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*Trnitá Street, Brno: horses T\_3256, T\_3257, T\_3258. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.*

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## ABSTRACT

The article presents a set of horse skeletons (11 individuals) found at three excavation sites south of the city of Brno (Czech Republic), dated to the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods. The skeletons were deliberately deposited within agricultural estates and the assemblage consisted of complete or near-complete skeletons. The osteological assemblage was therefore suitable for further analysis. Firstly, the withers height and robusticity of individual equines were determined. The majority of them were slightly taller and more slender-legged than those of earlier periods and smaller than contemporary riding and draft horses. With one exception, they were determined to be males and majority died at around 7-14 years of age. Pathological findings observed on the skull and second premolars can be most likely related to the working history of those individuals. Changes to the spinal column are in most cases rather mild or absent suggesting that the horses studied were probably not used for extensive heavy work. The relatively high incidence of other pathological changes indicates poor health care, with two individuals showing signs of a possible bacterial infection. The origin and mobility of the individuals were reconstructed by strontium analyses. With one exception, all individuals were most likely born and died in the same region.

### KEY WORDS

Zooarchaeology,  
equine archaeology,  
equine osteology,  
equine pathology,  
Medieval horse,  
Medieval Brno,  
history of horsemanship.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Les équidés dans les faubourgs d'une cité médiévale. Étude de cas : Brno (République tchèque).*

L'article présente un ensemble de squelettes des chevaux (11 individus) découverts sur trois sites au sud de la ville de Brno (République tchèque), datés de la fin de la période médiévale et du début de la période moderne. Les squelettes ont été délibérément déposés dans des domaines agricoles. L'assemblage ostéologique contient des squelettes complets, quasi-complets ou de torsos importants. Il est donc possible de l'utiliser pour une analyse approfondie. Tout d'abord, la hauteur au garrot et la robustesse des équidés ont été déterminées et il s'est avéré qu'ils étaient légèrement plus grands en taille que les équidés des périodes précédentes, mais plus petits que les chevaux de selle et de trait contemporains. Ensuite, l'âge (du poulain nouveau-né jusqu'à l'âge de 15 ans) et le sexe (à une exception, les individus adultes étaient des mâles) ont été déterminés pour chaque individu. Une analyse de l'état de santé a ensuite été effectuée en fonction des pathologies affectant les os. Tous les squelettes présentaient des modifications importantes résultant d'un travail intensif ou de conditions d'élevage inadaptées. Les résultats pathologiques observés sur le crâne et les deuxièmes prémolaires peuvent très probablement être liés à l'histoire professionnelle de ces individus. Les modifications légères ou absentes de la colonne thoraco-lombaire suggèrent que les chevaux étudiés n'ont probablement pas été utilisés pour un travail lourd et intensif. L'incidence relativement élevée des changements pathologiques observés indique plutôt des soins négligés et les os des deux individus sont marquées par les signes d'une possible infection bactérienne. L'origine et la mobilité des individus ont été reconstituées par des analyses de strontium. À une exception près, tous les individus sont probablement nés et décédés dans la même région.

### KEY WORDS

Zooarchéologie,  
archéologie équine,  
ostéologie équine,  
pathologie équine,  
cheval médiéval,  
Brno médiévale,  
histoire de l'équitation.

## INTRODUCTION

The authors present a set of horse skeletons recovered during rescue excavations realized around the medieval city of Brno (Czech Republic). Five individuals were recovered in Brno, Trnitá Street (15th-16th century), four individuals were identified in Brno, Křídlovická Street (16th-17th/18th century), and two skeletons (an adult horse and a foal) in Modřice (15th-16th century) (Fig. 1).

In the first step, the age, sex, size, and robusticity of the animals was examined. Subsequently, the size and robusticity were compared with the available data from the Czech medieval and modern sites.

In the next step, the pathological changes observed on the cranial and postcranial skeleton were recorded for each individual. These changes can be broadly characterized as those that could be directly linked to the working or riding history of the horses and those that could affect their working or riding performance. The most significant cases are presented

in this article<sup>1</sup>. Mobility and origin of the horses were also investigated *via* strontium analyses.

### ABBREVIATIONS

Bd	greatest breadth of the distal epiphysis;
GL	greatest length;
LSI	log standard index;
SD	smallest width of the diaphysis.

## CONTEXT AND MATERIAL

Brno represented a significant medieval agglomeration and was among the largest royal cities of the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia (1198-1918).

1. Detail pathology analysis represent goal of the next stage of the project. Then, we will also focus on mobility (combination of Sr and O isotopes analyses), origin and relation to other equine populations (DNA analyses). In the process of analyzing (elemental analysis and reconstruction of the production ways), there are also horseshoes found *in situ*.

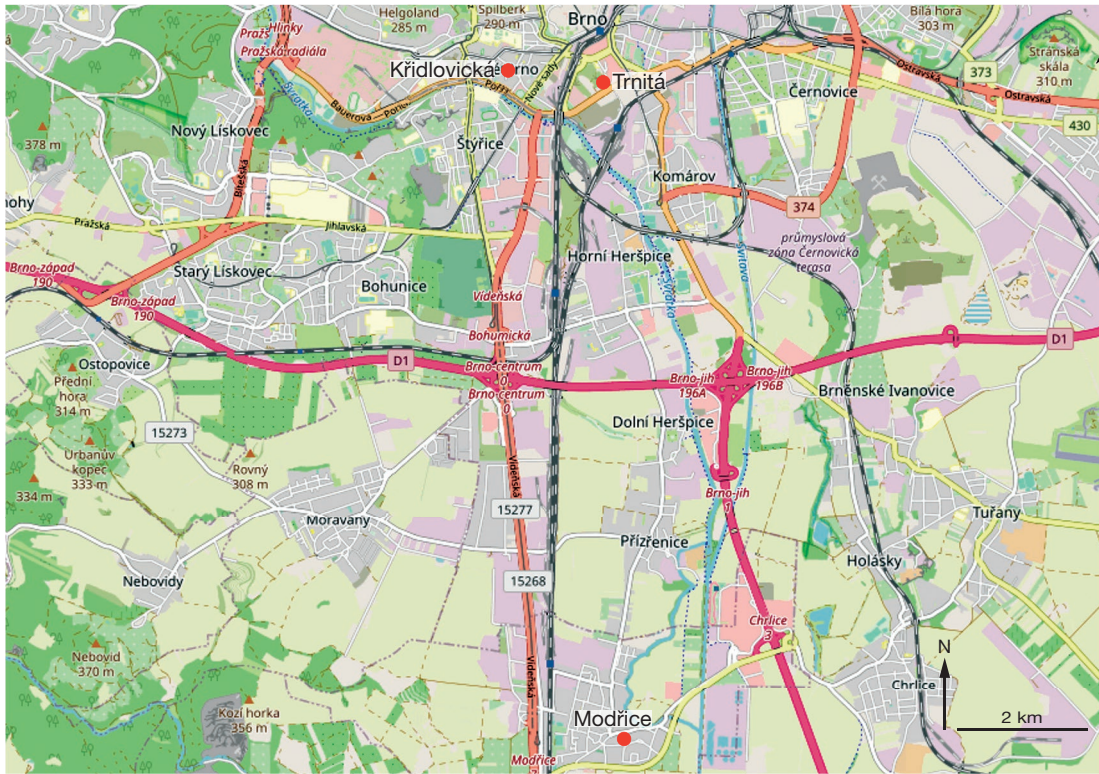


Fig. 1. — Localization of the investigated sites south of the city of Brno (Czech Republic).



Fig. 2. — Suburban villages south of Brno (Joris Hoefnagel, 1617).

Both sites analyzed here (Trnita and Křídlovická streets) represent rural settlements connected to the urban economy. Both are referred to as so-called suburban villages, where food is produced and transported to the city markets daily. These villages lay practically immediately under the city walls (Fig. 2)

(Procházka 2011; Jan 2014; Fasora & Malíř 2020). Semirural suburbs were essential to the supply and economy of the medieval urban nucleus itself (compare León & Murillo 2014).

The town of Modřice is located seven kilometers south of both locations mentioned above. It is conveniently located on

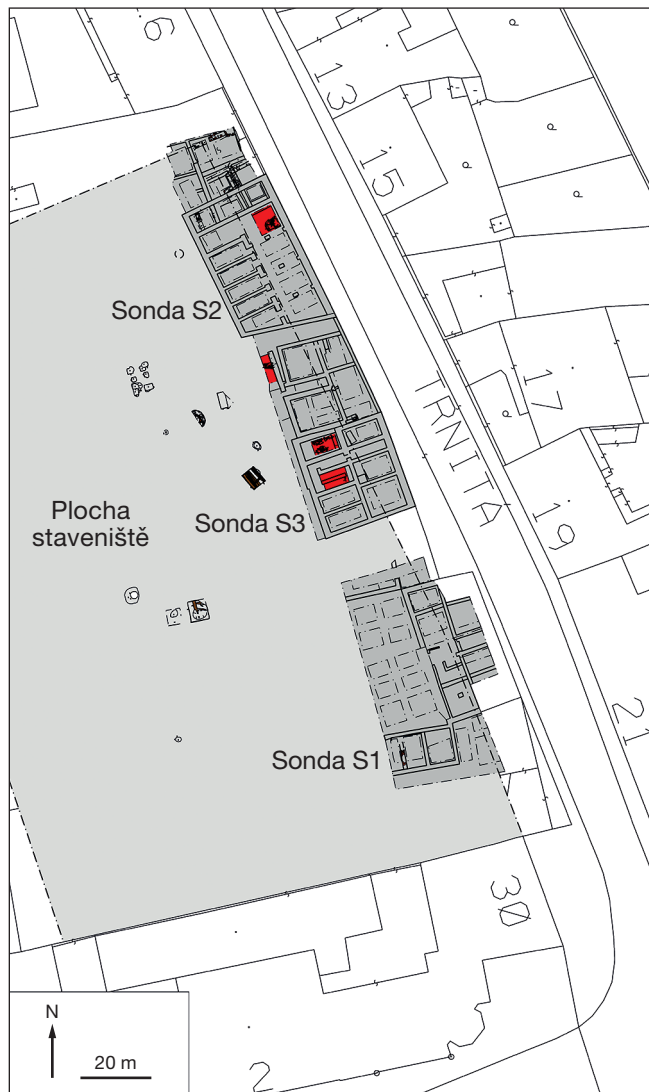


FIG. 3. — Trnitá Street, Brno: excavated plot with horse burials. Gray, excavated plot; red, trenches with horse burials. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.

the natural connection between Brno and Vienna. Modřice also belongs to the intensively populated regions of South Moravia. The first written mentions come from the period just before the middle of the 12th century, while sources from the year 1339 speak of Modřice as a town. However, the primary economic resources were agricultural production and the processing of agricultural products (Mitáček & Procházka 2017).

