

Martin Omelka

The cemetery of the church of St. John in Obora in Šporkova street (no. 322/III), Malá Strana, Prague

ANNOTATION

A brief review of the current results from research at a former cemetery area and the church of St. John in Obora covering iconography, history, building history and the archaeology of the site. The study is supplemented by a general overview of Post medieval grave furnishings from the 2002 and 2004 excavation seasons.

SUMMARY

The deserted cemetery and church of St. John in Obora in Šporkova street is situated on the southern hillside to Prague castle. Currently a peaceful site in the upper part of Malá Strana it is surrounded by Šporkova and Vlašská street and Jánský hillock.

The oldest pottery sherds from the site can be dated to the 9th–10th century however it cannot be excluded that they have derived from natural downhill movement from the castle spit. The first written evidence of the settlement is from 1278–1288 and the parish church of St. John, in the Obora hamlet, is first mentioned in 1363. This hamlet was an autonomous unit until 1656 when it became part of Malá Strana. After that time the church lost its parish function and was joined as a subsidiary to the church of St. Wenceslas. The church with the cemetery was abolished by the Joseph's reforms in 1784 and closed two years later. In 1791 it was sold to Josef Peiznach and a year later the crypt was cleared and the cemetery burial removed. After that the church was transformed into a house and is still used as such today.

By 1966 M. Heroutová had completed an archive search as part of a building history survey of the deserted church structure. A supplementary building history survey was completed by the team of D. HEJRETOVÁ, K. KROULÍKOVÁ, J. BERÁNEK and T. KYNCL in 2004–2005, regarding mainly photographic documentation of architectural and technical details revealed during a renovation.

The site was first archaeologically surveyed by Z. Dragoun in 1986 (DRAGOUN 1986) in the place of the 12th century rotunda interior. In 2002 and 2004 906, mostly Baroque graves, were uncovered on the plot and their excavation yielded several hundreds of special finds, which accompanied the dead in their graves. The excavation (supervised by the author) was a response to a building project by the owner, which affected part of the abolished cemetery situated to the south of the former church of St. John the Baptist, Obora.

Fig. 1. During the excavation in 1986 the complete interior of a rotunda was excavated and the sacristy to the north from the circular nave was cleared to the floor level.

Fig. 2. Jan Kozel and Michael Peterle from Annaberg (1562). Detail from a Prague prospect: PRAGA BOHEMIAE METROPOLIS ACCURATISSIME EXPRESSA 1.5.6.2 Fig. 3. Anonymous (1659–1665). View of the Minor Prague town with Petřín (a cut out).

Fig. 4. J. D. Huber (1765–1769). Malá Strana with Hradčany, a cut out from the Orthographic study of Prague and surroundings.

Fig. 5. Historic picture from 1920s of the yard and garden of house no. 322/III.

Fig. 6. House no. 322/III. before and after the reconstruction in the early 21st century.

Fig. 7. The building history development phases of the church of St. John in Obora after D. Hejretová, K. Kroulíková, J. Beránek and T. Kyncl.

Fig. 8. The original probable Baroque gable end of the deserted church. A dentil is apparent on the bottom line of the ledge.

Fig. 9. The preserved lower part of the church gable end revealed during archaeological excavation. Approximately in the centre of the picture is a blocked entrance into the church.

Fig. 10. Preparation for the documentation. Beside an individual serial number each skeleton had to be assigned with the identification information about its location and orientation position within the site.

Fig. 11. A medallion with Jesus and St. Mary discovered in a secondary position in the trench XIII (bag 0568).

Fig. 12. The Jesuits required systematic adoration of their saints. Alois Gonzaga and Stanislav Kostka, depicted on this medallion are a typical example of this propaganda of the Jesuit order.

Fig. 13. A cross as an example of high quality Baroque smiths art. No specific adoration or cult was discovered to be connected with this type of cross, which is still produced in numerous variations today.

Fig. 14. The Scheyren cross is reported to be part of the Holy Cross, which was brought to the central Europe in the mid 12th century on a wish of the Jerusalem patriarch. As a means for gathering alms it was supposed to help in financial difficulties. Worship in front of this cross could release someone from the pledge of a pilgrimage to The Holy Land.

English by Linda and Patrick Foster