailey has been used as arable land at least since the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

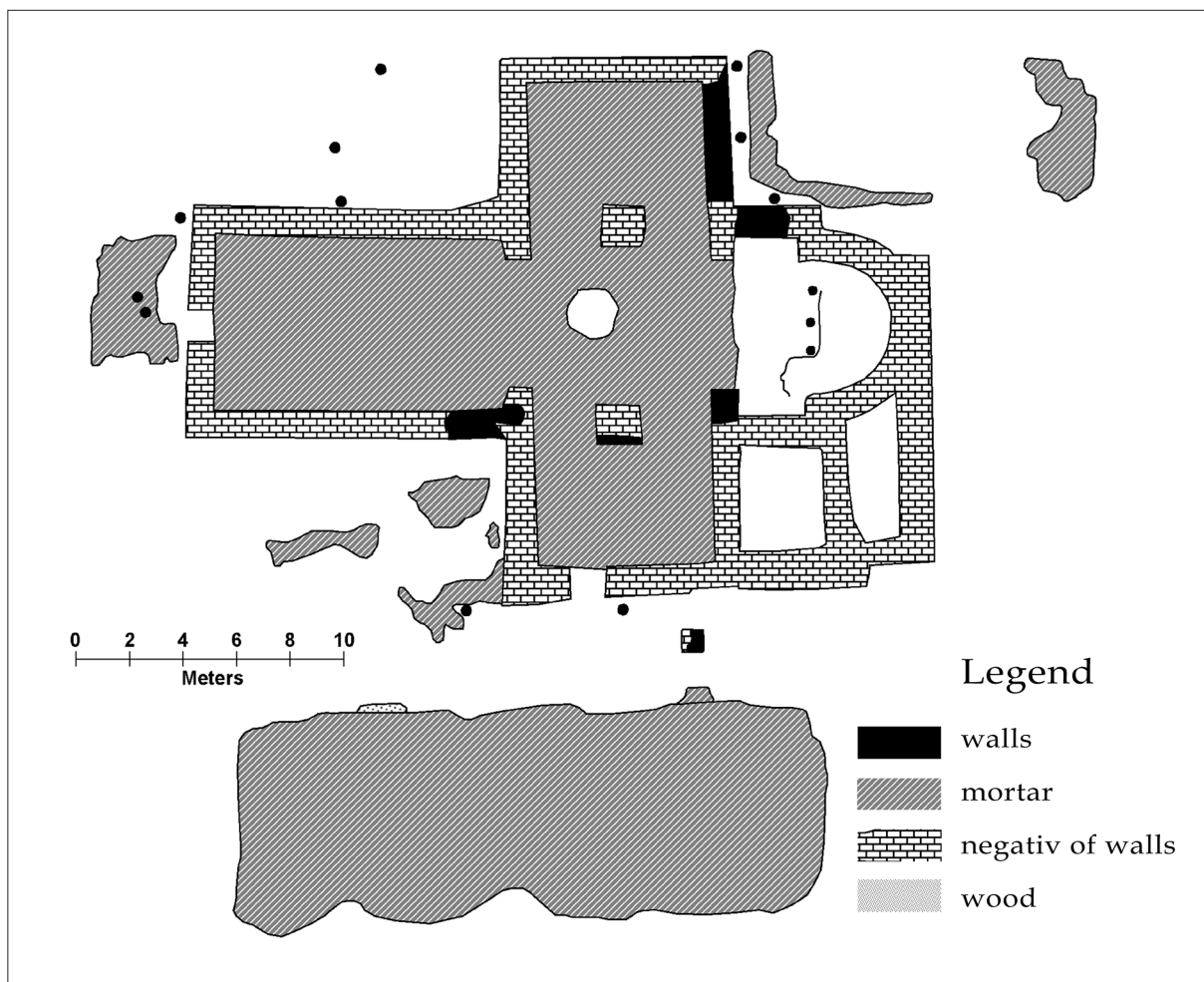


Fig. 2. Libice nad Cidlinou, the church on the inner bailey (after Turek et. al. 1981).