#### BRNO, TRNITÁ STREET

The rescue excavation, linked to planned construction, took place between July 2018 and October 2019. The street is a remnant of the historical village of the same name about 300 m beyond the city walls. The village developed gradually around a farmhouse built in the mid-13th century.

Construction affected a large part of the village, particularly three plots. Archaeological research focused primarily on the construction development of those homesteads. Skeletal re-

TABLE 1. — Brno, Trnitá: list of horse burials

Skeleton number	Preservation	Pit description (shape, size in m, fill)	Dating	Figure
T_1490	Fragmentary cranium. Lower hindlimbs were not retrieved.	Irregular, approximately oval pit, > 2 x 1.5 x 0.5 m. Grey sandy silt with a random appearance of charcoal, pebbles, and other angular stones.	Second half of the 15th and first half of the 16th century.	4
T_3164	Complete postcranial skeleton.	Almost rectangular or oval pit. > 1.4 x 0.9 x 0.4 m. Gravel mixed of cobbles, pebbles and coarse sand.	Second half of the 15th to the first half of the 16th century.	5
T_3256	Fragmentary cranium. Anterior middle and distal phalanges were not retrieved.	Unknown shape of the pit. Depth = 0.5. Grey sandy silt with a random appearance of charcoal, cobbles, pebbles and brick fragments.	Second half of the 15th and first half of the 16th century.	6
T_3257	Fragmentary cranium and axial skeleton. Limb bones except for one femur and fragments of scapula were not retrieved.	Unknown pit shape. Depth = 0.4-0.6. Grey sandy silt with frequent lumps of yellowish clay and random appearance of charcoal, cobbles, pebbles and brick fragments.	Second half of the 15th and first half of the 16th century. Object disrupted by the pit containing individual 3258.	6
T_3258	Fragmentary cranium. Cervical vertebrae 3-7 and thoracic vertebrae 3-18 were not retrieved.	Unknown pit shape. Depth = 0.8. Grey sandy silt with frequent lumps of yellowish clay and random appearance of charcoal, cobbles, pebbles and brick fragments.	Second half of the 15th to the first half of the 16th century. The context disturbing 3257.	6

mains of buried animals were discovered on all three of the plots investigated, buried in the backyards, not far from the houses (Fig. 3).

Burials can be dated to the broader period from the second half of the 15th to the first half of the 17th century, and most of them can be included in the period from the second half of the 15th to the first half of the 16th century (Table 1; Figs 4-6) (Zúbek 2022).



FIG. 4. — Trnitá Street, Brno: horse T\_1490. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.



FIG. 5. — Trnitá Street, Brno: horse T\_3164. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.



FIG. 6. — Trnitá Street, Brno: horses T\_3256, T\_3257, T\_3258. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.

#### BRNO, KŘÍDLOVICKÁ STREET

The skeletons were uncovered during the rescue excavation from April to June 2021. The name of the street is connected with the name of the village of Křídlovice, which was located in this part of today's urban agglomeration. This village was mentioned in records dated to 1314 as a satellite village connected to Brno in the 19th century. The village was located on the north bank of the Svratka river.

The area where the horses were found was already in use in the 14th-15th centuries, more intensively from the 16th to 18th centuries (Table 2; Figs 7-10).

#### MODŘICE, NÁM. SVOBODY

Two horse skeletons (Table 3; Figs 11, 12) were found during rescue archaeological excavation in the winter of 2021-2022, on a plot, Za Humny Street. A medieval homestead with a

TABLE 2. — Brno, Křídlovická street: list of horse burials.

Skeleton number	Preservation	Pit description (shape, size in m, fill)	Dating	Figure
K_800	Poorly preserved fragments of scapula, humerus, thoracic vertebrae and ribs.	Pit shape is unidentified. Grey sandy silt covering the skeleton.	Second half of the 17th and first half of the 18th century.	8
K_801	Fragmentary cranium, complete appendicular skeleton. Three horseshoes <i>in situ</i> .	Rectangular, NE-SW, > 1.4 x 0.95 x 0.6. Brown-grey soil rarely contains small ceramic fragments.	16th-17th century.	9
K_802	Complete postcranial skeleton and fragmentary cranium. Four horse shoes <i>in situ</i> .	Rectangular pit, E-W, 1.93 x 0.8 x 0.45. Grey-brown sandy silt is occasionally mixed with ceramic sherds.	16th century-first half of the 17th century.	10
K_803	Fragments of mandible. Postcranial skeleton not preserved.	Found together with K_802 (intrusion).	16th century-first half of the 17th century.	–

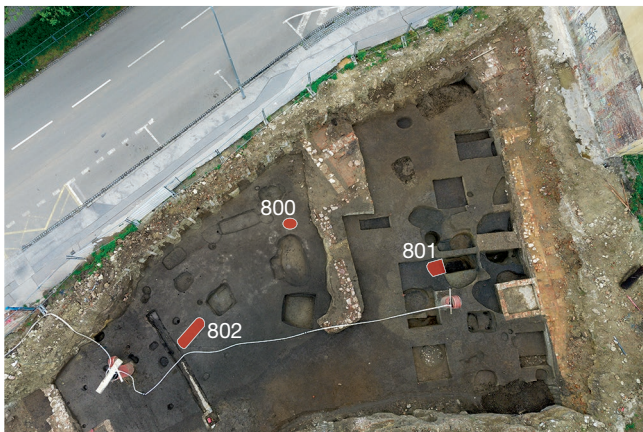


FIG. 7. — Křídlovická Street, Brno: excavated plot with horse burials. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.



FIG. 9. — Křídlovická Street, Brno: horse K\_801. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.



FIG. 8. — Křídlovická Street, Brno: horse K\_800. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.

house facing Náměstí Republiky square and a yard in the back section of the plot were explored. Various types of production and processing activities (kilns, furnaces, cellars, etc.) dated to a period spanning from the 14th century to the present were recorded in the yard. A number of buried farm animals were found in the rear tract itself.

## OSTEOLOGICAL METHODS

The individuals were identified as horses by following the macroscopic criteria described in Hanot & Bochaton (2018). Horse skeletons were sexed based on the presence of canine teeth in male horses and pelvis shape (Sisson 1914; Daugnora & Thomas 2005). However, in some cases, the sex of the animal could not be determined due to missing bones.

The age of the horses was estimated based on tooth eruption, wear of the incisors, the crown height of the premolars/molars, and epiphyseal fusion (Silver 1969; Levine 1982; Nacarino-Meneses *et al.* 2016).

Measurements of the long bones were taken according to international standards described in Von den Driesch (1976). Size differences in the long bones of each specimen were as-





FIG. 10. — Křídlovická Street, Brno: horse K\_802. Courtesy of Archaia Brno.

TABLE 3. — Modřice: list of horse burials

Skeleton Number	Preservation	Pit description	Dating	Figure
M_802	Postcranial skeleton and seven loose teeth (3 x I1-3, 1 x C, 2 x upper P2, 1 x upper P3). Four horse shoes <i>in situ</i> .	Oval.	15th-16th century.	12
M_803	Complete skeleton of a newborn foal.	Oval.	15th-16th century.	12

sessed using Log Standard Index (Simpson *et al.* 1960). LSI allows the comparison of different measurements by using the following formula:  $LSI = \log(x/m)$ , where  $x$  represents the individual measurement and  $m$  represents the standard value, which in this case derives from the average size of *Equus hemionus* Pallas, 1775 onager. *Equus hemionus* onager is one of the best-running adapted equids. A comparison of horses from Brno with the Onager standard can therefore provide insights into their adaptation to running. In addition, average proportions of limb bones of the modern Arab horses (*Equus caballus* Linnaeus, 1758), Przewalski's (*Equus caballus przewalskii* Poliakov, 1881), and draft horses were added as a reference sample (Eisenmann 2009).

Withers heights and robusticity of horses from Brno were compared with the available data from the medieval and modern contexts in Czechia (Table 4). Withers heights were estimated from Greatest Length measurements of long bones following May (1985). Robusticity was examined through metrical analysis of metapodials namely the ratios between GL and the smallest width of the diaphysis and greatest breadth of the distal epiphysis (Brauner 1916; Ameen *et al.* 2021). The modern samples for Arab (Clutton-Brock & Burleigh 1979), Przewalski's, and draft horses (Eisenmann & Beckouche 1986) were added as reference sample.

Ossification of ligaments between metapodials and in the area of nuchal ligament attachment site was scored based on criteria described in Bendrey (2007a, 2008). To determine possible bit wear, the extent of enamel/dentine exposure was examined and measured following Bendrey (2007b). Remaining pathological changes were evaluated based on comparison with relevant archaeological and veterinary literature (e.g., Baker & Brothwell 1980; Levine *et al.* 2005; Bartosiewicz & Gál 2013; Komosa *et al.* 2018).

Table 5 provides a summary of withers heights, robusticity, age, and sex of horses from Brno. Individual measurements, withers heights, and robusticity ratios used in the comparison are stored within the Pandora interference and are freely available (Smíšek *et al.* 2023-2024).

## RESULTS OF OSTEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

### AGE AND SEX

The youngest individual (Table 5; Fig. 12) of the dataset is a newborn foal M\_803 from Modřice. This specimen has the third deciduous incisors still inside alveoli, which suggests an age of less than three weeks (Nacarino-Meneses *et al.* 2016: 280, fig. 1). In this case the possibility can not be excluded

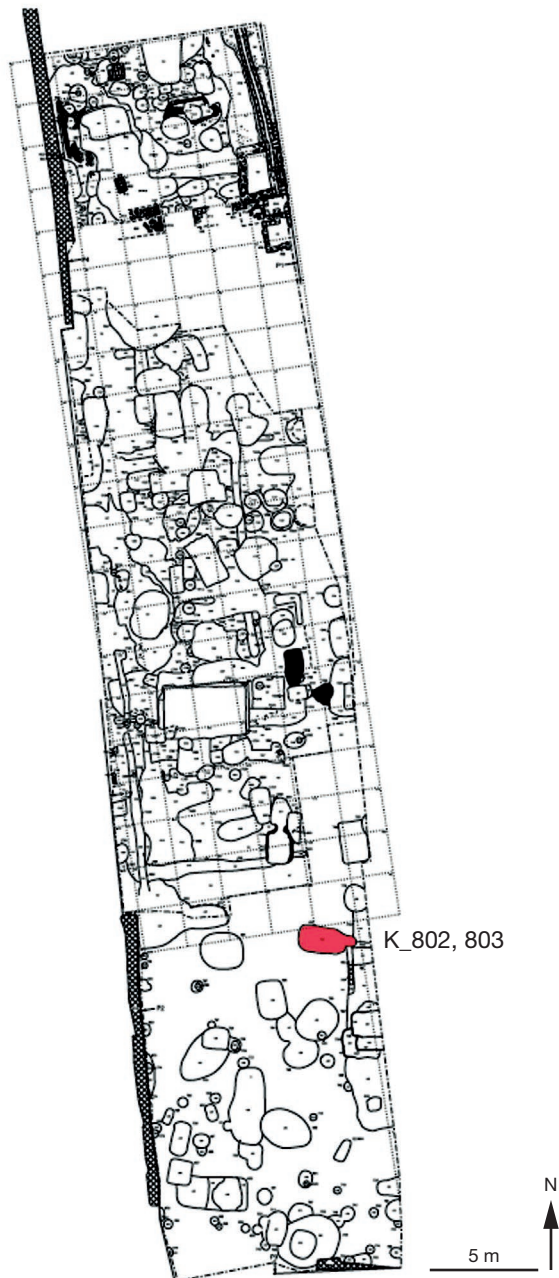


FIG. 11. — Modřice: excavated plot. Courtesy of the Institute for Archaeological Heritage, Brno.

