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Contribution to organic ornament in late Gothic period

ANNOTATION

This article briefly describes the use of organic ornaments in late Gothic architecture in Prague during the reign of Vladislav II. This 15th century architectural motif is considered in a wider Bohemian, as well as in European, space. Examples from Prague are compared with several similar foliage ornaments from Bohemia and also from Portugal. The Portuguese Manueline Gothic style of this period is characterised by expressive naturalistic decoration as well. These related motifs indicate the connection to the Central European and also Bohemian and Prague late Gothic period. A known example of this connection is a master printer Valentim Fernandes de Morávia, who passed new information and ideas from Portuguese royal court back to his homeland. His activity illustrates connection of Central Europe to distant European countries at the beginning of the Postmedieval period, which developed in various fields, including architecture.

SUMMARY

This article briefly describes the use of late Gothic organic ornaments in architecture mainly in Prague and Kutná Hora during the reign of Vladislav II and brings two Portuguese examples of Late Gothic botanic decoration from the same period to point connection between Late Gothic in Central Europe and Portugal. This item shortly summarizes debate about the creator of Prague's pearl of the late Gothic vegetable decoration - royal oratory in St. Vitus cathedral, which is mainly assigned to Benedict Ried, even Czech scientists sometimes dedicate it to Hans Spiess or both masters. Other examples of plant decoration in Prague illustrate its spreading during Late Gothic as it became one of the most characteristic symbols of this period and just these micro-architecture elements could help to recognize the architectonic relation in wider European context.

Not only the contacts of the Moravian Valentim Fernandes de Moravia, who worked for Portuguese king Manuel I during this period, but also the description of some comparative organic decorative motifs used in Prague castle, Old Town hall, in houses "V ráji" and "U jednorozce", in Týn church, in Křivoklát castle, in Kutná Hora and as far away as in Portuguese Cistercian Abbey in Alcobaça and in the Order of Christ monastery in Tomar (which were built in the same period in a style called Manueline) indicates potential for further research of this architectural phenomena in the wider European dimension.

Fig. 1. Prague (Praha), Prague Castle, St. Vitus cathedral. General view of the oratory, 1490–1493.

Fig. 2. Prague Castle, St. Vitus cathedral. Oratory, detail of truncated branches, 1490–1493.

Fig. 3. Prague – The Old Town Hall. Late Gothic doorway and window, 1480s.

Fig. 4. Prague – The Old Town Hall. Leaves detail on Late Gothic doorway, 1480s.

Fig. 5. Prague – The Old Town Hall. Detail of plant decoration of Late Gothic window, 1480s.

Fig. 6. Kutná Hora No. 377, Palackého square, Sankturin house. General view of the vault, around 1490.

Fig. 7. Kutná Hora No. 377, Palackého square, Sankturin house. Part of a vault decoration, around 1490.

Fig. 8. Milano, Castello Sforzesco – Sala delle Asse, Leonardo da Vinci 1496–1497.

Fig. 9. Tomar, Convento de Cristo, after 1510. Detail of truncated oak branches.

Fig. 10. Lisbon (Lisboa), Conceição Velha church, entrance portal, between 1503–1517. Detail of cut branches.

Fig. 11. Lisbon, Torre de Belém at the periphery of Lisbon. An effigy of the first rhinoceros imported to Europe.

Fig. 12. Lisbon, Torre de Belém. Turret with a rhinoceros carving of on a corbel.

Fig. 13. Tomar, Convento de Cristo, window of the capitular hall, details of organic decoration of the „Tomars window“, after 1510.

Fig. 14. Tomar, Convento de Cristo, details of florid and naturalistic decoration at the bottom of the „Tomars window“, after 1510.

Fig. 15. Alcobaça, Cistercian Abbey, doorway into the New sacristy, after 1519 (photo Viktor M.T.P.T, reprint from FURTADO MARQUES 2006).

English by Linda and Patrick Foster, Kristýna Kysilková