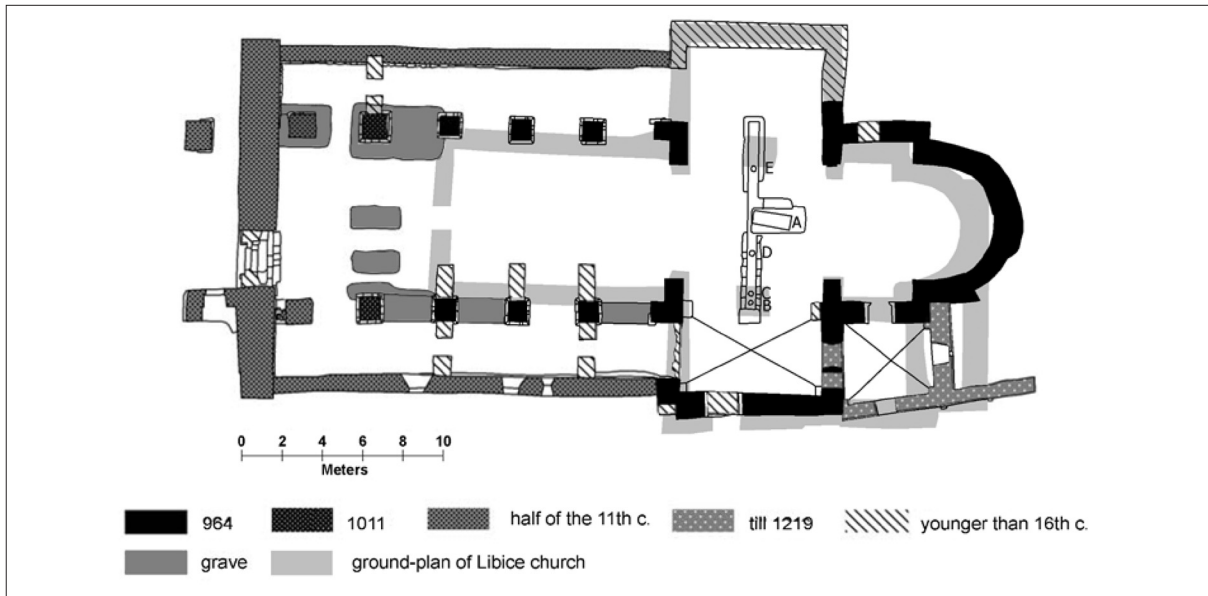
the transept and the presbytery (fig. 2), archaeologists lack cross-section drawings. Thus, any further evaluation must rely mainly on verbal descriptions of finding circumstances observed during archaeological excavations of the church (Turek 1981, 6–23), and the adjacent cemetery (Turek 1978).

The foundations of the church were embedded in the so-called leveling layer<sup>5</sup> that represents, from the stratigraphic point of view, a crucial milestone in the development of this particular site. This layer that covered both sunken settlement features and graves dating to the earliest development phase of the stronghold is absolutely dated from the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> to the half of the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The origin of this leveling layer is dated on the basis of pottery finds into the second development phase of the stronghold that covers the time period from between the mid 10<sup>th</sup> century and the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mařík 2008). A number of objects that document the exceptionality of this area

has been discovered both within the interior of the church and in its close vicinity (Wieczorek/Hinz 2000, 294–297). These finds include the discovery of a writing stylus, a fragment of a reliquary fitting, as well as fragments of two stone epigraph stelae (Charvát 2007), just to mention a few of them. However, such objects should be evaluated only under great precautions for they might have been, and probably were, repeatedly relocated, and mixed up with much later finds due to the long-time quarrying of stone that was used as building material. Fragment of a bell (Wieczorek/Hinz 2000, 295) that according to Turek’s view proves the existence of a wooden bell tower standing next to northern wall of the transept may be used as an example of such misinterpretation. As recent chemical analyzes clearly show the discovered bell fragment was in fact made of cast-iron in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

5 For detailed information on stratigraphic development of the Libice inner bailey, cf. Princová/Mařík 2006.

6 Communication for which I would like to thank Mr. Jiří Košta, National Museum in Prague, History museum, Department of Prehistory and Protohistory, curator of the archaeological collections.