that this animal was dead prior its birth. No teeth were available for age determination of horse K\_800, but unfused proximal humerus suggests an age of less than three to three and a half years. Only the postcranial skeleton was available for the age estimation of horse T\_3164. In this case, fused vertebral bodies suggest an age of more than five years. Two heavily worn deciduous premolars (dP3, dP4) coming from the horse K\_801 indicate an age of approximately three to four years. The ages of the rest of the adult individuals were determined based on incisor wear and the crown height of premolars/molars. One horse appears to be slightly younger, with age estimated around seven to eight years, while the



FIG. 12. — Modřice: horses M\_802, M\_803.

TABLE 4. — Sites used in the comparison of withers height (all sites) and robusticity (excluding Vyšehrad). Abbreviation: **NMLB**, number of measured long bones included in this study.

Site Number	Site	Period	NMLB	Source of osteometric data
1	Brno-Křídlovická	Early Modern	23	Present study
2	Brno-Trnitá	Late Medieval – Early Modern	55	Present study
3	Brno-Modřice	Late Medieval – Early Modern	14	Present study
4	Mikulčice	Early Medieval	316	Chrzanowska & Krupka 2003
5	Nemilany	Early Medieval	20	Dreslerová 2014
6	Pohansko	Early Medieval	27	Kratochvíl 1969; Chrzanowska & Krupka 2003; Dreslerová 2018
7	Stará Boleslav	Early Medieval	5	Kysely 2003
8	Vyšehrad	Early Medieval	1	Kysely 2004
9	Podolí	Migration	29	Ambros & Müller 1980
10	Záluží	Migration	6	Ambros & Müller 1980
11	Zdice	Modern	25	Diedrich 2017

rest of the specimens fall in the approximate range of nine to fourteen years.

The sex of the individuals M\_803, K\_800, K\_801, and K\_803 could not be determined due to the absence of diagnostic elements. Horse T\_3258 was determined as female based on the absence of canines and the shape of the pelvis, while the remaining individuals were determined as males.

#### PROPORTIONS OF THE LIMB BONES

Late Medieval – Early Modern horses T\_3256, T\_3258, and T\_3164 differ most significantly from the Onager standard (Fig. 13). Their metapodials are considerably shorter relative to the proximal limb bones, and the shapes of the LSI curves resemble most modern draft horses although all come from smaller individuals. The differences in size between metapodials and upper limb bones seem to be less pronounced in the rest of the Late Medieval – Early Modern specimens from Trnitá Street, Modřice, as well as the Early Modern Křídlovická Street individuals, where the overall shape of the curves is closer to Arabs and Przewalski's horses, which are well adapted to intensive running in open landscapes.

TABLE 5. — Summary table providing information on dating, mean withers height, robusticity ratios, sex, and age of the horses from Brno. Abbreviations: **Bd**, greatest breadth of the distal epiphysis; **GL**, greatest length; **MC**, metacarpal; **MT**, metatarsal; **SD**, smallest width of the diaphysis; **WH**, withers height.

ID	Site	Century	Number of measured long bones	WH mean		MC SD/GL x 100		MT SD/GL x 100		MC Bd/GL x 100		MT Bd/GL x 100		Sex	Age (years)
				(cm)	WH (SD)										
T_1490	Brno-Trnítá	15-16	10	144.7	1.2	14.8	—	21.6	—	M	10-13				
T_3256	Brno-Trnítá	15-16	15	137.3	1.1	16.2	12.8	22.1	18.2	M	10-11				
T_3257	Brno-Trnítá	15-16	1	142.5	—	—	—	—	—	F	7-8				
T_3258	Brno-Trnítá	15-16	15	147	3.2	14.5	11.9	22.7	17.6	M	9-11				
T_3164	Brno-Trnítá	15-16	14	145.5	3.5	14.4	11.6	21.8	18.6	M	> 5				
M_802	Brno-Modřice	15-16	14	141.9	3.6	14.2	11.4	21.4	17.6	M	12-14				
M_803	Brno-Modřice	15-16	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	?	newborn				
K_800	Brno-Křídlovická	17-18	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	?	< 3-3.5				
K_801	Brno-Křídlovická	16-17	9	143.7	2.7	14	10.9	20.7	17.1	?	3-4				
K_802	Brno-Křídlovická	16-17	12 (14)	146.5	3.5	13.6	11.5	20.9	17.8	M	9-11				
K_803	Brno-Křídlovická	16-17	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	?	9-12				

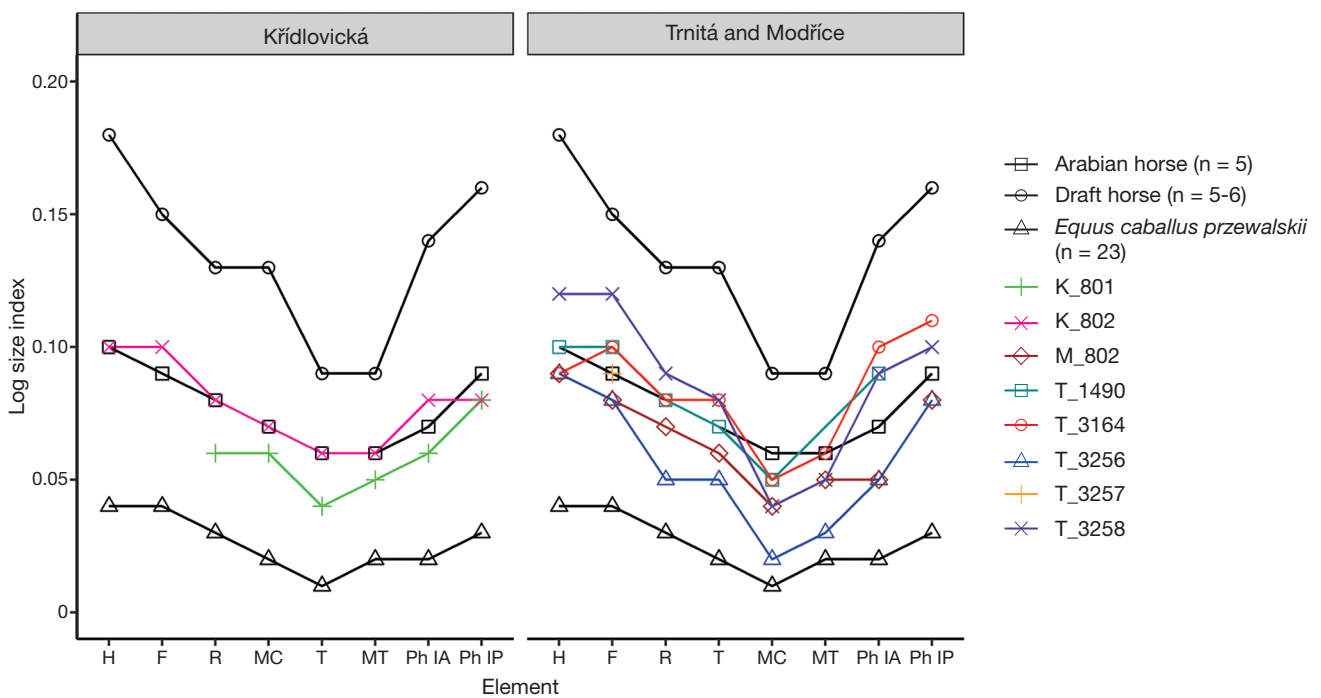


FIG. 13. — Comparison of the LSI distribution of horses from Brno and modern specimens of the Arabian horse *Equus caballus* Linnaeus, 1758, draft horse and *Equus caballus przewalskii* Poliakov, 1881 calculated from the greatest length (GL) of long bones and standard set of values derived from the average size of *Equus hemionus* Pallas, 1775 onager. Abbreviations: F, femur; H, humerus; MC, metacarpus; MT, metatarsus; Ph IA, anterior first phalanx; Ph IP, posterior first phalanx; R, radius; T, tibia.

WITHERS HEIGHT

The Late Medieval – Early Modern horses (Table 6) from Trnítá Street and Modřice vary in the mean withers’ height from 137.3 to 147 cm. The two individuals from Early Modern Křídlovická Street display average withers heights of 143.7 cm and 146.5 cm respectively. Modern mining horses from Zdice have an average wither height of 146.6 cm and appear to be slightly taller than horses from Late Medieval – Early Modern Brno. On the other hand, the height at the withers of Zdice horses is quite variable ( $\pm 1 \sigma = 8$ ) with the smallest individual reaching an average of 135.4 cm and the largest 161.3 cm respectively. Horses from the Early Medieval period vary in wither height from 120.9 to 149.5 cm with an average of 136.5 cm. Although approximately 16 sites with individual

horse burials are known from the Early Medieval period in the territory of the Czech Republic, only a fraction of them have been investigated by zooarchaeologists (Dreslerová 2020). Therefore, the majority of the bones from the Early Medieval period used in the comparison come from the settlement’s debris and not from individual burials so in most cases it is not possible to examine the relationships between individual bones in greater detail. The single horse burials from Mikulčice and Pohansko have average withers heights of 141.6 and 137.6 cm, and two individuals from Nemilany have 133.8 and 142.5 cm respectively.

Horses from the Migration period also appear to be slightly smaller with an average withers’ height of 135.4 cm. The available sample is limited to only seven partially preserved

TABLE 6. — Comparison of the wither's height of horses from Brno with the Czech Medieval and Modern archaeological sites. Estimated withers height is given for each element together with mean withers height and standard deviation ( $\pm 1\sigma$ ). Abbreviations: **F**, femur; **H**, humerus; **MC**, metacarpus; **MT**, metatarsus; **R**, radius; **T**, tibia.

