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Archaeological indicators for Medieval prisons

Medieval prisons play an important role in the collective thought as one of the symbols of Middle Ages, but are rarely studied as elements of urban landscape, in relation to their connection with the city, their administration and a proper life that we can investigate through archaeological excavations. This type of study has been undertaken thoroughly just from a juridical perspective, and less from an historical one.

Its principal difficulty comes from the conclusion one can arrive to very quickly: prisons haven't been built, but sporadically, until the Modern Ages; the places intended to hold people in custody were chosen depending on the present needs (often temporary ones), in ways so inexplicable to look like they were casual. In order to figure out these realities we need to focus on some archaeological marks like graffiti (which are the most useful and evident ones), and verify them in relation to the structural features of these sites. In this paper i will try to underline recurring themes and detect similar choices that have been made, epigraphical but above all iconographical ones, and try to understand the signs' meaning and their authors.