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Eastern emporas in Bohemia and Moravia in the 13th–15th centuries

ANNOTATION

This study discusses the neglected problems of eastern emporas (galleries), focusing mainly upon churches with eastern empora with a squint Windows or hagioscope. Three examples of probable 14th century date can also be found within the area of medieval Prague. They are compared with other analogical cases in Bohemia and Moravia, which have only been marginally discussed in the literature. This article attempts to analyse the functional – typological nature of these features and to define the relevant terms.

SUMMARY

The theme of this study is to point out the phenomenon of eastern or choir emporas, whose main possible purpose is visual contact with the main altar, but may serve many other practical needs. Numerous eastern emporas include emporas situated above the sacristy. Among them we focus on definition of such emporas, connected with presbyterium only by a squint. These structures are defined as emporas on the basis of their function as an oratory. Small squint windows enabling visual contact with the choir are classified as hagioscopes after analogies from French royal chapels, although their appearance can be quite variable.

The function of an oratory in these examples of eastern emporas is substantiated by its apparent use as a means of visual communication. Second storeys above sacristies (only in the case of St. Clement, the New Town of Prague it was originally a bellfry tower) contained a squint into the presbytery, which was furnished for the needs of an individual user. They are situated in a praying or kneeling niche (in the church of St. Nicolas, Znojmo – fig. 16, St. Clement, the New Town of Prague – fig. 8, church of St. Wenceslas in St. Sebastian's abbots chapel at the Premonstratensian monastery in Louka by Znojmo – fig. 21, 23) or in a niche with a seat (in the church of St. Stephan – fig. 10, 12, the New Town of Prague or in the church of The Holy Ghost, the Old Town of Prague – fig. 6). In other cases the wall was not thick enough for a niche (in the church of St. Bartholomew, Kolin nad Labem – fig. 13 or in St. Vitus, Český Krumlov – fig. 15). Also here the height of the opening was adopted for a kneeling person as for example the private ground floor sacristy – oratorium (not empora) of the bishop Jan IV from Dražice in the church of St. Martin, Dražice (fig. 1–3).

An empora is however a multifunctional space with use conditioned by actual needs. Storeys above sacristies or choir side chapels were often used for storage, libraries or reliquaries. At a number of these emporas existence of small windows or squints facing the main space was a neglected subject of research. These features have not been mentioned together with the oratorium function. Second storeys above sacristies in the church of St. Bartholomew, Kolin or of St. Vitus, Český Krumlov or The Holy Ghost currently serve as storage space. In the country these spaces were also used as a refuge, however even here there is an example of a parish church with a squint in a niche, with seats on both sides, leading into the choir (Hroby at Tabor). Examples of private empora oratoriums are in St. Sebastian's Abbots chapel in the church of St. Wenceslas, Louka (fig. 20–23) or the former chapel of Ruthard burgher at the church of St. Michael, the Old Town of Prague mentioned in documentary evidence at the beginning of the 15th century. We have to consider that in fact any space could serve as oratorium, and a Reliquary or library does not exclude an oratorium function. With the connection by a hagioscope these rooms become empora oratoriums. The function of a hagioscope is to allow the mass (event. wafer on display, relics etc.) to be followed separately and in complete privacy. They also enable acoustic contact. All these aspects cover one of two basic functions of an oratorium. The first is private praying, pertinently a mass. Functions of empora oratoriums were probably combined with reliquaries and treasuries quite intentionally since adoration of relics and reading, as part of private praying, directly fulfilled the first of the oratory functions. Besides it was beneficial to combine it also with its other possible functions, which at the same time determines the function of an empora. In most of the examples we did not succeed in determination to whom the oratorium was destined for. Only in case of the church of The Holy Ghost at the Old Town of Prague (fig. 4–6) was there any reason to presume that the oratorium served the Abbot of the Benedictine nun cloister, who was probably of a close relation to the founder family.

