

SoLiLL 2002

Project Group „Bread and Housing“ in České Budějovice

Renovation of ancient area of city

Presentation Virgin Conventual Church

Klášterní kostel Obětování Panny Marie v Českých Budějovicích

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Presentation Virgin Conventual Church - history

The Presentation Virgin Conventual church is the most valuable art-historical monument to be found in Ceske Budejovice. It was founded along with the town itself and the adjacent monastery in 1265 but the building of it took several decades. The original design was changed several times during the construction and other modifications were executed in the centuries following its



Presentation Virgin Conventual Church

completion. Also, the interior decoration changed in the course of time. All these activities left their traces, some of them more beneficial than others. However, the church as a whole has retained its unique dignity and beauty appealing both to experts and sightseers.

A plot on which the church and monastery now stand was consigned to the Dominican order on March 10, 1265. There is a record from 1267 to the effect that King Premysl Otakar II, in memory of his deceased first wife Marketa (Margaret) of Babenberg, founded St.

Panel : The Virgin Mary of Budějovice



Margaret' s chapel at the northern side of the presbytery. In the connection to the tradition, the

church should have been consecrated in 1274. However, the consecration is likely to have been performed only for a part of the church since it was not completed. From the very beginning the church was used by the Dominicans, who resided in the monastery, as well as by the local population.

The worshipping of the Holy Virgin has become a significant part of the history of the church. A major incentive to this tradition came about in 1418 when the church received a painting of the Virgin Mary, later called “Budejovicka” (meaning “of Budejovice”), Panel: The Virgin Mary of Budejovice (p. 14). This painting is popular among the whole religious population and it became the symbol of the protection of Ceske Budejovice.

The conventual church was gradually furnished with more works of art, many of which were later destroyed by several disastrous fires. Moreover, the Dominican monks were repeatedly hit by plagues. . Finally, the church was left in the care of the last Dominican, the prior Bernard Bursatorius. In 1784, the king Josef II. terminated the existence of the Dominicans, and donated the area of monastery to the Piarists. The Piarists is a church order which was founded in 1597 in Rome and which conducted the charity and the education of youth. They restored and newly furnished the church. After the Piarists, there was the Ministry of church who was in charge of mending. Since 1950, the church was not used for nearly forty years. The life came back into the walls after the revolution in 1989. The first restoration was done in 1995.

Church Interior and Exterior

The Presentation Virgin Conventual Church is at the square Piaristicke namesti. It adjoins the fortification of town and the Salt House.

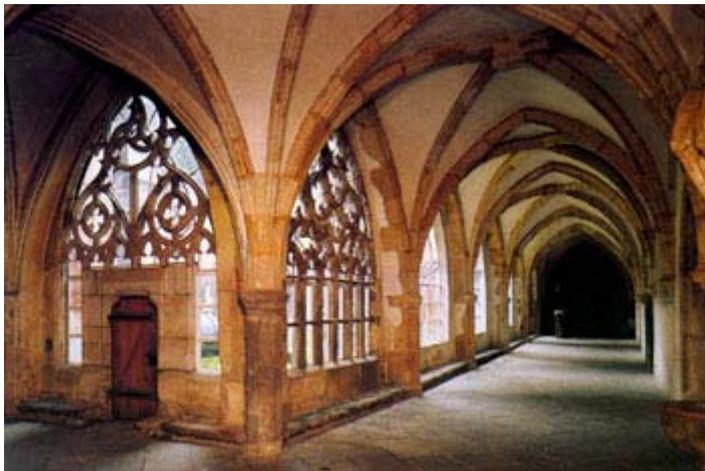
The basilica-type church has a nave and two aisles, with its western side adjoining



View of the church across the square Piaristické náměstí

the town wall. The side-aisle is supported with buttresses and articulated with windows which acquired their current appearance during the Baroque remodeling in the mid-17th century. The windows had originally been slimmer, with pointed arch and stone tracery. The second field of the northern aisle opens with a small neo-Gothic portal from the early 20th century. Walking around the church you will bypass the Baroque St. Anne's chapel. A few steps further, you will find yourself standing right opposite the transept. Notice the Gothic window with a stone carved work from the 14th century and the spire housing a screw staircase up to the cathedral roof space.

The main presbytery is considered to be the most exquisite architectural feature of the church. Its characteristic lofty and tower-like structure is stressed by tall buttresses and narrow Gothic windows. At the very crest of the steep roof, you will be able to see a slim spire, the so-called "sanctus bell", a typical feature of conventual churches due to the rules of the order which did not permit to build tall steeples. After the Baroque portal you may find a number of tombstones dating back to the 14th – 18th centuries. Originally they were placed on the church floor and were moved to their current location in 1904 during the reconstruction of the paving.