ID	Period	H	F	R	T	MC	MT	Number of		
								Measurements	Mean	$\pm 1\sigma$
T_1490	Late Medieval – Early Modern	142	144.2-145.3	144.7-145.1	146	145.2	–	8	144.7	1.2
T_3256	Late Medieval – Early Modern	136.9-137.3	137.6	136.1-136.5	137.7-138.5	136.1	138.3-139.4	11	137.3	1.1
T_3257	Late Medieval – Early Modern	–	142.5	–	–	–	–	1	142.5	–
T_3258	Late Medieval – Early Modern	147-148	153	146.8-147.2	150	142.2	145.1-146.2	11	147	3.2
T_3164	Late Medieval – Early Modern	138.7	143.9-144.6	142-143.9	147.2	147.1	149.8-150.4	10	145.5	3.5
M_802	Late Medieval – Early Modern	136.4-136.9	140	141.8	141.7-142.1	142.8-143.4	147.2	10	141.9	3.6
K_801	Early Modern	–	–	139.4	141.7	144-144.6	146.2	6	143.7	2.7
K_802	Early Modern	141-142	146.3	c. 144.7-145.5	145.6	148.3-148.9	149.8-150.4	8 (10)	146.5	3.5
	Modern	136.4-145.7	138-148.8	135.3-166.5	153.9-156.3	131.8-156.2	146.7-149.3	25	146.6	8
	Late Medieval – Early Modern	136.4-148	137.6-153	136.1-147.2	137.7-150	136.1-148.9	138.3-150.4	65	143.6	4.3
	Early Medieval Migration	130.4-138.3	131.9-142.9	122-149	129.5-148.6	123.3-149.5	120.9-146.4	226	136.5	5.8
		128.5-134.6	127.4	135.2-138.1	131.4-139.3	132.4-137.9	135.7-144.1	25	135.4	3.6

individuals from the Brno-Podolí with the largest specimen reaching an average of 139 cm in withers and a single skeleton from Záluží with an average withers' height of 132.3 cm. In general, it seems that the average withers' height of horses gradually increased especially from the Late Medieval – Early Modern period onwards. Increased height in withers has been recently noted for post-Medieval horses from England, and Late Medieval horses from Lithuania (Ameen *et al.* 2021; Piličiauskienė *et al.* 2022).

However, in the case of horses from Czech sites, the non-homogeneous representation of sample sizes for the individual periods must be taken into account. New data may thus further modify our observations.

#### ROBUSTICITY

When considering the ratio (Fig. 14) between the smallest width of the diaphysis and the greatest length of the metapodials ( $SD/GL*100$ ) the specimen T\_3256 appears to be the most robust and is comparable in terms of robusticity to the most massive individuals from the Migration (metacarpals), and Early Medieval period (metatarsals). In contrast, the increased length of the metapodials of remaining individuals from Brno does not seem to be reflected in their greater robustness, with the horses from Křídlovická Street (K\_801, K\_802) appearing as the most gracile. This observation is somewhat surprising, considering that the horses from Brno came from rural estates. It seems highly likely that these horses were utilized as working animals and, if so, perhaps rather more robust individuals should be expected.

A similar pattern is present when looking at the ratio (Fig. 15) between the distal breadth and the greatest length of the metapodials ( $Bd/GL*100$ ). The horses from Brno do not appear to be considerably more robust compared to horses of Migration and Early Medieval periods. Comparison with the Modern mining horses from Zdice is interesting.

Horses from Zdice were hard working animals from the area of iron ore mines. Based on cranial morphology Diedrich identified “crossbreeds” of small to medium-sized mining horses and large-sized working horses (Diedrich 2017). The robusticity of these individuals is variable, with the one outlier, interpreted as a medium-sized mining horse (Sk 6), being significantly more robust, and another, interpreted as a large working horse (Sk 4), being considerably more gracile, compared with other mining horses from Zdice and Czech sites overall. The differences in robusticity may possibly be related to animal utilization or “breed” morphology (Ameen *et al.* 2021), although the latter seems more likely given the fact that the horses from Zdice were most likely used for heavy work and despite that display relatively great variability in robusticity.

Based on these observations, it seems that the robusticity of the horses from Brno was not of particular importance to their owners. Except for T\_3256 (in terms of shaft width) all remaining horses from Brno appear as rather moderately robust to gracile.

#### PRELIMINARY PATHOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

The study of isolated pathologies can be misleading, as pathological findings can also occur in non-working animals and may be related to ageing, the life history of the individual or be hereditary (e.g., Baker & Brothwell 1980; Bartosiewicz & Gál 2013). When assessing pathologies, it is therefore important to compare individual findings within the skeleton of an individual in order to make a comprehensive diagnosis. Therefore, the following sections describe pathological findings and their possible causes observed on the skull, dentition, thoracolumbar column, and appendicular skeleton with the aim of providing as complete information as possible about the condition of each horse from Brno.

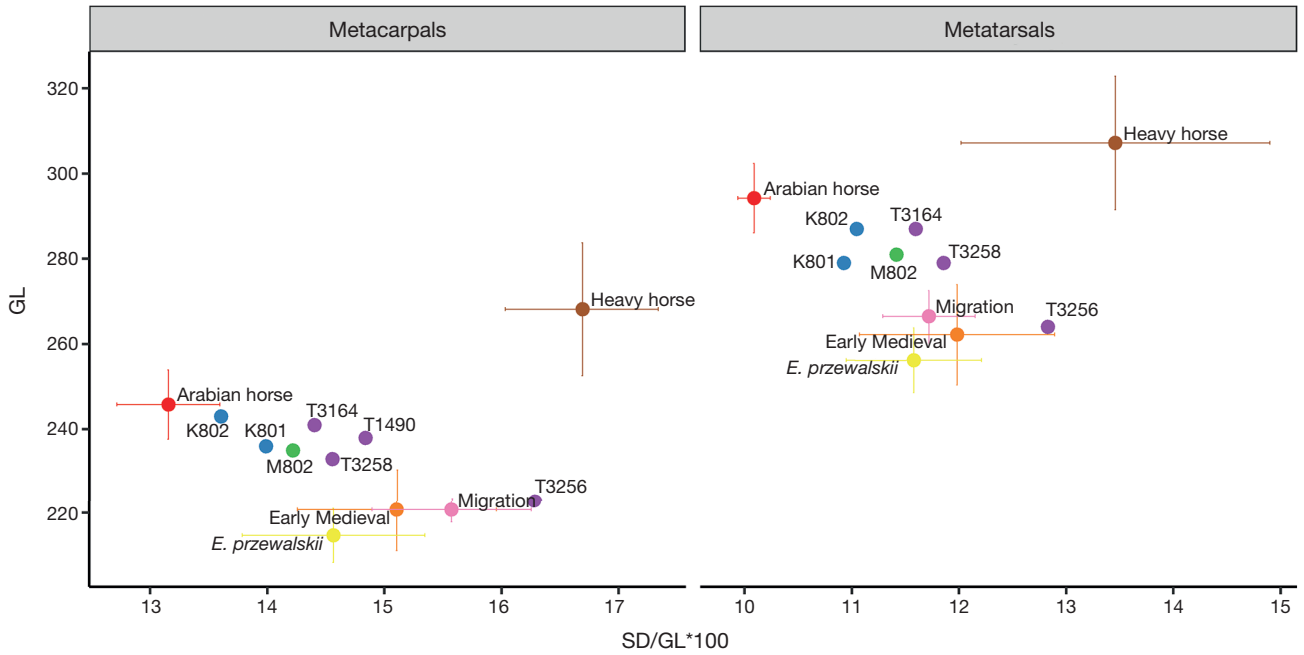


FIG. 14. — Robusticity Comparison of the ratio of measurements  $SD/GL*100$  on horse metacarpals (left) and metatarsals (right) from Brno with the mean ratios of horses from Czech Medieval sites and modern specimens of Arabian horse, heavy horse, and *Equus caballus przewalskii* Poliakov, 1881. Abbreviations: **GL**, greatest length; **SD**, smallest width of the diaphysis.

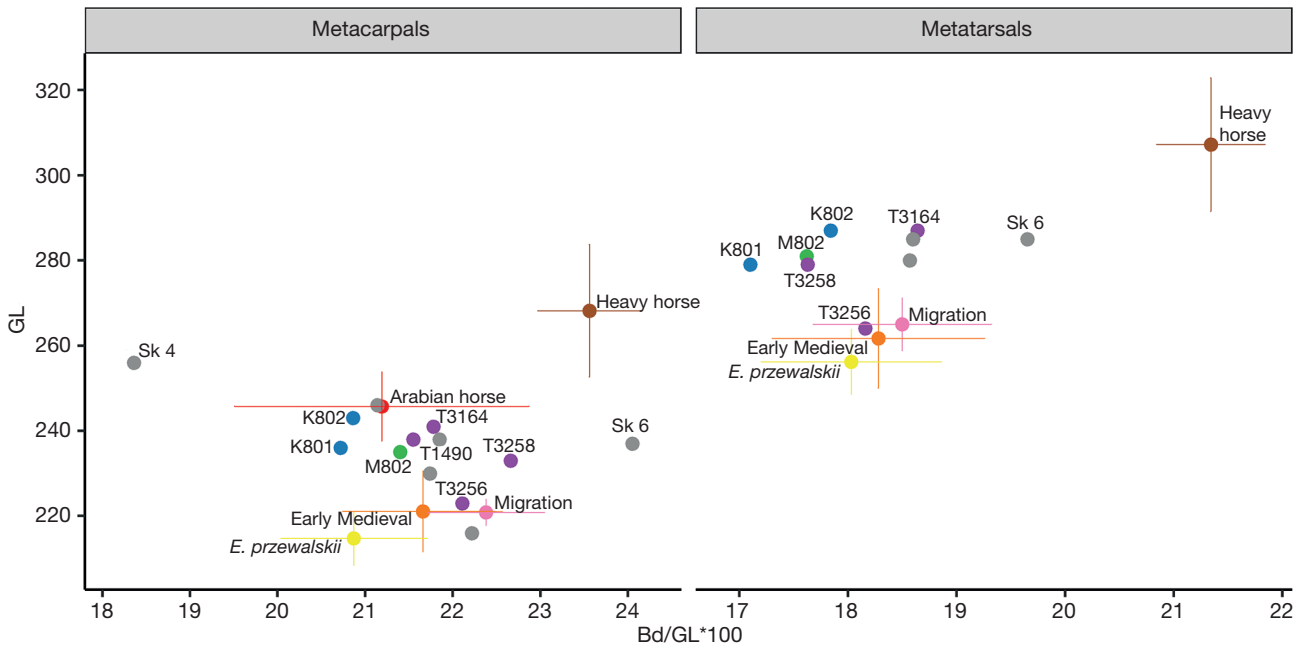


FIG. 15. — Comparison of the ratio of measurements  $Bd/GL*100$  on horse metacarpals (left) and metatarsals (right) from Brno and Zdice (grey points) with the mean ratios of horses from Czech Medieval sites and modern specimens of Arabian horse, heavy horse, and *Equus caballus przewalskii* Poliakov, 1881. Abbreviations: **Bd**, greatest breadth of the distal epiphysis; **GL**, greatest length.

