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Stonemasons marks in the passage of the Powder Tower

ANNOTATION

The text concerns problems of the methods of survey and documentation of stonemasons' marks and pays attention to the current state of viewing the results of work done in this field so far, i.e. publication of documented stone marks on Prague buildings. Walls in the passage of the Prašná Gate have been chosen to practical verification of options and limits during their documentation without direct access (from scaffolding, platform etc.). Documentation of marks on the ashlar walls was pursued solely from the pavement level using a camera, folding 2 m rule as a graphical scale and sun light at various angles in various seasons and day times on certain parts of the walls. Individual types of marks and their position on the walls were documented. The marks come from the period of the tower construction in 1475–1483. In the second half of the 19th century the marks were documented by František Beneš, Franz Rziha and Josef Mocker. The finds from the passage could thus be compared with earlier documentation, which was widened with further types of marks found in the accessible interiors of the tower.

SUMMARY

The article is concerned with stonemasons' marks, a remarkable phenomenon revealing the process of the construction of a number of significant historic buildings and representing a sort of "signature" by their authors, recognised as such by the scholars of the early modern art-history. First definition of the marks is shortly summarised with an outline of basic possibilities of their classification. Also the general development of their modern research and documentation is shortly mentioned. In more detail the development outline and the state of research, documentation and publishing of Prague stonemasons' marks during almost 200 years – since 1822 to the present day is described. The use, possibilities and problems of new technologies is also discussed.

As a very specific item of documentation the stonemasons' marks require appropriate specialised documentation methods. Part of the first class Prague monument – The Powder Tower has been chosen to practical verification of the use of one of the possible documentation method. Construction of the late gothic tower was started in 1475, but not finished until the Mocker's reconstruction 400 years later. It is one of the most valuable preserved gated towers in Europe. Stonemasons' marks at this primary building have already been researched before Josef Mocker in the second half of the 19th century by the conservationist František Beneš and the most famous collector of marks Franz Rhiza. Published documentation of these three authors is critically evaluated and compared, and mainly compared with the actual finds on the building.

Remote documentation method without direct access to the stonemasons' marks has been tested on the walls of the gate passage. Documentation of marks on the ashlar walls was pursued solely from the pavement level using a digital camera, and sun light at various angles, in various seasons and day times, on certain parts of the walls. Individual types of marks and their position on the walls of the passage were drawn into a photoplan of the interstices of the ashlar walling. The documentation was widened with further types of marks found in the accessible interiors of the tower.

Fig. 1. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower (Gate), east view (photo L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 2. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, stonemasons' marks published by F. Beneš in 1864 (numbering L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 3. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, stonemasons' marks published by F. Rhiza in 1883.

Fig. 4. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, stonemasons' marks published by J. Mocker in 1889 (numbering L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 5. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, north side of the passage. Drawing of the wall with the position of discovered marks. Scale of the drawing 1 : 50, scale of the legend (of the traced marks) 1 : 5. Position of presumed stonemasons' marks, which are not recognisable from the ground, indicated only by a question mark. Areas of recently replaced ashlar are hatched. Plan of the wall was redrawn on the base of single picture photogrammetry (L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 6. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, south side of the passage. Drawing of the wall with the position of discovered marks. Scale of the drawing 1 : 50, scale of the legend (of the traced marks) 1 : 5. Position of presumed stonemasons' marks, which are not recognisable from the ground, indicated only by a question mark. Areas of recently replaced ashler are hatched. Plan of the wall was redrawn on the base of single snap photogrammetry (L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 7. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, mark no. 1. Comparison of the shape of the mark published by F. Beneš, F. Rhiza and J. Mocker with a current photograph. Mocker's shape of the mark is in scale, the rest is adjusted to the size of the photographed mark (photo L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 8. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower, mark no. 3. Comparison of the shape of the mark published by F. Beneš, F. Rhiza and J. Mocker with a current photograph. Mocker's shape of the mark is in scale, the rest is adjusted to the size of the photographed mark (photo L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 9. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower. Stonemasons' marks in the level of the ground floor – in the passage and on the outer face of the tower. Some marks have been drawn on a transparent foil (in black), the rest are an approximate shape of the marks (in grey). Uncertain marks are numbered with a question mark. Marks, added after the documentation by P. Chotěbor are numbered in black (completed by L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 10. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower. Stonemasons' marks in the level of the first floor and the staircase above it (in the interior). Some marks have been drawn on a transparent foil (in black), the rest are an approximate shape of the marks (in grey). Uncertain marks are numbered with a question mark. Marks, added after the documentation by P. Chotěbor are numbered in black (completed by L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 11. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower. Stonemasons' marks in the level of the second floor and the staircase above it (in the interior). Some marks have been drawn on a transparent foil (drawn in black), the rest are an approximate shape of the marks (drawn in grey). Uncertain marks are numbered with a question mark. Marks, added after the documentation by P. Chotěbor are numbered in black (completed by L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 12. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower. Stonemasons' mark no. 52 in the staircase above the first floor. An example of an exceptionally complex type of a stonemasons' mark (photo L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 13. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower. Stonemasons' mark no. 32 in the staircase above the first floor. An example of an unusual, complex type of a stonemasons' mark found in two exemplars (photo L. Bartoš, 2015).

Fig. 14. Prague 1-Old Town, The Powder Tower. Stonemasons' marks in the level of the second floor. Presentation of the field documentation of stonemasons' marks (P. Chotěbor, 2007).

Translated by Linda and Patrick Foster