Tracery windows in the cloister

It is also needless to mention two exquisite tracery windows in so called flamboyant style, which lead into the Paradise Courtyard. The vaulting of the church reaches the height of 20 m, its total length is 57m and width 21m.

At first sight you may notice that despite some partial modifications and additions the church has retained its antique Gothic character, intensified by the original color of the restored arch ribs, brackets and majestic red jack arches at the point of nave and transept crossing.

Presbytery – its design, inspired by classical Gothic architecture, is lofty giving the impression of



View to the presbytery with the neo-Gothic great altar

airy space which is substantially supported by light rays shining through the tall Gothic windows. The sculptured vaulting brackets represent the founder of the church Premysl Otakar II. and his second wife Kunhuta.



St. Christopher, wall painting and neo-Gothic altar

In the transept, there are very valuable wall paintings. You can find St. Christopher – the patron of pilgrims and the helper in moments of physical and psychical weakness. The wall paintings were discovered at the niche of the transept. They are in two layers. The older one – layer from around 1350 – shows the Virgin with Child the kneeling donor, St. Dominic and two female saints on the sides of the niche. The younger layer contains a Pietà, i.e. the Virgin Mary with Christ's dead body on her lap, on the left side of the niche there is St. Catherine of Alexandria and opposite her St. Barbara. The

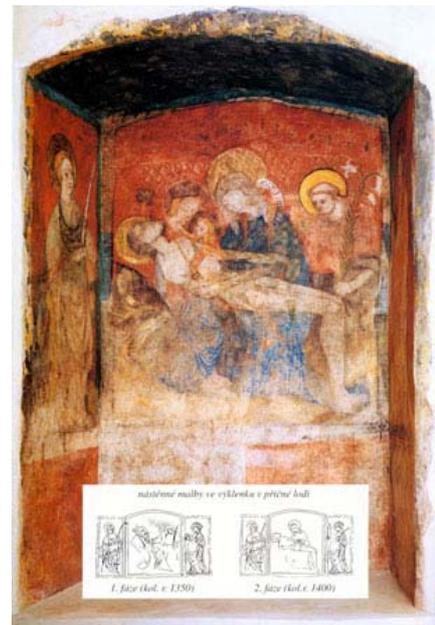
younger layer with the Pietà and female saints was painted around 1400. The St. Catherine figure was later still

repainted in the late Gothic style.

Neo-Gothic altars in the transept date back to 1865. The left one is consecrated to St. Joseph Kalasant, founder of the Piarist order. The other, consecrated to St. Adalbert (Vojtech), was donated by the outstanding local businessman and benefactor Vojtech Lanna.

In the vaulting of the church just above the altar, there are interesting brackets with images of i.e. devil, monkey, lion.

The nave and the isles are especially baroque. The cutwork of pews, secession chandeliers, topography and the wall paintings are surely worth to see it.



Wall paintings in the transept niche



Vaulting brackets (around 1270 –1300)

The restoration work

There was an investigation of the church in 1993. During this time the wall paintings and the polychromy of architectural parts such as ribs, brackets, buttresses of the triumphal arc were discovered.

During years 1995-1997 the wall paintings were uncovered and restored. The specialists found these paintings a significant feature of the 14th century.

They found St. Christopher on the right side of the triumphal arc. It is an approx. 10 m high figure – patron of pilgrims and the helper in moments of physical and psychical weakness. They also found two female saints on the sides of the niche, the male saints and the figure of Christ on the buttresses.



The whole church is light-colored. The walls of the nave are white. The ceiling of the presbytery is yellow and the walls are white.

The presentation Virgin Conventual Church obtained the grant for a half of million of Czech crowns. (14.025 EUR). The total sum which includes a sum from the fund of the regeneration and restoration of landmarks makes 1.770.000 Czech crowns (55.660 EUR). The split of the fund has been ratified in this week (13th April, 2002, Ceskobudejovicke listy – newspaper). The sum for the restoration of objects, which are financially exigent makes 480.000 Czech crowns (15.094 EUR) and will be split among 19 corporations and individuals who entered the competition.



The reimbursement of the church is divided between the ministry of culture and the town of Ceske Budejovice. The owner of the project is The Roman Catholic church.

The episcopate of Ceske Budejovice takes care of this landmark very well. It coordinates the split of coffers, spiritual, cultural and sociable use of this place.

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Appendieces :