*Skull and dentition*

Assessing skull pathologies in this study is problematic because most of the skulls were preserved in fragmentary form (T\_1490, T\_3256, T\_3257, T\_3258, K\_801, K\_802) or are virtually absent (T\_3164, K\_800, M\_802).

Ossification of the nuchal ligament attachment site (Fig. 16A-C) could be examined in three cases. Observable

changes in this region are mild in horse T\_3256 (score 1/2) while being significantly more pronounced in horses T\_1490 (score 5) and T\_3258 (score 4). Although the ossification of the nuchal ligament may occur in captive unworked animals (Bendrey 2008), a score of three or higher seems to be relatively uncommon in feral horses, while being more frequent in driven and ridden horses



FIG. 16. — **A**, Horse T\_3256: Ossification of the nuchal ligament attachment site (score 1/2); **B**, horse T\_3258: ossification of the nuchal ligament attachment site (score 4/4); **C**, horse T\_1490: ossification of the nuchal ligament attachment site (score 5/5). Scale bars: 5 cm.

TABLE 7. — Measurements of enamel dentine exposure and recorded presence/absence of occlusal bevel. Abbreviations: **LDH**, height of enamel/dentine exposure; **LDW**, Enamel dentine exposure at widest point.

ID	LDH (Left)	LDW (Left)	LDH (Right)	LDW (Right)	Profile (bevel)
T_1490	1.93	3.01	No	No	Yes
T_3256	3.64	1.82	12.16	3.62	No
T_3257	13.27	5.8	15.11	5.54	No
T_3258	9.29	3.58	10.81	6.22	No
T_3164	—	—	—	—	—
K_800	—	—	—	—	—
K_801	—	—	—	—	—
K_802	13.13	6.16	10.27	7.1	No
M_802	—	—	—	—	—

(Taylor *et al.* 2015). The pronounced ossification in individuals T\_1490 and T\_3258 may thus indicate their utilization as working animals.

Evidence for the anterior enamel/dentin exposure of more than five millimeters (Table 7) was found in horses T\_3256, T\_3257, T\_3258, and K\_802 (Fig. 17). In addition, horse T\_3256 exhibits roughening of the bone in the region of the diastema, while specimen T\_1490 lacks such evidence but a significant occlusal bevel is present on both lower and upper P2s (Fig. 18).

These observations are suggestive of the use of metal bits (Bendrey 2007b).

The skull of T\_3256 adds further evidence for the possible use of a bridle or halter. Pitting (Fig. 19) is present in the region of maxillary bone and proliferative periosteal lesions on mandibular bone (Fig. 20). Such lesions might be the result of chronic irritation/trauma or might have been caused by an infection (Makowiecki *et al.* 2022). In addition, two grooves are present along the dorso-medial border of incisive bone (Fig. 21). The grooves observed on the nasal process are likely related to heavy exertion and hypertrophy of the muscles involved in nasal dilation (Pérez & Martin 2001; Taylor *et al.* 2015; Taylor & Tuvshinjargal 2018).

#### Thoracolumbar region

Pathologies observed in the region of the thoracolumbar spine can be classified as vertebral fusion, overriding/impingement of the dorsal spinous processes, and bone proliferations on/or around articular processes. Remaining vertebral abnormalities (e.g., mild bony thickening of



FIG. 17. — Enamel/dentine exposure on the second premolar of the horse T\_3257. Scale bar: 1 cm.

the articular processes), are similar to those observed on Exmoor ponies (Levine *et al.* 2005) and seem to be rather insignificant.

Spinal fusion of the last two lumbar vertebrae (L5 to L6 and in one case L4 to L5) is present in horses T\_3256, T\_3164, K\_802, M\_802. Two other individuals (T\_1490, T\_3258) with the preserved lumbar spine, also manifest signs of the beginning of spinal fusion of the last two lumbar vertebrae on the transverse processes. Thoracic vertebral fusion (T14 to T16) was identified only in horse T\_3256 (Fig. 22). This individual has fused vertebral arches and spinous processes, which may be consistent with spondylosis ankylopoetica



FIG. 18. — Occlusal bevel on second premolars of the horse T\_1490. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 19. — Pitting on the maxillary bone of the horse T\_3256. Scale bar: 5 cm.

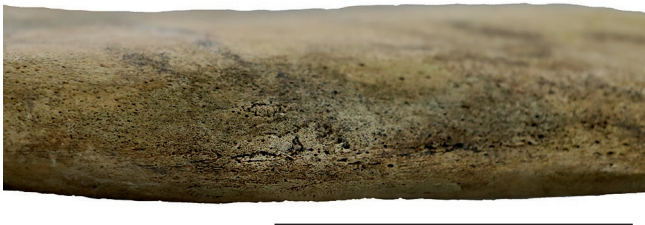


FIG. 20. — Proliferative periosteal lesions on the mandibular bone of the horse T\_3256. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 21. — Horse T\_3256: medial groove formation on the right nasal process of the incisive bone. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 22. — Horse T\_3256: fused vertebral arches and spinous processes of thoracic vertebrae 14-16. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 23. — Horse M\_802: bone proliferations on the posterior articular process of thoracic vertebra 18. Scale bar: 5 cm.

(Bartosiewicz & Bartosiewicz 2002). Bone proliferations (Fig. 23) are present in specimens T\_3256 (T17 to L2 and M\_802 (T18 to T19). These lesions are suggestive of osteoarthritis of the facet joints (Girodroux *et al.* 2009; Diedrich 2017).

In horses, the fusion between the last lumbar vertebrae can occur naturally (Henson 2009; Bartosiewicz & Gál 2013). On the other hand, the fusion of thoracic vertebrae and bone proliferations (T\_3256, M\_802), especially those located caudally, are in zooarchaeological literature usually associated with riding (Müller 1985; Levine 1999; Li *et al.* 2020) and have also been documented in draught animals (Lignereux & Bouet 2015; Diedrich 2017).



FIG. 24. — Horse T\_3256: overriding/impingement of dorsal spinous processes of thoracic vertebrae 9-12. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 25. — Horse T\_1490: overriding/impingement of dorsal spinous processes of thoracic vertebrae 11-15 and the lesions on the lateral portion of spinous processes of thoracic vertebrae 11-12. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 26. — Horse T\_1490: lesion on the dorsal spinous process of the thoracic vertebra 10. Scale bar: 5 cm.

TABLE 8. — Recorded scores for the ossification of interosseous ligaments between metapodials of the horses from Brno.

ID	Age (years)	Left metacarpal		Right metacarpal		Left metatarsal		Right metatarsal	
		II-III	III-IV	II-III	III-IV	II-III	III-IV	II-III	III-IV
T_1490	10-13	0	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
T_3256	10-11	2	1b	1b	1b	0	0	0	0
T_3257	7-8	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
T_3258	9-11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T_3164	>5	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
M_802	12-14	2	1b	2	2	0	2	0	1b
K_800	<3-3.5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
K_801	3-4	1c	1c	1c	0	0	0	0	0
K_802	9-11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Overriding/impingement of dorsal spinous processes (Figs 24, 25) was identified in specimens T\_1490 (T5 to T15), T\_3256 (T5 to T6, T9 to T12, L4 to L5), and M\_802 (T4 to T11, T13 to T14). In addition, horse M\_802 also has fused spinous processes of the sacrum.

Overriding/impingement of dorsal spinous processes is usually associated with riding (Haussler 2018; Li *et al.* 2020) but has been also recorded in draught animals (Diedrich 2017) and in extinct wild horses, which most likely never had additional weight placed on their backs. In the wild population, the incidence is, however, relatively low (6 % overall with only 0.3 % confirmed by radiology) (Klide 1989). In comparison, the incidence of lesions on dorsal spinous processes of horses from Brno (T\_1490, T\_3256, M\_802; Fig. 26) varies between 28-37 %.

Other factors such as aging could contribute to recorded pathological changes as well (Clayton & Stubbs 2016) but, given the relatively young age of horses from Brno, it seems likely that observed vertebral abnormalities in horses T\_1490, and T\_3256 can be related to repetitive strain associated with the use of these animals by humans. The same might be true for the individual M\_802, however in this case it cannot be ruled out that observed changes in the thoracolumbar region could be associated with the severity of pathological findings observed on the hind limbs (see sections Metapodials, Central and third tarsals, Navicular Bones, Distal phalanges, and Discussion) (Alvarez Gomez *et al.* 2008; Mayaki *et al.* 2019). It is also worth noting that the other two individuals with preserved thoracolumbar spine (horses T\_3164, and K\_802) do not exhibit any significant pathological changes.

#### Appendicular skeleton

Appendicular skeleton abnormalities were observed on metapodials, central and third tarsal bone, proximal phalanges, navicular bone, and distal phalanges.

#### Metapodials

Ossification of interosseous ligaments (so-called “splints”) between metacarpal bones (Table 8; Fig. 27) was observed on horses T\_3256, T\_3164, M\_802, and K\_801, while on the metatarsal bones was found only on specimens T\_3164, and M\_802. In the





FIG. 27. — Horse T\_3256: ossification of the interosseous ligaments (score 2) on the medial side of the left metacarpal bone. Scale bar: 5 cm.

case of metacarpals, the pathology is more common and developed on the medial side, while metatarsals show no discernible pattern. Ossification between the metapodials could lead to equine lameness (Bertone 2011). Numerous factors such as trauma and/or movement on hard surfaces, as well as conformational faults, could contribute to this condition (Marković *et al.* 2015). It was described as the most prevalent pathological finding in the 280 archaeological skeletons from Lithuania among horses from four to 16 years of age. Similar to the Brno horses, it was more common in metacarpals than metatarsals and appears to have begun on the medial side (Daugnora & Thomas 2005). The same pattern was noted for the modern captive specimens of *E. Przewalskii* (Bendrey 2007a).

#### Central and third tarsals

Spavin, osteoarthritis of the distal intertarsal and tarsometatarsal joints (Fig. 28) is present in horse M\_802. This individual exhibits severe exostoses along the left central and third tarsals, which are fused. In individual K\_802, bone proliferations (Fig. 29) were observed around the proximal articular surface of the third (left and right) tarsal bone and a small cavity is present on the proximal articular surface of the left third tarsal. Spavin is known from wild fossil horses (Rooney 1997). It usually causes only a relatively mild degree of lameness and if the condition is not too extensive the joint will ankylose, and the animal may be used for slow work (Baker & Brothwell 1980). In addition, bony reactions on corresponding articular surfaces of central and third tarsal bones (Fig. 30) were observed in individuals T\_3256, T\_3258, T\_3164, and K\_801. A similar pathological condition was noted in modern mining horses from Zdice (Diedrich 2017), and Galo-Roman horses from Iwuy (Lignereux & Bouet 2015).