**Fig. 3.** Walbeck/Aller, Chapter church of Our Lady, St. Pancratius, and St. Anne – Libice nad Cidlinou. Comparison of ground plans of the earliest building phase of the church at Walbeck and that on the bailey of Libice (Drawing Author).

### The church at Walbeck

As was already stated above, the model for the Libice church was sought in realm of the Saxon Ottonian architecture (Turek 1958). Among the most cited analogies belong the churches of St. Cyriac in Canburg and Gernrode, the chapel in the imperial Pfalz at Werla, and the Our Lady church at Walbeck (Turek 1988, 122–133). On the basis of recent structural survey it seems clear that above all the last mentioned building has several features in common with the church at Libice; and the next part of this paper will focus on this structure. Walbeck/Aller is situated approx. 60 km to the west of Magdeburg on the borders between the federal lands Sachsen-Anhalt and Niedersachsen (fig. 3). The church consecrated to Our Lady, St. Pancratius and St. Anna was built by the Count of Walbeck Liuthar II as a part of his collegiate chapter foundation (Heinecke 2007). In fact, this foundation represents only a part of an act of contrition for the Count's participation in an attempt on the Emperor Otto I's life conducted in the year 941. This unfortunate incident was mentioned in the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg (Thietmar II, 21, 62), who was Liuthar's grandson. As in the case of Libice nad Cidlinou, the beginnings of archaeological interests in the church of Walbeck can be traced back to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Heinecke 2007). In those days, all that remained standing from the original triple-aisled basilica were the peripheral walls. It was H. Feldkeller, who made the most significant discovery during the archaeological excavations conducted in the year 1932, when he found a plaster tomb (fig. 3 A) – the resting

place of the church's founder Liuthar II (Rüber-Schütte 2007). The tomb was situated precisely in the intersection of the main nave's and the transept's axes and disturbed a narrow sunken feature measuring 9.3×0.5 m. The feature was covered with stone slabs with circular holes and pottery jars beneath (fig. 3 B-E). Since no other relevant analogies are known, the precise function of this facility remains an unanswered question. Various hypotheses have been expressed, varying from a fumigation facility or a reliquary chest to some facility for acoustic improvement of this particular part of church (Rüber-Schütte 2007). However, jars embedded in churches' floors may also be identified with certain liturgical facilities known as piscina sacra that served as cistern for liquids (water and oil) used during the ordinances (Maříková-Kubková 2003). The archaeological excavations conducted by Hans Feldkeller had not been followed up for a long period of time, since after the World War II the area around Walbeck was left stranded in an inaccessible frontier zone between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Thus, the recent structural survey as well as the repairs of this considerably neglected ecclesiastical building may have been accomplished only in the years 1998–2001 (Cramer/Breitling 2006). Four building phases covering the Early and the High Medieval Ages could be distinguished on the basis of this survey (fig. 3). The earliest Walbeck church was a single-aisled building with a transept; and, comparing it to that of Libice, strong affinities in ground-plans of both structures can be observed (fig. 3). This earliest phase is placed by the authors of the

