

History Hidden Under the Floor

ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH
OF THE KLEMENTINUM



NÁRODNÍ
PAMÁTKOVÝ
ÚSTAV

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The National Heritage Institute



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Archaeological Research of the Klementinum

The Klementinum is not only an important monument of Baroque architecture but also an area rich in archaeological findings. More than thousand years of continuous human activity in the heart of the Old Town of Prague, near the bridge over the Vltava River, have left numerous material remains that give the evidence about the history of the place and the life of our ancestors. A large number of medieval monuments have been preserved under the paving of the courtyards of the former Jesuit college, some of them have been archaeologically examined. Researchers found here the remains of the Dominican Convent of St. Clement, several cemeteries, and parts of medieval burghers' houses with wells, pits, furnaces and workshops in their rear. There were narrow streets, yards and gardens in between the houses.

1. Research in the Klementinum's Main Yard (2014)



The Burials in the Klementinum Area

Archaeological excavations uncovered a few medieval burial sites. The oldest one was discovered in the southern part of the Klementinum area. Evidently, it served as a burial ground for several generations, particularly during the 2nd half of the 9th century and the 1st half of the 10th century. In that period, the area where the Old Town of Prague was established later, had not been inhabited. Jewellery, knives and vessels for offerings were found in some of the graves. The Klementinum area was used for burials also in the following centuries. There was a cemetery at the Romanesque Church of St. Clement and another at the parish Church of St. Martin Minor; even the area of the Dominican convent itself served as a burial site, namely the cloister, the convent church, chapels and probably the Chapter Hall as well. A cemetery situated between the convent and Křižovnická Street was used as late as the 16th century.



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2. A pot from the grave, 10th century

3. Fragments of tombstones, 15th century

4., 5., 6., 7. Medieval graves, found in the Klementinum area



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8. Late-medieval pavement discovered near the Church of St. Martin Minor
9. 12th-century furnace documentation
10. Furnaces used in processing non ferrous ores in a medieval illumination (GASK)

The Life in the Middle Ages

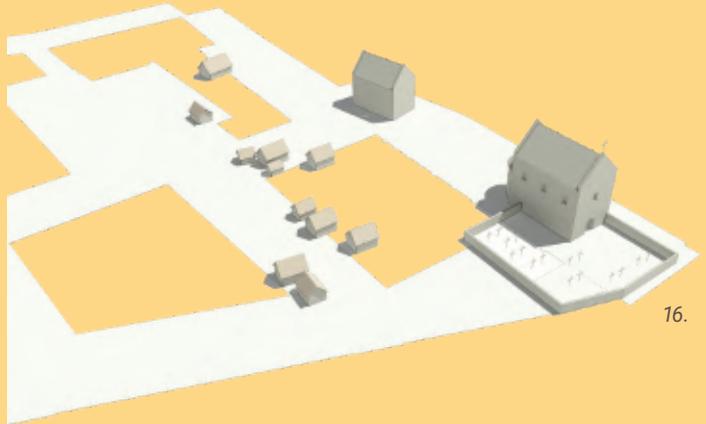
First inhabitants began to settle at the foreland of a wooden bridge over the Vltava, in the area of today's Klementinum, at the end of the 10th century. In the following century, there were numerous thriving workshops of Prague ironmongers, the workshops of metal founder appeared there in the 12th century. Buildings in this period were usually made of wood. Their remains were discovered in many places of the Klementinum area. The High Middle Ages brought a change in house-building, burghers' houses were made of bricks, most often on a long and narrow plot of land, streets between the houses were later thoroughly paved. There were houses of craftsmen in the northern part of the Klementinum, in the neighbourhood of the Dominican convent. Written sources from the beginning of the 15th century identify their owners as a cutler, a blacksmith, a goldsmith, a soap maker, a glove maker, a furrier, a tawer, a tailor, a shoemaker, a painter, a bricklayer, a stonemason, a butcher, a bow maker, a watchman, and a scribe.

