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## 11 Death and Burial in Post-medieval Prague

### Introduction

The aim of this study is to present the results of archaeological excavations of modern-period cemeteries in the territory of the Czech Republic. It should first be pointed out that the tradition of archaeological excavations of modern-period cemeteries in Bohemia began in the 1950s as part of excavations focused on the High Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the excavation of later burial horizons was of marginal interest in Czech archaeology until the 1990s; later burial horizons (i.e. from the 17th century) were recorded only in basic features, and the first intentionally documented modern-period find contexts were not available until after 1990. More than 30 excavations of modern-period cemeteries have been published from the sites investigated in the Czech Republic thus far. The vast majority of these are Catholic cemeteries with burials of the laity and to a lesser extent members of the clergy.

In Czech archaeology, the excavations have raised many questions related to the occurrence of grave furnishings, which are virtually absent in medieval and Renaissance burials in the country. First, it was necessary to define the significance of grave furnishings for the study of the religious beliefs in Bohemia and Moravia at the time. What can be regarded as standard grave furnishings in Bohemia in the 17th and 18th centuries? How do the discovered grave furnishings correspond to the social status and demographic structure of the deceased? And finally, what parallels, dissimilarities and traits do Czech find assemblages and contexts reveal in comparison to the results of similar excavations in Europe? This chapter will address these questions.

### 11.1 The Burial Rite in Baroque Bohemia

Burial rites in Bohemia during the Early Modern period are closely tied to customs and rituals in the other central European regions. Characteristic of the territory of the Czech state is the fact that the formerly religiously disparate population, still composed mainly of non-Catholics at the beginning of the 17th century, was almost completely re-Catholicized following the signing of the international peace treaty at the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648. The ruling Habsburgs gained the opportunity to assert the Catholic faith in their lands (although exceptions existed) and therefore once the Thirty Years' War ended, part of the Protestant population left Bohemia, often forfeiting most of their personal property in the process. Many of the people



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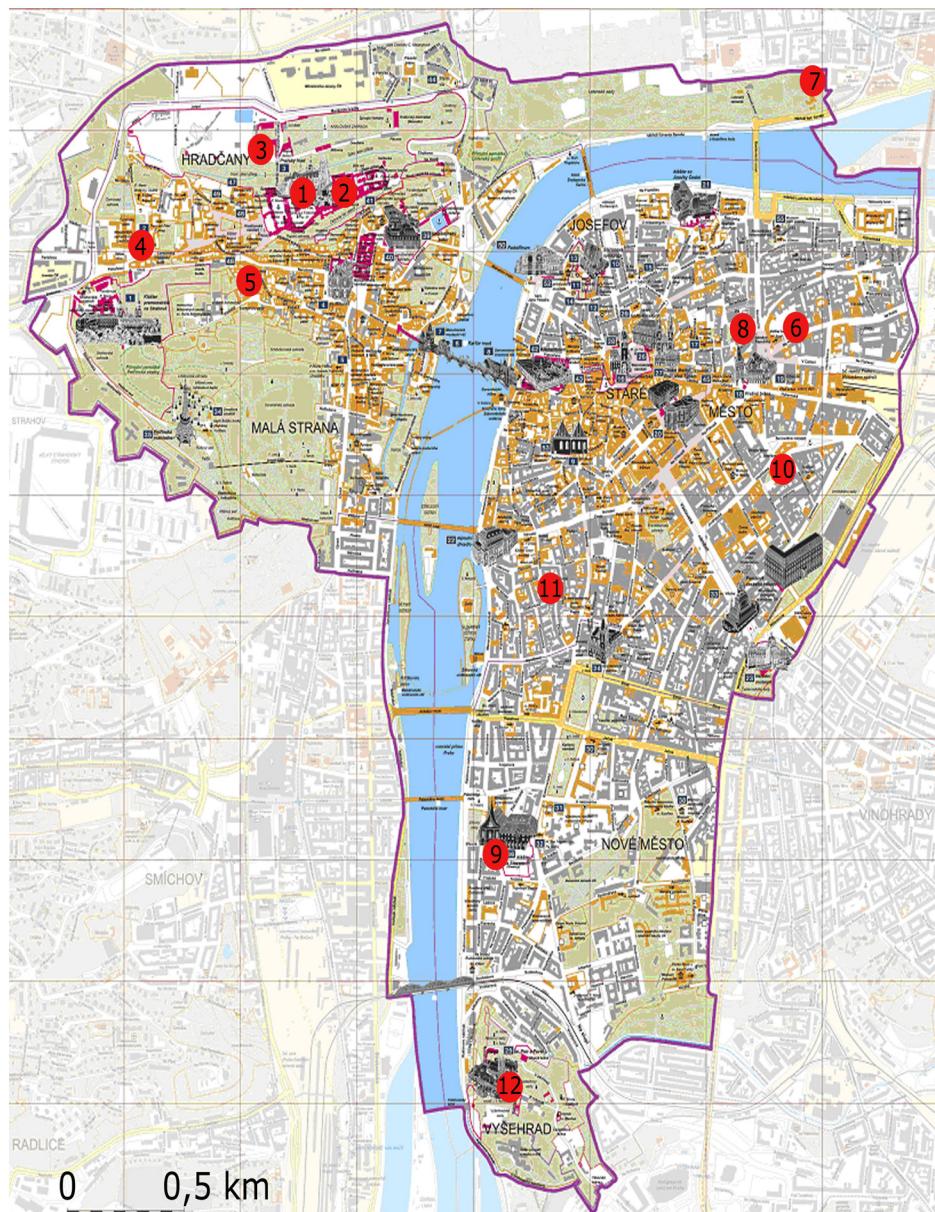
who could not, or did not want to, leave the land were subsequently forced to adopt the Catholic faith – a change that was, however, often only formal.