#### Proximal phalanges

Changes in the form of bilateral enthesopathy at the point of insertion of collateral ligaments (Fig. 31) were observed on proximal phalanges. Those changes are rather mild/moderate, except for horse T\_3258, which displays severe exostoses on posterior proximal phalanges that extend toward the proximal end, and on the left phalanx, the exostoses are also present on the dorsal aspect of the distal end.

Enthesophytes were observed on the proximal phalanges of wild fossil horses, which indicates that this is a naturally oc-



FIG. 28. — Horse M\_802: new bone formation along the left central and third tarsal bones and fusion of corresponding articular surfaces (spavin). Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 29. — Horse K\_802: bone proliferation and cavity on the third tarsal bone. Scale bar: 5 cm.

curing phenomenon (Rooney 1997), although this condition might also be possibly exacerbated by work (Bendrey 2007c; Marković *et al.* 2014, 2015; Albizuri *et al.* 2019).

#### Navicular bones

Both posterior navicular bones (Fig. 32) of horse M\_802 are partly degraded. Widened vascular channels were observed in individuals M\_802, T\_3256, and T\_3258 (Fig. 33). One posterior navicular bone of individual T\_3258 has an irregular shape and surface with severe exostoses. Observed degenerative changes are indicative of navicular syndrome (podotrochlosis) (Komosa *et al.* 2018), which usually affects the forelimbs, but was also recorded in the hindlimbs of modern horses (Meijer & Rijkenhuizen 1999). Navicular syndrome is often associated with lameness. However, it is rarely reported in zooarchaeological literature since the navicular bones are usually not recovered during excavations (Baker & Brothwell 1980).



FIG. 30. — Horse K\_801: bony reactions on corresponding articular surfaces of central and third tarsal bone. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 31. — Horse T\_3256: ossification of collateral ligaments on the lateral side of left posterior proximal phalanx. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 32. — Degraded posterior navicular bone of the horse M\_802 (top). Severe exostoses on the posterior navicular bone of the horse K\_3258 (bottom). Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 33. — Widening of the vascular channels observed on the navicular bones. From the top normal navicular bone of the horse K\_802, and widened vascular channels in horses M\_802, T\_3258, T\_3256. Scale bar: 5 cm.

### *Distal phalanges*

Anterior distal phalanges of horse T\_3256 (Figs 34; 35) manifest increased porosity of bone on the parietal surface, thinned bone around the rim, and roughened new bone on the palmar process



FIG. 34. — Distal phalanges (from the top) of the horses T\_3164, T\_3256, and M\_802. Scale bar 5 cm.

and parietal surface. Specimen T\_3164 (Fig. 34) exhibits thinning of the bone around the rim of the solar surface, increased porosity, and roughened new bone on palmar processes. Both posterior distal phalanges of individual M\_802 (Figs 34, 36) show severe loss of bone mass. Those pathological findings might be associated with chronic laminitis (Dyson 2011; Engiles *et al.* 2015; Bowker 2017). Laminitis is often thought to be caused by inflammatory processes, but most veterinary cases seem to be associated with pasture grazing, obesity, and insulin resistance (Johnson *et al.* 2010). Laminitis was noted in Byzantine (Onar *et al.* 2012) as well as in pre-domestic fossil horses (Walleit 2013).

#### T\_3258

The pathological findings in horse T\_3258 stand out from the others. In addition to proximal posterior phalanges and navicu-



FIG. 35. — Horse T\_3256: increased porosity and the new roughened bone on the palmar process and parietal surface of the posterior distal phalanx. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 36. — Horse M\_802: degraded posterior distal phalanx. Scale bar: 5 cm.

lar bone, exostoses (Figs 37–41) are present on the left posterior middle phalanx (dorsal surface), left calcaneus (tuber calcanei), both tibiae (left: tuberosity, right: pronounced ossification in the area of muscular lines), both femurs (both: trochanter major, left: third trochanter), right radius (ridge of oblique groove), and right humerus (pronounced ossification in the area of teres tuberosity). Proliferative periosteal lesions (Figs 42–45) were observed on the pelvis (acetabular shaft), sacrum (dorsal surface and spinous processes), and ribs. The multicentric origin of lesions may point towards an infection that spreads via the bloodstream and subsequently results in inflammation, which eventually affected the bones (Archer *et al.* 2004; Bendrey *et al.* 2008). However, determining the cause of those pathological changes solely based on structural changes within the bone is problematic, and thus needs to be viewed as hypothetical at this point.

## STRONTIUM ISOTOPE ANALYSES

### LABORATORY METHODS

Strontium isotope analyses were performed using a Triton Plus thermal ionization mass spectrometer (TIMS; Thermo Fisher) housed at the Czech Geological Survey, Prague. Sample preparation was provided using a method described in Erban Kochergina *et al.* (2022). For isotope analyses enamel from the top of the teeth, monitoring the early phases of the sampled



FIG. 37. — Horse T\_3258: new bone formation located proximally on the dorsal aspect of the left posterior middle phalanx. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 38. — Horse T\_3258: severe new bone formation on the medial side of the right posterior proximal phalanx. Scale bar: 5 cm.

individual's life, was selected. Single-row steel drills with a diamond surface were used for drilling. Samples with weights of 25-50 mg were placed in PFA vials and sonicated in 5 ml of 5 % ultrapure acetic acid for 15 minutes. To remove potential secondary minerals and contamination, all samples were left overnight in 5 % ultrapure acetic acid at room temperature, then rinsed three times in Milli-Q water. Samples were dissolved with a mixture of 3.5 ml concentrated HF and 1.5 ml



FIG. 39. — Left calcaneus of the horse T\_3258: new bone formation located on tuber calcanei. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 40. — Left femur of the horse T\_3258: new bone formation located on trochanter major. Scale bar: 5 cm.

of concentrated  $\text{HNO}_3$  at  $140^\circ\text{C}$ . The solution, evaporated to dryness at  $60\text{--}80^\circ\text{C}$ , was then treated twice with concentrated  $\text{HNO}_3$ . After evaporation, the residue was treated again with a mixture of 0.14 M  $\text{HNO}_3$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  (9:1). To dissolve the organic residuum, five drops of perchloric acid ( $\text{HClO}_4$ ) were used. Following evaporation at  $180^\circ\text{C}$ , the residue was refluxed three times using 1.5 ml of concentrated  $\text{HNO}_3$ . Then, the dry sample was taken up with 1.7 ml of 2M  $\text{HNO}_3$  and centrifuged for 10 min at 4000 rpm to check the presence of solid residues. Strontium was separated by ion-exchange chromatography using the Sr spec resin (Triskem).

Strontium isotopic ratios were measured in static mode using a single Ta filament. The  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios used the assumption  $^{86}\text{Sr}/^{88}\text{Sr} = 0.1194$ . External reproducibility was estimated from replicate analyses of the NBS 987 ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} = 0.710265 \pm 01 [2\sigma, n = 2]$ ) and carbonate sample NIST NBS 915b ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} = 0.708024 \pm 07 [2\sigma, n = 7]$ ) reference standards. Repeat analyses of samples 4-B-Tr, 3-B-Tr and 1-B-Tr comprising total sample dissolution, ion-exchange chemistry and Sr isotope composition replicated within the analytical uncertainty (Table 9).

## RESULTS

Sr isotopes were analysed in the teeth of 10 individuals. Of the eight individuals, two samples were tested to cover as much as possible of the life span of each individual.



FIG. 41. — Right humerus of the horse T\_3258: pronounced ossification in the area of teres tuberosity. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 42. — Horse T\_3258: proliferative periosteal lesions located around dorsal surface and spinous processes of the sacrum. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 43. — Horse T\_3258: proliferative periosteal lesions located on acetabular shaft. Scale bar: 5 cm.

Therefore, a molar and incisor, which crystallize at different ages, thus providing values related to different phases of an individual's life, were used. Individual K\_801 provided only one testable tooth, and in the case of foal M\_803, given its age, it was sufficient to analyse one tooth as well. (Table 9; Fig. 46). Also, a sample of T\_3256 coffin bone was analysed for comparison. One bovine tooth (T\_420) was also tested for the same reason.



FIG. 44. — Proliferative periosteal lesions on the rib of the horse T\_3258. Scale bar: 5 cm.



FIG. 45. — Proliferative periosteal lesions on the rib of the horse T\_3258. Scale bar: 5 cm.

TABLE 9. — Strontium radiogenic isotopic composition of 10 studied horses from Brno region. Abbreviations and symbols: **d**, duplicate; **2 s.e.**, two standard error;  $\pm 1 \sigma$ , standard deviation between two enamel samples from same horse; \*, fragments of mandible not included in zooarchaeological analysis.

	Lab N	Sample	ID	Tooth	$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$	2 s.e.	$\pm 1 \sigma$
Brno, Trnitá							
1	4859	1-B-Tr	T_1490	M1	0.709355	$\pm 17$	0.00001
	4859d	-	-	-	0.709361	$\pm 12$	-
	4860	2-B-Tr	-	I	0.709375	$\pm 19$	-
2	4861	3-B-Tr	T_3256	M1	0.715298	$\pm 11$	-
	4861d	-	-	-	0.715262	$\pm 10$	-
	4862	4-B-Tr	-	I3	0.711503	$\pm 18$	-
	4862d	-	-	-	0.711506	$\pm 20$	-
	5026	-	-	3rd phalanx articular surface	0.712181	$\pm 07$	-
3	4863	5-B-Tr	T_3257	I3	0.711265	$\pm 11$	0.00052
	4864	6-B-Tr	-	M1	0.710531	$\pm 16$	-
4	4866	8-B-Tr	T_3258	M1	0.710525	$\pm 10$	0.00052
	4867	9-B-Tr	-	I3	0.709787	$\pm 13$	-
5	4868	10-B-Tr	T_420	M1	0.712012	$\pm 08$	0.00017
	4869	11-B-Tr	-	P	0.711772	$\pm 07$	-
Brno, Křídlovická							
6	4870	12-B-Kř	K_801	Dp	0.710733	$\pm 09$	-
	4871	13-B-Kř	K_802	M1	0.710135	$\pm 17$	0.0001
7	4872	14-B-Kř	-	I3	0.709992	$\pm 16$	-
8*	4873	15-B-Kř	K_803*	M1 or M2	0.709758	$\pm 13$	0.00008
	4874	16-B-Kř	-	I2	0.709874	$\pm 14$	-
Modřice							
9	4875	17-Mod	M_803	I2, foal	0.711005	$\pm 14$	0.00011
10	4876	18-Mod	M_802	P	0.711333	$\pm 09$	0.000001
	4877	19-Mod	-	I3	0.711334	$\pm 13$	-