- Fig. 1.** Church of St. Martin, previously of St. Ludmila, Dražice (Mlada Boleslav distr.), early 14th century. Hagioscope of the ground floor oratory leading to the north wall of the presbytery.
- Fig. 2.** Church of St. Martin, previously of St. Ludmila, Dražice, (Mlada Boleslav distr.). A niche with a hagioscope in the corner of the oratory.
- Fig. 3.** Church of St. Martin, previously of St. Ludmila, Dražice, hagioscope leading from sacristy to presbytery.
- Fig. 4.** Church of The Holy Ghost, at the former Benedictine nun cloister, Old Town in Prague, 2nd half of the 14th century. View from the north to the church tower with a sacristy on the ground floor. Arrow at the first floor points at the window of the eastern empora.
- Fig. 5.** Church of The Holy Ghost, Old Town in Prague, groundplan of the loft above the sacristy (measured and drawn by the author).
- Fig. 6.** Church of The Holy Ghost at the former Benedictine nun cloister, Old Town in Prague, 2nd half of the 14th century. Empora opening for communication with the presbytery.
- Fig. 7.** Church of St. Clement, New Town of Prague, end of the 14th century. Empora window at the floor above the presbytery vault.
- Fig. 8.** Church of St. Clement, New Town of Prague, end of the 14th century. Detail of a praying niche with an empora window.
- Fig. 9.** Church of St. Stephan's, New Town of Prague, after 1350s. Groundplan of the loft above the current sacristy above the vault level of the aisle, empora window with a sedile depicted in section. Groundplan of the vault and the eastern wall is a reconstruction, position of the staircase is hypothetical (measured and drawn by the author).
- Fig. 10.** Church of St. Stephan, New Town of Prague. Plaster corresponds with the volume of the former empora oratory, currently in the attic.
- Fig. 11.** Church of St. Stephan, New Town of Prague, after 1350s. Last fragments of wall side ribs in the southwestern corner of the former empora oratory.
- Fig. 12.** Church of St. Stephan's, New Town of Prague, empora opening.
- Fig. 13.** Church of St. Bartholomew's, Kolin nad Labem, after 1360. View into the interior of the sacristy loft with an empora opening leading to the presbytery.
- Fig. 14.** Church of St. Bartholomew, Kolin nad Labem. The outside view of the sacristy and empora. Empora window is emphasized. Staircase turret connects the interior of the sacristy with the empora.
- Fig. 15.** Church of St. Vitus, Český Krumlov, after 1407. Empora with a hagioscope (?), the floor of the room was probably consequently raised up.
- Fig. 16.** Church of St. Nicolas, Znojmo, early 15th century. Empora opening between the presbytery and the sacristy loft.
- Fig. 17.** Eberbach monastery (Rheingau distr.), detail of a praying niche leading to the transept.
- Fig. 18.** Church of St. Lawrence at the St. Ann monastery, The Old Town in Prague, former Dominican female cloister. Two phases of empora openings on the northern side of the presbytery.
- Fig. 19.** Church of St. Lawrence at the St. Ann monastery, The Old Town in Prague, former Dominican female cloister. Medieval empora opening, second half of the 14th century.
- Fig. 20.** Church of St. Wenceslas, Louka by Znojmo, Premonstratensian monastery, sometime before 1487. View from the south onto the south church tower with St. Sebastian's abbots chapel at the first floor. (Its window is depicted by an arrow). Currently blocked doorway leading to an outside timber gallery connecting the oratory with the east wing of the monastery (original doorway in yellow).
- Fig. 21.** Church of St. Wenceslas, Louka by Znojmo, abbot's chapel of St. Sebastian's. Empora opening in a niche leading into the presbytery, sometime before 1487. During the last heritage renovation the opening was furnished with a secondary transenna (stone window hood for shading the window used mainly in the Mediterranean).
- Fig. 22.** Church of St. Wenceslas, Premonstratensian monastery Louka by Znojmo, view from the north. Three phases of empora opening development. Gothic hagioscope at the east end, in the Baroque period an oriel was set

out from the chapel of St. Sebastian's into the choir. Windows most to the west are also from the Baroque period – they lead to the landing connecting the southern longitudinal empore, the sacristy and the staircase into St. Sebastian's chapel. The opening at the highest point originated by blocking the doorway to the spiral staircase – it is not an empore.

Fig. 23. Church of St. Wenceslas, Louka by Znojmo, abbot's chapel of St. Sebastian, sometime before 1487. A niche with a squint leading into the presbytery, to the left from it is the entry into the Baroque oriel.

English by Linda and Patrick Foster