An important part of practising the Catholic faith was the consistent application of the relevant Catholic burial rite, which can partially be studied also from the grave inventories of archaeologically researched modern-period burial grounds. The deathbed ritual and funeral were firmly defined Catholic rituals that had been codified by the Council of Trent in the year 1563 and in the norms issued by the Roman Curia and the regional church administration. For Bohemia this primarily meant the regulations established by the Prague Synod of 1605, the Roman Ritual of 1614, the Prague Ritual originally issued in 1642 and the text of the regulation by the Prague Synod on the sacraments issued in 1684 and 1762<sup>1</sup> for the needs of the Bohemian clergy. Additional important sources for studying the development of the local burial rite include catechisms published by the Prague Archdiocese, the missals of local orders, normative manuals such as *Ars Moriendi* ('The Art of Dying') and the testaments of the deceased. During the course of the 18th century the funeral rite was also governed by legal norms (laws issued by Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II).

On the basis of the aforementioned sources it is known that, due to its eschatological element, the deathbed ritual belonged among the most important moments in the life of Catholics. The rite included two types of sacraments – Extreme Unction and the Holy Eucharist. The practice of the first of these sacraments can also be documented in archaeological sources. The actual funeral was composed of three basic parts between the 16th and 18th centuries. The first part involved the transfer of the deceased from the home to the church, the second was the Mass for the deceased, and the third burial in the grave. Up until the legal regulations issued by Joseph II (Emperor Joseph II's decree, 23 August 1784 and 2 September 1784), the length of funeral preparations was limited by only two circumstances – the wealth of the funeral organiser and concerns of a mundane nature: death outside the actual parish, or waiting for the preparation of the coffin, tomb, etc. The burial of Prague townspeople in the middle to higher classes of society typically lasted one to three days. Orders by Emperor Joseph II shortened the period for burying the deceased to twenty-four hours. Unfortunately, there is no way to prove the length of the burial rite archaeologically; therefore we are dependent on written sources as amendments to laws, parish registers, and personal testaments.

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<sup>1</sup> *Synodus Archi-Diocesana Pragensis. Habita ab Illustrissimo & Reverendissimo Domino Domino Sbigneo Berka, Dei [et] Apostol. Sedis Gratia Archi-Episcopo Pragensi, & Principe Legato Nato, & c. Anno a Christi Nativitate M.D.C.V. In Festo S. Wenceslai Principis Martyris Ac Patroni.*



**Figure 11.1:** Map of Prague showing sites of archaeologically-excavated modern period cemeteries.  
 1. St Vitus Cathedral, Prague Castle 2. The Basilica of St George, Prague Castle 3. The Prague Castle Riding School 4. The Loreto Square, Prague Castle 5. Šporkova Street, Prague's Lesser Town Quarter 6. The Republic Square, Prague's New Town Quarter 7. The Church of St Clement, Prague-Bubny 8. The Church of St Benedict, Prague's New Town Quarter 9. Trojická Street, Prague's New Town Quarter 10. The Church of St Henry, Prague's New Town Quarter 11. V jirchářích Street, Prague's New Town Quarter 12. The Church of St Peter and Paul, Prague-Vyšehrad.

## 11.2 Modern Period Cemeteries in Bohemia<sup>2</sup>

The archaeological study of modern-period cemeteries, the modern burial rite and objects from the funeral appurtenances of this period is in its early stages in the Czech Republic<sup>3</sup>. The greatest number of published early modern and modern cemeteries in the territory of today's Czech Republic are located in Prague (Fig. 11.1); as a result, they form the primary source for this work.

Beginning in the 1950s, archaeological excavations in Prague were primarily conducted in the centre of the city, specifically at the cemetery of the Capuchin St Joseph Monastery at the George of Poděbrady barracks on Náměstí Republiky (from the mid-17th century to the 18th century)<sup>4</sup>; the excavation at the Church of St Clement in Prague-Bubny (19<sup>th</sup>-century horizon)<sup>5</sup>; the archaeological rescue excavation at the Prague Commandery of the Teutonic Knights and the former Romanesque

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<sup>2</sup> Archaeological research in Bohemia defines the Early Modern period as the period from the end of the 15th to the middle of the 17th century. The period between 1650 and 1800 is designated as the Modern period. Czech historical research also divides the Modern period into two stages: the term "Early Modern period" is used for the period of 1500-1650, "Modern period" for the period of 1650-1790/1800 (Petráň a kol., 1995, p. 31). The beginning of the Early Modern period overlaps somewhat with the emergence of the Renaissance (Bůžek, Král & Vybíral, 2007, p. 44).