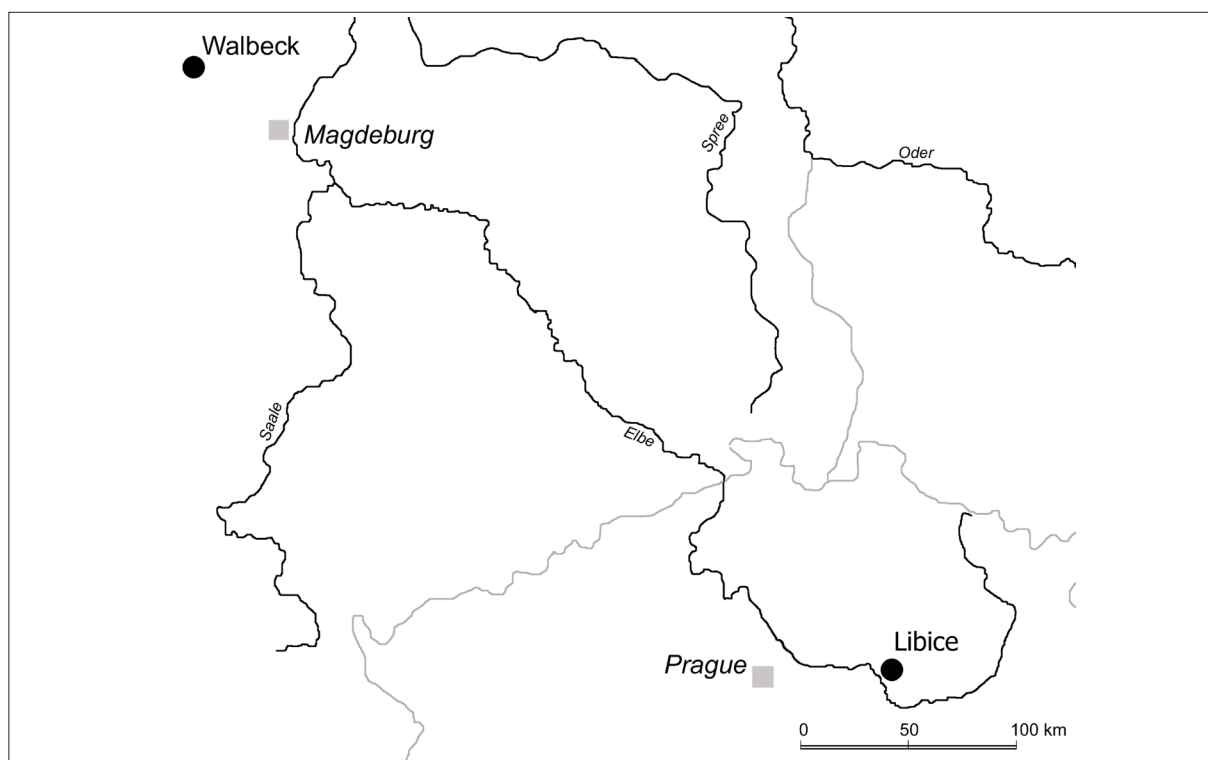


Fig. 4. Walbeck/Aller and Libice nad Cidlinou, Map (Drawing Author).

survey in the time around the years 941–964; and their observations are based in addition to historical sources also on a  $^{14}\text{C}$  date obtained from the preserved wooden frame of one of the windows. After a fire in the year 1011 (Thietmar VI, 40, 349) the church's main nave was lengthened. However, the crucial rebuilding took place around the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century, when Walbeck church was transformed into a triple-aisled basilica. The main nave was enlarged and arcades were struck through its original stone masonry (Cramer/Breitling 2006).