Sr isotopic ratios of the dataset vary from 0.7094 to 0.7153. Such isotopic composition is typical for sedimentary rocks of the Moravian region. From the dataset, four horses (T\_1490, M\_802, and K\_803) can be selected with almost identical iso-

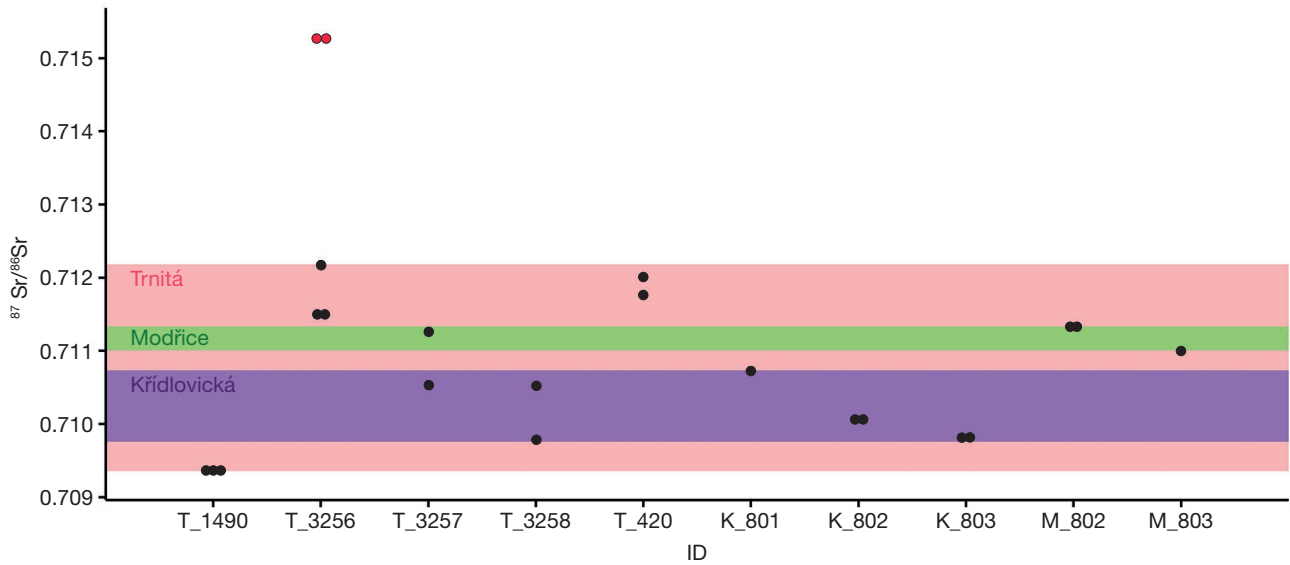


Fig. 46. — Distribution of strontium radiogenic isotopic composition for each analysed individual (ID). The red points represent outliers measured in first molar of individual T\_3256 (duplicated measurements).

topic composition of the enamel of both teeth. The standard deviation of both measures differs in the fifth and sixth decimal places. Such minimal differences are more typical for international reference materials than for natural samples. Enamel samples of both teeth of horses K\_802 and T\_420 show very similar isotopic composition with standard deviation on the fourth decimal place. These differences are very small and do not indicate a change in diet or migration of these individuals. Therefore, it can be concluded that these individuals had the same diet for several years and did not migrate over longer distances. These horses likely spent their whole life with one owner on the same pasture with the same water source.

Two horses T\_3257 and T\_3258 show a little heterogeneity in the enamel composition of different teeth ( $\pm 1 \sigma = 0.0005$ ). Such differences could probably be due to a more varied diet than in the horses of the previous groups. Different water sources or slightly different pastures can easily make such a difference.

The only horse that shows signs of migration, which may not be very distant, is the T\_3256 Late Medieval – Early Modern horse. The difference in Sr isotopic ratios between enamel from M1 *c.* 0.7153 and I *c.* 0.7115 is relevant as the M1 is the first permanent tooth to erupt at approximately eight to 12 months of age and the incisors between three and four years of age. Enamel layers in equine cheek teeth take longer to mineralize than had been previously assumed. The enamel continues to mineralize for approximately six to 12 months after each tooth begins to erupt (Hope *et al.* 2004). Therefore, there is a difference of several years between the mineralization of M1 and the incisors, during which the individual T\_3256 most likely ate and moved in geologically significantly different regions.

This difference in the third tenth place indicates that the horse has changed its place of residence. The more radiogenic strontium corresponds more to granitic rocks, the less

radiogenic ones are similar to those measured in the other horses and correspond to local sedimentary (for example) less deposits. The granitic rocks from around Brno, from the Brno Massif, are very specific and have a very primitive (less radiogenic) isotopic composition that varies from 0.703 to 0.708 (Y. V. Erban Kochergina, pers. comm.). However, there are other rocks in Central Europe, which could be a source of radiogenic Sr (Janoušek *et al.* 2020, 2022; Novák *et al.* 2020, 2023). Based on the radiogenic composition of plants and samples of highly radiogenic rocks, Erban Kochergina *et al.* (2021) proposed a simple scheme to use Sr isotopes to determine the place of origin of plants and bones. Bioavailable Sr in plants, bones and teeth (in our case) is a mixture of Sr that has entered the living organism from food and drink (if we are talking about animals and humans). The boundary that separates the two large groups of samples is the Sr isotopic composition of the rainwater (and/or sea spray), which is 0.709–0.710. If the sample under examination has an isotopic composition lower than 0.709, it probably does not come from a site that is composed of rock with an isotopic composition higher than 0.710. It works the same way in the other direction. For the horse T\_3256 it could mean that it did not spend its first years of life on the territory of the extensive Czech Cretaceous Basin ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} \leq 0.708$ ; Nádaskay *et al.* 2019) or typical for Central Europe volcanic rocks ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} \leq 0.706$ ; Ulrych *et al.* 2011; Walther *et al.* 2016; Mysliveček *et al.* 2018; Rapprich *et al.* 2023). The Sr isotopic composition of sedimentary rocks is very heterogeneous (Waroszewski *et al.* 2021; Mach *et al.* 2021; Erban Kochergina *et al.* 2024). Therefore, if the horses come from a locality with sedimentary bedrock, it is very difficult to determine their exact origin. In time, based on more data, we will be able to determine Sr isotope ranges for individual sites. The most homogeneous Sr isotopes are samples from Modřice

( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  0.7110–0.7113) and Křídlovická  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  0.7098–0.7107). The most heterogeneous are samples from Trnitá ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  0.7094–0.7118). However, all these isotopic ratios are typical for the Moravian region.

The isotopic composition of the coffin bone/distal phalanx gives very interesting and, in our opinion, promising results. The distal phalanx, nourished by an active hoof mechanism, intensively replenishes bone mass throughout its life. We assume that in the case of migration, the hoof will reflect the isotopic composition of the region of occurrence. The coffin bone/distal phalanx sample we studied (T\_3256) has a Sr radiogenic isotopic composition of 0.7122. We presumably assume that the coffin bone thus shows a mixed strontium signal (0.7115 and 0.7153) generated throughout life, which we will focus on in the next phase of research.

And the development of this part of the hoof occurred during the change of residence. Further concurrent studies of the Sr isotopic composition of horse teeth and coffin bones/distal phalanges may lead to interesting results and more precise information about animal life mobility and their individual biographies.

## DISCUSSION

Horses from Late Medieval – Early Modern Brno seem to be slightly taller at the withers than the average horses from the Migration and Early Medieval periods, although by modern standards they fall into the pony category (below 148 cm) (Van de Pol & Van Oldruitenborgh-Oosterbaan 2007). The increase in withers' height, could be related to changes in animal husbandry that occurred in Europe with the arrival of the Renaissance, and ended by the Early Modern era. This period is in general characterized by the introduction of new horse types and by the increased size and productivity of domestic animals (Bökönyi 1995). Based on the proportions of the limbs and robustness, it seems that horses with a variety of conformations were bred in the suburbs of Brno. Horses from Křídlovická and Modřice appear to be relatively gracile with less pronounced differences between metapodials and other limb elements, while some individuals from Trnitá (horses T\_3256, T\_3258, and T\_3164) resemble modern draft horses in terms of proportions of their limbs, but they are significantly smaller and, except for specimen T\_3256, also less robust. The pathological changes observed on second premolars (horses T\_1490, T\_3256, T\_3257, T\_3258, and K\_802) are most likely related to the use of a bit, while changes observed on the mandibular and maxillary bone of T\_3256 might be related to the use of noseband. Pronounced ossification in the region of the nuchal ligament attachment site (horses T\_1490, and T\_3258), could also be related to the working history of the individuals. However, determining the predominant use of these animals based on observed pathological changes is challenging, due to the complex etiologies of many pathologies (Salmi & Niinimäki 2016). In addition, when considering the context of the findings, it seems reasonable to expect that these could have been mul-

tipurpose animals, utilized for driving, riding, and as pack horses. Vertebral abnormalities are virtually absent in horses T\_3164, K\_802 or milder (horses T\_1490, T\_3256, and M\_802) in comparison to some rather extreme examples from literature (e. g. Janeczek *et al.* 2012; Lignereux & Bouet 2015; Marković *et al.* 2019). Moreover, compared to mining horses from Zdice, where the majority of the horses died between four to seven years of age (Diedrich 2017), most horses from Brno died between seven to fourteen years of age, which may further indicate that they were not used for such extensive heavy work. Other pathological findings observed on the appendicular skeleton, especially those on metapodials, central and third tarsals, navicular bones, and distal phalanges could have led to lameness in the deceased animals. These changes cannot be directly linked to workload, although they could be possibly exacerbated by it.

The severe loss of bone mass observed on the posterior distal phalanges of horse M\_802 might indicate that the bone was affected by sepsis (Cauvin & Munroe 1998). Sepsis is usually associated with bacterial infection and can lead to the death of the individual (Taylor *et al.* 2015). In this case, it seems possible that pathological changes observed on the thoracic column, intertarsal joint, and the lateral rather than medial side of the metatarsals of the individual M\_802 could be related to this condition as well. Current approaches to the horse prefer to perceive the organism as a unity where everything is related to everything else<sup>2</sup>. The hoof mechanism is often the “crossroads” of many problems that subsequently manifest themselves more strongly in other, even distant parts of the body. If the hoof mechanism is not working properly – usually due to improper hoof care, inappropriate diet, or overloading – restriction of metabolism, rotation of the distal phalanx, and deformation of the podotrochlear bursa follows, the horse tries to avoid pain by using so-called relief postures. This changes the forces acting on the tendon attachments and subsequently the bone. All kinds of growths or skeletal degradation begin to form (according to Wolff's law: growths in the case of excessive pressure and bone loss in the case of excessive tension). In none of the examined individuals, was degradation of the distal phalanx identified in isolation; this condition was always accompanied by other distinct pathologies in the metapodials and spine (Strasser & Kells 2001). Another example of a possible bacterial infection is represented by a horse T\_3258, which exhibits multicentric lesions on both limbs, sacrum, and ribs. The extent of pathological changes observed on individuals T\_3258, and M\_802 suggests that the animals may not have been fit for the work for some time prior to their death.