<sup>3</sup> The earliest comprehensive work, which attempted to define several generalised conclusions on the basis of archaeological material from Moravia and Silesia, was published by Unger (Unger, 2000). He continued that work with a study summarising the issue of the burial rite in the Middle Ages and the Modern period (Unger, 2002). Blažková (Blažková-Dubská, 2005a) released an overview of published and unpublished Early Modern and Modern period cemeteries in Bohemia in 2004. Krajíč (2007) compiled a work describing the processing of Modern period grave finds from the south Bohemian region. Works by collectives of authors (Omelka, Řebounová & Šlancarová, 2009a; Omelka & Řebounová, 2011) were among studies that analysed the composition of grave inventories and the significance of Catholic symbolism in devotional items from grave contexts in Baroque Bohemia and Moravia.

<sup>4</sup> The archaeological excavation at the George of Poděbrady barracks on Náměstí Republiky (Republic Square) in Prague was conducted in 2004, during which the cemetery at the Capuchin St Joseph Monastery was also researched (Flek et al., 2009a; Juřina et al., 2007). The cemetery horizon was composed of two stratigraphic layers of graves with a total of 18 grave units. Objects of a personal or other nature were found in nine graves. All 18 skeletons were subjected to an anthropological analysis and, in addition to the gender of the individuals, several diseases were also identified. The cemetery was used to bury members of the monastery community. The cemetery may have been used for monastic brothers as well as lay servants and patients at the monastery hospital. The relative chronology of the cemetery is therefore defined by the period of the existence of the Capuchin monastery between the years 1633 and 1795 (Flek et al., 2009b).

<sup>5</sup> An advance archaeological excavation, conducted in 1997 at the Church of St Clement in Prague-Bubny, captured part of a modern period cemetery. A total of 63 grave pits were uncovered. Solid remains of coffins and their hardware, the personal items of the deceased, human remains and parts of clothes and shoes were found in the graves. Clear traces of medical autopsies were found on several skeletal remains. The find contexts place the graves in the final phase of the cemetery, i.e. to the course of the 19th century, in one case to the end of the 18th century (Kostka & Šmolíková, 1998).

Church of St Benedict in Prague's New Town (14th to 18th century)<sup>6</sup>; the excavation in Prague's Trojická St (first half of the 18th century)<sup>7</sup>; the former cemetery on the grounds of the Church of St Henry in the New Town<sup>8</sup> (14th to 16th century); and the excavation at the V Jirchářich site (second half of the 18th century)<sup>9</sup>.

The early modern and modern cemeteries that have been processed in the most detailed manner and published are those from Prague Castle and its immediate surroundings – Hradčany (11th to 18th century)<sup>10</sup> and the Lesser Town (see below).

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**6** In 1971, the then Prague Centre of Monument Care and the Anthropology Department of the National Museum conducted a rescue archaeological excavation at sites of the Prague Commandery of the Teutonic Knights and the former Romanesque Church of St Benedict in the New Town quarter of Prague. Only a small number of graves has survived intact from the original cemetery, where the number of graves was estimated in the thousands. During the excavation samples were taken from a total of 850 graves, which were divided into five chronological phases on the basis of their stratigraphy (Ječný & Omlorová, 1988, p. 8). From the perspective of modern-period burials, the two latest phases of burials – the fourth and the fifth – are significant. The fourth phase lasted approximately between 1380 and 1635. It is probable that only part of the cemetery (represented by 160 skeletons) from this phase of burial was identified (Hanáková & Stloukal, 1988, p. 159). The fifth phase of burial lasted approximately 150 years, at which point the church and the adjacent buildings were owned by the Strahov Premonstratensians. Bones from graves disturbed by a Baroque building were deposited in the cellar of a newly constructed charnel house on the north side of the church along the wall of the cemetery. The compacted layer of bones (nearly 30cm deep) contained the remains of several hundred individuals. Preserved next to the spacious crypt located beneath the chancel of the seminary church were several masonry tombs filled with wooden coffins. Intensive burials also continued outside the church in this period. A specific terrain situation was captured by the excavation in front of the west facade of the Baroque church, where disrespectfully-buried skeletons were found laid across one another in irregular groups in the waste fill. This was apparently a plague cemetery from the year 1680, during which more than 16,000 people died in Prague. The graves on the remaining land explored in front of the west facade of the church were arranged in rows and formed part of the cemetery that surrounded the Baroque church for the entire following century. This phase of burial contains 462 skeletons (Ječný & Olmerová, 1988, p. 22).

**7** The find of a mass grave with dozens of skeletons in a 1.3-meter thick layer in the year 1969 in Trojická Street in Prague was dated to the first half of the 18th century (Beranová, 1989, p. 273). Brass sacred objects depicting St John of Nepomuk, and remnants of funeral chaplets in the form of silver, copper and brass wires were found in the grave fill.

**8** A site with modern-period burials that has been studied for a longer period of time is the former cemetery on the grounds of the Church of St Henry in Prague's New Town Quarter, which was used primarily between the 14th and 16th centuries (Dobisíková et al., 1997; Hanáková, Martinec & Vyhnaník, 1975; Omelka & Starec, 2002).