### Discussion

Besides their almost identical ground-plans, Walbeck and Libice churches (fig. 4) also share several other features. Among the most prominent ones belongs the issue of funerals disposal within the church. The only person who had been buried inside the earliest phase of the Walbeck church in such a prominent place was its founder, Liuthar II. Other burials are located in the western lengthening of the main nave built after the fire in 1011<sup>7</sup>; and the three burials in-between the arcades' pillars must have been entombed there only after rebuilding conducted around the half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Although no

burials have been found in the church at Libice, the sunken feature placed in the central part of the transept may raise certain doubts (fig. 2). If relics were kept in this place as was Turek (1981, 12) supposed, wouldn't it be more convenient to place them in the presbytery, next to the altar? Perhaps an alternative hypothesis may be raised – that a tomb for the church's founder was built on this place, just like in Walbeck or Gernrode (Knapp 2006). And, during the stone quarrying in Modern Ages this tomb was destroyed. The other part of Libice church whose interpretation causes serious problems represents the two opposite emporae on the southern and northern ends of the transept that R. Turek supposed on the basis of the masonry negatives (fig. 2). As a direct analogy for this architectural solution he cited the St. Cyriac church at Gernrode (Turek 1988, 126). However, recent structural survey clearly shows that these emporae were built only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Imhof 2006, 317). In this connection, one must also put into consideration other objections expressed by Anežka Merhautová, who cast doubts on existence of these emporae.<sup>8</sup> If we accept the hypothesis that the Libice church was inspired by the foundation of Walbeck, a complete set of questions concerning the personality of the builder, and also the

7 On the basis of an allusion in the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg, those graves are hypothetically connected to members of the house of the Counts from Walbeck that were buried in this place during the first two decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, cf. Schuffels 2007.

8 Those pillars do not stand in alignment with the peripheral walls of the choris and the aisle, and, thus, they can hardly support the dome arches (Merhautová 1995).

nature or purpose of this building arises. Given the historically well documented links between the Slavníks and Saxony, it is possible to consider them the founders of the church built on the inner bailey at Libice. However, due to the limited possibilities of archaeological dating methods we can not state exactly which member of this family was responsible for the construction of the church. Due to the above mentioned close filiations, the first historically known ruler at Libice, Slavník can be taken into consideration. However, neither his son Adalbert nor his son Soběslav can be excluded. The later second Prague bishop Adalbert, having been educated in Magdeburg for nine years (972–981) had for sure opportunity to meet members of the local (Saxon) nobility, and, thus, gain many useful contacts. If Adalbert or his brother Soběslav can be identified as the initiators of the church construction on the inner bailey then the absence of burials in the church interior can be explained by its short life time (till the year 995), and, furthermore, the privileged place in the central part of the church would not be utilized for the same reason. Equally important is the question whether the Slavníks let themselves be inspired only by the structural form of the Walbeck church or if they adopted the whole ideological concept, as several aristocratic families in Saxony had done in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In these times, new cloisters or chapters were founded by these families, who, after the fashion of the Imperial family, later used them as their final resting places (Knapp 2006). However, on the basis of present state of exploration, it is nearly impossible to judge whether the nucleus of some ecclesiastic institution was built on the inner bailey of the Libice stronghold. This presumption can be supported by the finds of writing-kits or the discovery of two unique inscribed tomb stones (Charvát 2007). The presence of priestly charge on Libice stronghold can also be documented by one reference in St. Adalbert legend written by Bruno of Querfurt who mentioned that small Adalbert had twice run back to his parents from priests who should have educated him (Bruno, 596). Although it is highly unlikely that he would run from for example Prague that is several tens of kilometers far-away from Libice, clear evidence of existence of such a school directly at Libice is missing.

### Conclusions

On the basis of structural form comparison of the earliest phase of the Early Medieval church belonging to the collegiate chapter at Walbeck, it is possible to state that precisely this building is the direct model for the church built on the inner bailey of the Libice stronghold. The reli-

able dating of Walbeck church enables us to imply that the Libice church and its architectural form, as was documented by archaeological excavations, surely relates to the Slavník family power activities in the second part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter of Walbeck represents a private foundation of the Count of Walbeck, and the chapter church was also used as this family's cemetery. Yet, the question whether the Libice church is, in fact, only a copy of certain religious building or real manifestation of the so-called *imitatio imperii* including its spiritual dimensions as was the case of private foundations in the Early Medieval Saxony still remains unsolved.

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