Romanesque Buildings in the Klementinum Area

We do not know the exact location of the Romanesque Church of St. Clement. It was this place, where the Dominican Friars began to build their convent upon their arrival. The tiny Church of St. Clement stood, in all probability, in the place of today's Church of the Holy Saviour, because a medieval cemetery was discovered north of it. Apparently, there was an early-medieval court with a medieval sanctuary, mentioned above, and a burial place next to it. The court area could also include a stone house, one wall of which built of marlstone ashlar was found in a cellar under the sacristy of the Church of the Holy Saviour. Archaeologists discovered another early-medieval stone construction under the Klementinum's western wing. They managed to uncover a wall under the cellar floor, also built using ashlar technique that was characteristic of Prague Romanesque houses of the 2nd half of the 12th century and the 1st half of the 13th century. Even the disappeared and not yet researched Church of St. Martin Minor at the north part of the area could originate in the same period.



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11. The Church of St. Martin Minor (St. Eligius) in the plan from 1641
12. Visualisation of a Romanesque house
13. The only visible remains of medieval buildings are to be found in the basement of the Church of the Holy Saviour
- 14., 15. Medieval walls built using ashlar technique, discovered during the archaeological research
16. Visualisation of the built-up area around 1200 in the southwestern part of the Klementinum area, a hypothetical appearance of the Church of St. Clement

Most Interesting Findings



The ground plan of the Klementinum showing places of archaeological findings



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17. Research in the Klementinum's Main Yard (2014)
18., 19. Research in the Student Yard (2013)
20. The Dominican Convent of St. Clement in the Middle Ages, Charles Bridge with a bridge tower is in the upper right corner



The Convent of St. Clement, the Oldest Czech Dominican Convent

The Dominicans, or the Friars Preachers, arrived in this place in the 1230s. The remains of their convent, known so far only from written sources, were discovered in the southern part of the Klementinum area. The uncovered archaeological findings helped locate its basic arrangement in more detail. It was possible to determine a paradise courtyard with cloisters, south of it was the Convent Church of St. Clement. In the northern part used to be situated the wing of the quadrature with a refectory (dining room) with the floor of marlstone pavement. The eastern wing, including the Chapter Hall with a polygonally terminated chapel, has been researched only partially. The findings of architectural marlstone parts prove the decorativeness of the convent. A uniquely discovered fragment of the Gothic relief of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane can also be connected with the Dominican Convent.



21. The Gradual of Master Wenceslas, initial "C" with a church building (The Archives of Charles University, no shelf mark, fol. 198v)
22., 23. The floor and a circumferential wall of the convent refectory (dining room)

The Convent of St. Clement, a Centre of Spiritual and Political Life

During the Middle Ages, the Prague Dominican Convent became an important centre of spiritual, intellectual and political life. Assemblies of Czech noblemen were held there, as well as sessions of the municipal council, various meetings and court hearings. There was a school of the order called *studium generale* housed in the convent. Many Dominican masters taught both there and at Prague University. The convent served as the last resting place of eminent personalities of the time. In 1420 the convent was plundered and ruined by the Hussites; although some friars returned later, the convent in its original form had never been restored. The Dominicans left this place in 1556, when the Jesuits settled here. After their arrival the whole area underwent an extensive construction change. Since then, the remains of medieval buildings have been hidden under massive backfills and only the recent archaeological research made it possible to reveal information about the earliest history of the unique area in the heart of Prague.



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24. A fragment of the Gothic relief found in the Church of the Holy Saviour (Photo M. Staněk)

25. The Gradual of Master Wenceslas

(The Archives of Charles University, no shelf mark, fol. 104v)



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Visualization of the appearance of the Convent

of St. Clement: Vojtěch Dvořák according

to the documents by Jan Havrda,

Miroslav Kolář and Anna Žďárská

Visualization of the Romanesque house:

Pavel Zoch according to the

documents by Vojtěch Kašpar

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