**9** During the large-scale reconstruction of the water mains in the New Town Quarter of Prague in 2009-2011. While trenches for the water mains were being dug in August 2011, it was discovered that a ditch ran through the cemetery at the Church of St Michael. Discovered at the bottom of the ditch were undamaged coffins with skeletal remains in their original position, dating to the final phase of burying in the second half of the 18th century. A total of 22 Baroque graves were explored at the site (Omelka & Selmi Wallisová, 2014, in press)

**10** Graves inside St Vitus Cathedral at Prague Castle have a special standing among burials. Only representatives of the first three generations in the long line of Habsburg rulers – individuals who

### 11.3 Prague Castle and the Church of St John the Baptist

The work by Ivan Borkovský addresses the archaeological excavation at St George's Basilica and the Monastery at Prague Castle in 1959-1963 (Borkovský, 1975). Although the main focus of the publication is early medieval burials of the members of the Přemyslid dynasty, significant attention is also paid to the burials of abbesses and Order members. In the case of the abbesses, lead plaques are often available for determining the name of the deceased and, often, the year of death. This information indicates that the burials occurred from the Late Gothic period up to the Josephinian reforms in the 1780s. Burials of administrators, Order sisters and several most probably lay individuals can be dated to the broader period between the 16th and the 18th centuries. Nevertheless, due to research advances the authors of this text are currently reviewing the relevant assemblage of finds.

A rescue archaeological excavation was conducted in 2002 and 2004 at Šporkova Street 322/III, in the immediate vicinity of the former Church of St John the Baptist in Obora in the Lesser Town of Prague. As part of the rescue excavation, a total of 906 burials, or parts thereof, were documented and subsequently removed from the ground. General information from the excavation is available in the journal *Staletá Praha* (Omelka, 2009). A large assemblage of finds, mainly from the Modern Period, was retrieved from the grave units or their fill. Detailed inventories of these artefacts are presented in the related studies (Omelka 2006; Omelka & Řebounová, 2008; Omelka & Řebounová, 2011; Omelka & Řebounová, 2012a; Omelka & Řebounová, 2012b; Omelka, Řebounová & Šlancarová, 2009b; Omelka, Řebounová & Šlancarová, 2010; Omelka, Řebounová & Šlancarová, 2011; Omelka & Šlancarová, 2007). The cemetery was used

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had chosen Prague as the seat of their monarchy – were buried in the church, originally in the tomb of Bohemian kings built by Charles IV beneath the chancel. In 1589 the remains of Ferdinand I, his wife Anna Jagiellon and their son Maximilian were transferred to the new royal Colin Mausoleum built in front of the church altar. Emperor Rudolph II was buried in a monumental sarcophagus beneath the Colin Mausoleum (Bravermanová & Lutovský, 2001, p. 223; Vlček, 2000, p. 77). On the basis of archaeological and written sources, the cemetery at the Riding School (excavated in 1951-1952) can be dated in general to the period around the middle of the 17th century. It is assumed that the cemetery contains the remains of Swedish soldiers involved in the siege of Prague in 1648 (Blažková-Dubská, 2005b; Blažková-Dubská, 2006).

The next and chronologically the oldest cemetery in the immediate vicinity of Prague Castle is the cemetery on Loretańské náměstí (Loreto Square) in Hradčany. With a minimum of two interruptions, the cemetery was used from the Early Middle Ages up to the Early Modern Period (the middle of the 11th century to the middle of the 16th century). Finds of decapitated individuals and mass graves are documented from the earliest phase of the cemetery (Boháčová & Blažková, 2010). The last and one of the most important excavated cemeteries is located in St George's Basilica at Prague Castle, where the latest burials are dated to the end of the 18th century.

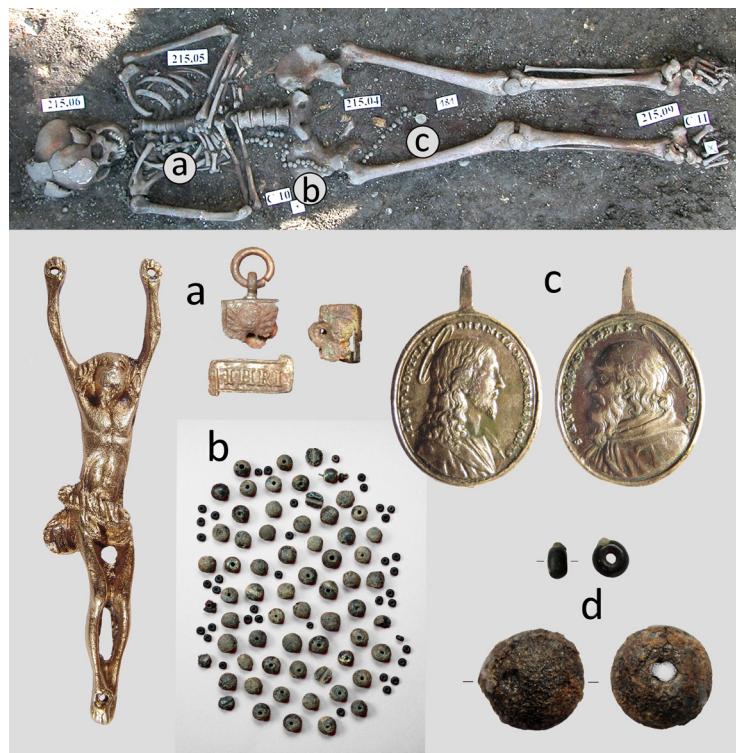
at least from the 13th century to the 18th century. All of the discovered skeletons were spatially measured, professionally removed and subsequently subjected to basic anthropological analysis. This was followed by a detailed archive review of the death records of the relevant parish, with a focus on evaluating personal and demographic data.