## BRNO AND MODŘICE HORSES IN CONTEXT

A logical question, arising from the finds of horse skeletons from three rural sites around the large royal city, is: How do these assemblages fit into the context of medieval horse

2. Pischinger's basic principle: every cell is related to the whole system (Pischinger 2007).

breeding and use? Domesticated horses have been present in the archaeological contexts of central Europe since the Early Bronze Age (2200 B.C.E.; Librado *et al.* 2021). The first written mention of horse breeding in Bohemia comes from *Annales of Fulda* from 871 and from 903. They state the customs duties charged for stallions (1/3 of solidus) and mares (1/12 of solidus) exported from Bohemia (Misař 2011: 7). From the same period (Great Moravia and the Duchy of Bohemia), the skeletal remains of horses as well as riding equipment (bridles, bridle parts, spurs, etc.) are commonly found (Měchurová 1981). Ibrahim ibn Yaqub (10th century) mentions in his chronicle that in Prague workshops they made excellent harnesses and saddles, which were exported to foreign countries together with horses (Kowalski 2022: 83).

Quality and renown for horse breeding is mentioned from the wider region. The *Report on Horse Livestock* by the knight Jan Dobrenski, probably from 1560, mentions horses from central Bohemia (Nymburk and Čáslav) (Misař 2011: 7). Quality and renowned horse breeding came from the Kingdom of Hungary (Dvořáková 2007).

Breeding has been systematized gradually since the 16th century. At that time, the horse “Bohemicus” was known, and the first stud farms were established in the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, where local breeding was improved by Spanish and Italian stallions: 1579 – Kladruby n. Labem, 1580 – Lipica (Misař 2011: 8).

Although in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, there were no breeds in the modern sense, horses were nevertheless assigned to particular activities for which they were suited according to their constitution and temperament. The aristocratic milieu was characterized by the great destrier (Latin: *dextrarius*), a large powerful horse (Dvořáková 2007: 69). However, even its size was smaller than contemporary riding horses (Ameen *et al.* 2021). Another type was the universal equestrian horse, the palfrey (Latin: *palefridus*), at the turn of the 15th century and 16th century this was also called Gradarius. Arabian horses were referred to as badavia and the ambulator was a pacing, ambling horse (Dvořáková 2007: 70-77). But these types were available only in aristocratic environments. The production and breeding of horses for rural activities was governed by different rules, and there is considerably less information about them. The Brno horses probably belong to this category of working animals. Here it was necessary to provide animals suitable for work, i.e. primarily draft and field work. In England, the horses called affers and stotts (*affrus et stottus*) were in use in farms. They were smaller and cheaper than cart or riding horses (Clark 2004: 27, 28; Dvořáková 2007: 63; Claridge 2015, 2017), and their numbers were many times greater than the number of bred riding horses (Claridge 2017: 5).

The Moravian region had a slightly different tradition from the centre of the Bohemian kingdom. There was a more pronounced influence of horses of oriental origin (Misař 2011: 18, 19), as well as small hardy Hungarian horses, among which Arabian horses had been present in breeding since

the 15th century, although probably only in elite settings (Dvořáková 2007: 46).

Even horses were subject to a hierarchy that resulted mainly from their availability. A peasant could not think of buying horses intended for the nobility, whose types are known from written sources. From the 13th to the 15th century, prices in Central Europe fluctuated. For example, Wiliński (1979) states that in the 14th century in Poland, a work horse cost one to three hryvnia, a knight's or merchant's horse four to six hryvnia and an aristocratic horse seven to ten hryvnia. There were exceptions, e.g., Ladislaus IV's horse, which was purchased for 200 hryvnia. Compared to other domestic animals, an adult sow cost one golden, and a cow one to three golden. One hundred to two hundred golden could buy a whole village or a stone house in a town, 400 golden a castle. A wagon cost about 40 gold pieces. A horse was sometimes used as payment (Dvořáková 2007: 88-90).

The prices of war horses were similarly high in the Roman Empire (Byzantium). From the 13th to the 15th century, warhorse prices ranged from 20 to 100 hyperpyrones. The price of a slave rarely went over 50 hyperpyrones (Morrisson & Cheynet 2002: 840, 841, table 11; 848, table 14). A cavalry officer earned enough for two to four horses, a regular rider needed to work for a year or two for one horse (Morrisson & Cheynet 2002: 862, 863, table 17).

A horse was considered a valuable asset. Its acquisition value was relatively high and its maintenance demanding. The horse also did not add any value in the form of meat. Horse meat was rarely consumed in the kingdom of Bohemia, and this was true for Christians from the time of Pope Gregory III's decree from 732. Horses formed part of inheritances and dowries, but were also targets of thieves. The horse trade was centrally controlled. There were special market places (e.g., Wenceslas Square in Prague) and rules on the basis of which horses could be sold, who could buy and from where (Dvořáková 2007: 96, 97, 129, 130). The horse trade also had a huge international dimension (Gladitz 1997), extending from China across Central Asia to Eastern Europe, across the Near East and Arab breeders to the Mediterranean, then to Spain, Italy, across the Alps and into England. The horses of the South Moravian countryside were then in its periphery.

Therefore, the peasants made great efforts to balance the maximization of the performance of their horses with their health. They used two essential procedures: vein dropping and hot iron application. The farrier also ground and pulled teeth and made ointments and various decoctions. But healing was also done with incantations. The first account of equine medicine was the work Meister Albrant Rossarzeibuch from 1435 to 1440. The work of the Augsburg merchant Mark Fugger, who bought horses in Spain (1563), where there were already specialists in the treatment of horses (Dvořáková 2007: 118-122), was a breakthrough. The manuscripts of the Byzantine Hippatrikas were also being transcribed and translated at this time (Klontza-Jaklová *et al.* 2023). In perhaps every aristocratic residence in the Czech



Republic, which included stables, there was literature summarizing the knowledge of horse care at that time<sup>3</sup>. Sources state that stallions and geldings lived to 18-20 years, rarely to 30. Mares were said to live to 40-50 years (Dvořáková 2007: 123). This is certainly not confirmed by the existing archaeological findings.

The breeders of that time were already aware of the causes of some diseases, knew about laminitis, and knew that an unsuitable diet could cause it. Descent through a vein was supposed to help. Abscesses were opened, and incense was put into them. Hot iron was then put on the distal hoof cushion. Tapered hooves, or “bad” hooves in general, were often mentioned as an acute problem. Bruised backs were covered with patches of cloth (Dvořáková 2007: 240-246). Pathological changes observed in the present study most frequently occur on lower limbs in general and in the thoracolumbar region. Those changes could impact the working performance of those individuals and might be a result of inappropriate or neglected care.

Medieval Moravia was not, however, a centre of horse breeding, unlike central and eastern Bohemia, where large breeding farms developed very early on and were subsequently transformed into aristocratic, royal and imperial breeding farms. A report from the provincial administration to the general command in Vienna in 1780 states that the unfavourable state of breeding persisted. The horses have a frame caused by inappropriate breeding in unsuitable stables, feed (high proportion of food industry waste), premature foaling, improper shoeing, large numbers of unlicensed stallions in less accessible locations. Subsequently, new studs were established, and the situation improved (Misař 2011: 19, 20). The breeding of horses and their use in the fertile areas of Moravia was certainly widespread, and horsepower was no exception. Among other things, this is evidenced by numerous toponyms reflecting the presence of horses (e.g., Kobylnice, Kobyly, Kobyhá nad Vindavkou).

## CONCLUSION

This study provides insights into the physical characteristics, origin, utilization, and health condition of horses from the Late Medieval to Early Modern period in the suburbs of the medieval city of Brno. Our research results suggest that horses with a variety of conformations, predominately of local origin (based on strontium analysis), were bred in the villages. The horses from Brno appear to be slightly taller in withers compared to previous periods, and there seems to be no discernible pattern indicating a preference for robust animals.

Considering our research results and archaeological context, it seems reasonable to conclude, that horses from Brno were used primarily as work animals. Pathological findings

observed on the skull (T\_1490, T\_3256, T\_3258), and second premolars (T\_1490, T\_3256, T\_3257, T\_3258, and K\_802) can, most likely, be related to the working history of those individuals. Changes observed on the thoracolumbar column are rather mild (T\_1490, T\_3256, M\_802) or almost absent (T\_3164, K\_800), which suggests that the horses from Brno were probably not used for extensive heavy work. On the other hand, all individuals died prior to old age, and the relatively high incidence of observed pathological changes indicates neglected care, which could have contributed to the untimely death of these animals. In addition, two individuals (T\_3258, and M\_802) show signs of a possible bacterial infection, but in these cases, further investigation would be necessary to confirm our hypothesis.

Strontium analyses performed to capture as long a life span as possible have shown that most horses come from Moravia's sedimentary rock region. The minimal differences in values allow us to consider that the individual horses were most likely born and died in the same village, perhaps a farmstead, and their diet did not have large fluctuations. The only exception is individual T\_3256, which shows signs of migration and may come from another part of central Europe. As to the place of origin of our studied horses (except T\_3256), we could exclude regions characterized by low <sup>87</sup>Sr/<sup>86</sup>Sr isotopic ratios (e.g., volcanic, marine sediments). The pilot strontium analysis of the distal phalanx, with <sup>87</sup>Sr/<sup>86</sup>Sr = 0.712, seems to confirm mobility between two different geological areas, characterised by less radiogenic bioavailable Sr in the grass and water (<sup>87</sup>Sr/<sup>86</sup>Sr c. 0.711) and more radiogenic (<sup>87</sup>Sr/<sup>86</sup>Sr c. 0.715). But interestingly, this is also a different individual in terms of size (withers height 137.3 cm). This individual resembles most closely the modern draft horses in terms of limb proportions and robusticity but is significantly smaller (in withers), compared to modern draft horses as well as to other studied horses from Brno.

In order to assess the equine population in the Bohemian Kingdom in the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods, to contextualize over time, the source base needs to grow, and more, similar, collections need to be examined.

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3. See e.g., the library of the State Chateau and Hippological Museum in Slatiňany (e.g., *Knihy o koních [Book on Horses]*, 1738, ZK SN 0734; *Hippiatria*, 1574, ZK SN 00741, *Hippiatria*, 1622, ZK SN 00752).

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