
Introduction to Castleology

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For 11 years now, Czech doctoral students of History, Archaeology and related disciplines meet during the first weekend of September for an annual Summer School of Medieval Studies. The traditional location of the event being the ancient Sázava Monastery (approximately 1 hour from Prague), situated near the river of the same name. The event is organised by the Centre for Medieval Studies, a joint workplace between the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Charles University. Thus, it annually attracts several dozens of young aspiring historians and their respective teachers.

The Summer School weekend encourages lectures and seminars on various topics, ranging from theoretical musings over a medieval chronicle (or another relevant text), to a very practical application of the historical research (e.g. when discussing the heritage protection or exploration of the archaeological sites). In contrast, the evenings tend to be much more relaxed debates over a glass of wine and self-made grilled meat. This then evolves into a comfortable sing-along around a camp fire (accompanied with a guitar) until the late hours, a traditional Czech activity which is popular among students.

However, Sunday afternoon offers a different programme. Students lucky enough to stay this long (rather than rushing to catch their travel connections to the various ends of the Czech Republic), are invited for a half-day trip to the historically rich valley of the river Sázava or the surrounding regions. This year, around 25 of them explored the ruins of once mighty castle of Zlenice, learning their basics (or deepening their knowledge) of a science called Castleology, a discipline dedicated solely to the research of castles and their architecture.

Standing amongst heaps of stones, the group and their guide discuss if the entrance gate of the castle had two or more stone floors. A significant aspect that remains is a later added fireplace in the former gate house, as well as the exact direction of the paths into the core of the castle, which lie beyond the gate houses and the circular defence walls. The viewing of a deep horizontal opening in one of these walls sparks a discussion of the wooden bar that was once used here, as well as the imprints of timber on the inner palace walls. This subsequently leads to a debate regarding the former existence of bedrooms on this long since vanished floor.

It is a delight to observe students in their element like this – what might have once segregated them from their peers in primary or secondary schools has now changed dramatically in finding colleagues of similar aspirations during their university years. The Summer School of Medieval Studies encourages these equally minded future researchers of historical disciplines, from all corners of the Czech Republic to come together once a year. In doing this they are not only given the opportunity to explore new areas of the country, but are able to unite their mutual interests within a fulfilling and sociable environment. I am no doubt speaking for all participants when I voice a big thank you to all those involved in organising this special event on a regular basis.

Jennifer Nee is a student of Drama and English and American Literature at the University of Kent. She is currently studying English Literature at Charles University Prague for two semesters. She is a keen reader and writer, prompting her interest in journalism and the publishing sector. Therefore, she wanted to contribute to iForum to gain more experience in these areas, as well as believing it to be a great opportunity to involve herself in the Czech culture; such as exploring their traditional aspects of theatre, literature and cuisine amongst other things. Furthermore, she also believed the iForum to be a chance to interact with other aspiring writers and journalists.