## 11.4 Analysis of the Grave Goods

More than 3,000 items were found during the excavation of St George's Basilica, and more than 6,000 in the excavation in Šporkova Street. The vast majority of finds belonged to the inventories of the deceased. An analysis revealed that a common trait of both find assemblages is the presence of artefacts of a religious nature connected with both the spiritual life of the deceased and the burial rite. In addition to their geographical proximity (the sites are located near to one another: the basilica is situated in the grounds of Prague Castle, and the Church of St John the Baptist in Obora was located below the castle in the Lesser Town Quarter), the two find assemblages had a nearly identical upper limit for determining the dates of the finds. Burials were performed in St George's Basilica up to Emperor Joseph II's decree issued in 1781 and 1782 banning burials inside settlements, churches and tombs. The *datum ante quem* for determining the relative chronology of finds from the burials at the Church of St John the Baptist in Obora is 1784, i.e. the year that the cemetery was abolished by the emperor's decree. Both assemblages contain artefacts from the 17th and 18th centuries. Graves in the basilica can be dated with certainty from the beginning of the 17th century up to the 1880s, thanks to the absolute dates of burials preserved on the epigraphs on coffins and tombs. Although such dating resources were unavailable for the burials in Šporkova Street, it was possible on the basis of grave inventories, stratigraphic relationships and written sources (death records) to establish that the vast majority of the deceased were buried in the second and third thirty-year periods of the 18th century.

The differences between the sites can be followed in the social and religious environments. The cemetery at the Church of St John the Baptist in Obora represents a burial place for townspeople in which the burial practices of the common Prague urban society of the 17th and 18th centuries are reflected (Fig. 11.2). Written sources indicate that the cemetery was used to bury common citizens of the Lesser Town (Prague Archives, Collection of Parish and Civil Registers, sign. MIK i8, MIK Z3, MIK Z4, MIK Z5), and this was proved archaeologically. From the perspective of social structure, death records indicate that the vast majority of the individuals buried in the cemetery at the Church of St John the Baptist in Obora were members of the middle or lower-middle class, typically craftsmen, merchants, public officials, landlords, the destitute aristocracy, servants, university students, soldiers and the local clergy. The lowest and highest classes of society were only marginally represented. With regard

to nationality, aside from Bohemians, the majority of other buried individuals were Germans, Italians and even Dutch. Foreigners were primarily merchants and highly-qualified professionals in construction and architecture, sculpture and painting. The most prominent members of the Italian contingency were the architect Jan Santini Aichel (1677–1723), whose works included the church at Zelená Hora, and the architect Anselmo Lurago (1702–1765). Dutch nationals buried in the cemetery include Aegidius Sadeler (1570–1629), the author of a map of Bohemia from 1605, and Bartholomeus Spranger (1546–1611), a Mannerist painter with an Italian orientation who moved to Prague in 1580 (Omelka, 2002, p. 101). From a religious perspective, the cemetery belonged to a parish administered by the Jesuits since the beginning of the 17th century.



**Figure 11.2:** Burial 181 from Šporkova Street in Prague with furnishings. Preserved items of the grave furnishing of a 30-40 year old woman consist of (a) the metal fittings of a wooden crucifix, which was placed into the palms of the deceased; (b) rosary beads originally bound around the hands of the deceased; (c) a brass rosary medal; and (d) a sample of rosary bead types found in this grave. This composition and type of items is a typical example of grave furnishing of Prague's Lesser Town inhabitants, buried in the cemetery of St John in Obora during the 18th century.

On the other hand, St George's Basilica on the grounds of Prague Castle primarily reflects the burial customs of a narrow range of people connected with the operation of the convent, and the nobility (Fig. 11.3). The basilica, which had functioned in the Early Middle Ages as a burial place for the ruling Přemyslid dynasty, was used in the modern period especially for burying members of the Benedictine convent, which was in operation at the site almost continuously from the tenth century to the 1880s. The excavated graves belonged to monastery abbesses, Order sisters,<sup>11</sup> church administrators, higher-ranking servants, monastery officials and benefactors, both noble and civic. Lower-ranking servants, residents of Prague Castle that were local parishioners and the vast majority of children were buried in the cemetery situated along the south wall of the church. The unusually large amount of objects retrieved from both excavations has provided insight into the composition of the grave furnishings of Prague Modern Period citizens and the Order community, the morphology of individual artefacts and their development, and the spiritual dimension of death and the religious notions of the buried individuals. Making a sizeable contribution to this understanding at both locations was a comparison of the discovered material with the testimony of period written and iconographic sources.

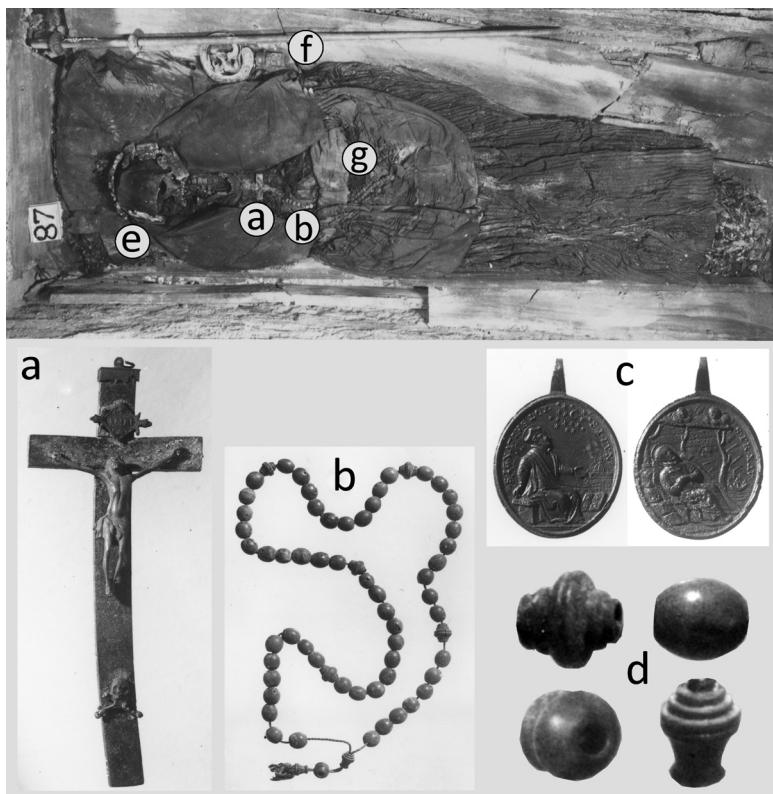
## 11.5 Typology of Grave Goods

Baroque burials in Bohemia are characterised by the presence of relatively rich grave furnishings. The most distinct component of the Catholic funeral in this period was the use of the cross (crucifix), various types of rosaries and prayer beads typically decorated with a broad range of small crucifix pendants, religious medals, reliquaries and prayer books.

Small crucifixes had been in use in the Catholic environment since the Middle Ages for various liturgical ceremonies, both inside and outside churches. They were carried as processional crosses, and they appeared in households in the form of home altars, table reliquaries or table crucifixes without relics, the purpose of which was the same as icons. The custom of hanging a cross with the crucified Christ on the walls of rooms spread in the 18th century. Crucifixes played an important role in rituals connected with death and the funeral rite, a context in which the cross was linked with the granting of general absolution. General absolution (the general Apostolic Blessing of the dying) is a blessing with plenary indulgences granted by the Pope or a priest authorised by the Pope to all seriously ill members of the Catholic faith that can be granted absolution and Extreme Unction (Kaiser, 1965, pp. 321–322). Absolution

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<sup>11</sup> The abbesses were usually of aristocratic origin; three were members of the Přemyslid family. The ranks of Order sisters were typically composed of girls and women from noble and wealthy families (Ekert, 1883, p. 82).



**Figure 11.3:** The grave of the abbess Aloisie Terezie von Widmann (†1735), St. George's Basilica. The abbess was buried in a wooden coffin in a brick burial chamber inside the church. The wooden crucifix (a) and a rosary (b) with a religious medal (c) approximately correspond with items placed into burgher and aristocratic graves in Bohemian milieu. A sample of rosary beads types found in this grave is also shown (d). Abbesses' graves differ from burgher graves and graves of common order sisters with the presence of an abbess's crown (e), and staff (f).

became an official part of the Catholic funeral ceremony with the issue of the Roman Ritual (*Rituale romanum*) of 1614. The codification of this ritual in Prague is assumed to have occurred at the latest by 1642, the year the Prague Ritual (*Rituale pragense*) was issued. During the Baroque period the blessing and plenary indulgences were often connected with the cross (often the crucifix) that was placed in the grave with the deceased. The deceased usually held the cross in their hands, which were placed on the chest or abdomen (Korený, Omelka & Řebounová, 2012, p. 270). A total of 140 various crosses in this position was found in Šporkova Street, while 46 finds of this type were made at St George's Basilica. The majority of the crosses were wooden crucifixes with a metal (typically brass) figure of Christ and other metal parts applied to the cross.

Rosaries also played an important role in the burial ritual. Rosaries were personal belongings owned by a person for their entire life; these were then buried with their owners when they passed away. A rosary was composed of two types of beads: 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary' beads. Beads were among the most common finds at both sites: more than 5,000 were found in Šporkova Street, and more than 2,000 at St George's Basilica. A wide range of forms and materials were documented at the two sites, including beads of glass, wood, bone, precious stones and metals (on the form and types of Baroque rosaries in greater detail see Omelka & Řebounová, 2008, pp. 606–610). Like pendants, rosaries could also be granted by Church indulgences. Various types of pendants were attached to rosaries; one important group was composed of small crosses which could be worn as a personal ornament, as part of a scapular, as a container for relics or as part of a rosary. More than 20 small crosses of this type come from burials in St George's Basilica; 95 were found in Šporkova Street. They are usually connected to rosaries in two ways. One was as a 'Credo Cross', i.e. a cross symbolising the start of the rosary, the Apostles' Creed; in this case the small cross was hung at the beginning of the rosary strand. In the other case, the small cross was attached as a common apotropaic charm anywhere along the rosary. In terms of form, in addition to Greek crosses, which appear rather sporadically, the vast majority are Latin, two-bar and clover crosses. Some of the crosses were specific types (Fassbinder, 2003, pp. 248–249; Omelka, Řebounová & Šlancarová, 2010, pp. 467–520), which were often connected to a particular pilgrimage site, event or saint, and were distinguished more or less by a given symbolism or reference to miraculous effect. These 'special' crosses often differ from common Latin crosses, which typically feature an attached or relief figure of Christ, by an uncommon shape. Examples of this type of pendant are the 'Scheyern Cross' in the form of a two-bar cross with an expanded base, or the Cross of Caravaca – a two-bar cross with thistle-like ends. Both types were represented in the assemblage of finds from Šporkova Street, whereas only the Cross of Caravaca type was documented in St. George's Basilica. Other types of cross pendants represented in both assemblages were a Benedict pfennig in the shape of a cross, and the Jerusalem Cross. The most commonly used material for the production of pendants at both sites was brass; casting was the predominant production technology.

Another group of devotionals appearing in large numbers in the funeral contexts at both of the studied sites was religious medals, 46 of which were found during the excavation of St George's Basilica, and 248 in Šporkova Street. The objects were typically small round or oval medals (or small plaques with intricate shapes) made of various materials (metal, wood, glass, bone, clay, enamel, wax, textile or paper). The most frequently preserved specimens are solid metal forms usually of cast brass, tin, bronze, in rare cases of silver or alloy, with a relief motif on one side, though in most cases on both. The vast majority of sacred objects found at both excavated sites were solid metal medals. Hanging these small medals on prayer beads or rosaries

was highly popular in the Baroque period. Considering the fact that rosaries in this period were not only a common part of the death ritual but, as the large number of remnants discovered in archaeological excavations indicates (Omelka & Řebounová, 2008, pp. 605–679), a fully obligatory component of the grave inventory, the role of the majority of these medals in the context of Baroque graves appears self-apparent. Nearly all the medals found at the sites were pendants on rosaries. Medals in graves likewise appear as parts of scapulars, reliquaries or in a position suggesting that they were worn around the neck.

Religious medals can be divided into a number of groups based on the reason for their production. The most important ones are pilgrimage medals depicting adoration sculptures from Bohemian (Svatá Hora near Příbram, Stará Boleslav) as well as Austrian (Mariazell) and German (Neukirchen) pilgrimage sites, symbols of a religious Order (primarily Jesuit), and commemorative motifs, the emblems of religious brotherhoods and protective medals. These latter medals can be further divided into those with a special protective effect (specimens with symbols against the plague or bad weather) and those with a general protective influence. This subgroup includes, for example, medals depicting Jesus and the Virgin Mary, as well as those for which a special effect expires after a certain amount of time (Benedict pfennigs). The wealth of depicted motifs is partly based on the diversity of function (Omelka, Řebounová & Šlancarová, 2009a, p. 592).

Funeral crowns or chaplets (in Latin *corona mortis* or *corona funebris*; in German *Totenkronen*, *Totenkränze*) are a common find discovered primarily in the grave inventories of Order sisters from St George's Basilica. Existing knowledge suggests that funeral crowns and chaplets were mainly placed in the graves of children and single individuals of both genders. Although the individuals were mainly young, burials of older and even old people also contained crowns and chaplets. The main criterion was the 'maidenliness' of the deceased, a quality that was venerated by this ornament. In certain German territories the chaplet or crown was also used to honour women in the *puerperium* (post-natal) period for their suffering (Lippok, 2009, pp. 80–81). Like age, religious affiliation was also not decisive in this burial ritual: Prague excavations indicate that the custom was widespread among both Protestants and Catholics. The remains of funeral crowns or wreaths were also found in Catholic churchyards in some others Czech sites, as Rakovník (Central Bohemia), Kralovice (Western Bohemia) or České Budějovice (Southern Bohemia).

Eight nearly complete graves of abbesses from the years 1600–1766 were documented in St George's Basilica. The inventories of these graves typically contained an insignia of the standing of the abbesses (usually a gold-plated wooden crown, a crosier, a ring and gloves). Like the burials of regular Order sisters, those of abbesses contained rosaries (of ivory, jet stone, glass and wood) commonly furnished with brass pendants, wooden crosses with applied metal figures (held in the hands of the deceased), prayer books, scapulars, reliquaries and remnants of the aforementioned

chaplets. The burial of Aloisie Terezie von Widmann from 1735 is exemplary of the inventory of Prague abbesses (Figs. 11.3 and 11.4). The abbesses were buried in a supine position with hands folded across their abdomen or, more commonly, on the chest.



Figure 11.4: A portrait of the abbess Aloisie Terezie von Widmann (1732-1735).

## 11.6 Burial Customs in Bohemia after the Thirty Years' War: A Summary

The archaeological excavations conducted thus far at modern-period cemeteries in Prague indicate that, with only strictly defined exceptions, the liturgical acts required by the Catholic faith were closely observed in the territory of today's Czech Republic during the 17th and 18th centuries. The religiously disparate population, still composed mainly of non-Catholics at the beginning of the 17th century, was

almost completely re-Catholicized following the Westphalian Peace in 1648. The practice of the Catholic liturgy by the population was then regularly monitored by the relevant Church officials, with one form of control being the funeral rite. People (and their families) who did not respect the prescribed religious practices could face existential problems. The majority of the population tried to avoid this problem by at least formally respecting the rules. This situation is reflected in grave inventories that are sometimes overly lavish; the composition and style of such inventories appear to be the same in the burials of townspeople, nobles and Church dignitaries.

It is therefore possible to state that burial furnishings in the 17th and 18th centuries in Bohemia and Moravia document the official inclination of the Bohemian and Moravian environments toward the practice of Catholicism, a faith that placed a strong emphasis on the visual presentation of the rite. The buried artefacts reflect the social necessity of conducting burials according to the Catholic burial rite required by state and church authorities. At the same time, the artefacts also express personal piety; some of the devotionals were in fact endowed with special indulgences that the Catholic faithful believed would shorten the anticipated period the deceased must spend in purgatory. The desire to shorten the suffering of the soul in purgatory held an important place in the thinking of Baroque people. It can be generally assumed that every grave in the Czech Republic from the Baroque period contained grave furnishings. The most distinct component of the Catholic burial in the local environment in this period was the use of the cross (crucifix), various types of rosaries and prayer beads typically decorated with a broad range of small crucifix pendants and religious medals, as well as reliquaries and prayer books.

The excavations conducted at St George's Basilica and at the original cemetery at the defunct Church of St John the Baptist in Obora in Šporkova Street in Prague rank among the most representative researches of modern-period cemeteries in Bohemia. St George's Basilica is significant primarily in that it served as a burial site not only for the Bohemian rulers and aristocracy but also as a cemetery for townspeople and, above all, for members of the Benedictine Order.

The revealed standard grave furnishings of burgher and church burials in Prague consisted of one crucifix held in the hands of the deceased, and one rosary, often accompanied by at least one medal, that could be also held in the hand of the deceased or could be wrapped around his hands. Pendants and crucifixes held in the hands were most commonly made of brass, while organic materials – wood and bone – were mainly used for rosary beads. In certain cases, cross pendants and medals are relatively sensitive chronological materials (commemorative medals issued on special occasions). The wealth of grave furnishings is not determined by the number of artefacts but rather by the type of the material and the actual craftsmanship. Due to the fact that the number of discovered artefacts made of durable materials does not match the number of excavated burials, it can be assumed that the majority of burgher graves contained standard grave furnishings made of organic materials, most commonly wood. The preservation of wooden artefacts depends on soil conditions,

which are not always ideal in the country. The graves of wealthier members of society and higher ranking abbesses are furnished with artefacts of finer craftsmanship made of durable materials – again mostly of brass. Coffins were mostly very badly preserved everywhere, with no surviving decorative elements.

The custom of depositing burial chaplets was widespread in both the Church and lay environment, as excavations in Šporkova and Trojická streets document. The graves of townspeople also commonly contain personal items of the deceased (jewellery – especially rings, earrings and pince-nez) and health aids (pressure bandages). Burials of Order sisters documented in the Church environment at Prague Castle contain insignias of the Church dignitaries, i.e. crosiers, gloves and crowns.

The cemetery at the Church of St John the Baptist in Šporkova Street served as the final resting place for local settlers of the Lesser Town. In terms of archaeology, this research involved the most in-depth processing of a modern-period burial inventory and analysis of the social structure of the deceased in the Czech Republic. Together with the greatest number of modern-period graves explored using modern archaeological methods, this site has produced the highest degree of knowledge of burial customs employed by Baroque townspeople.

The essential congruity of grave furnishings in burials of members of the monastery community from Prague Castle and burghers buried at the Church of St John the Baptist in the Lesser Town documents the difficulty in socially classifying Baroque residents solely on the basis of grave goods. A thorough comparison of written sources (such as burial registers) and archaeological finds in the future could help clarify notions of which grave furnishings can be archaeologically documented and, on the other hand, which part of the source inventory will always remain the domain of written sources. Based on the processing of Bohemian and Moravian excavations, it can be stated that the composition of grave furnishings and the type, material and craftsmanship of discovered artefacts do not differ significantly from similar finds known from Catholic cemeteries dating to the 17th and 18th centuries from south Germany, Austria and Poland. Together they testify to a high degree of unification of the Catholic burial rite within Central Europe.

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