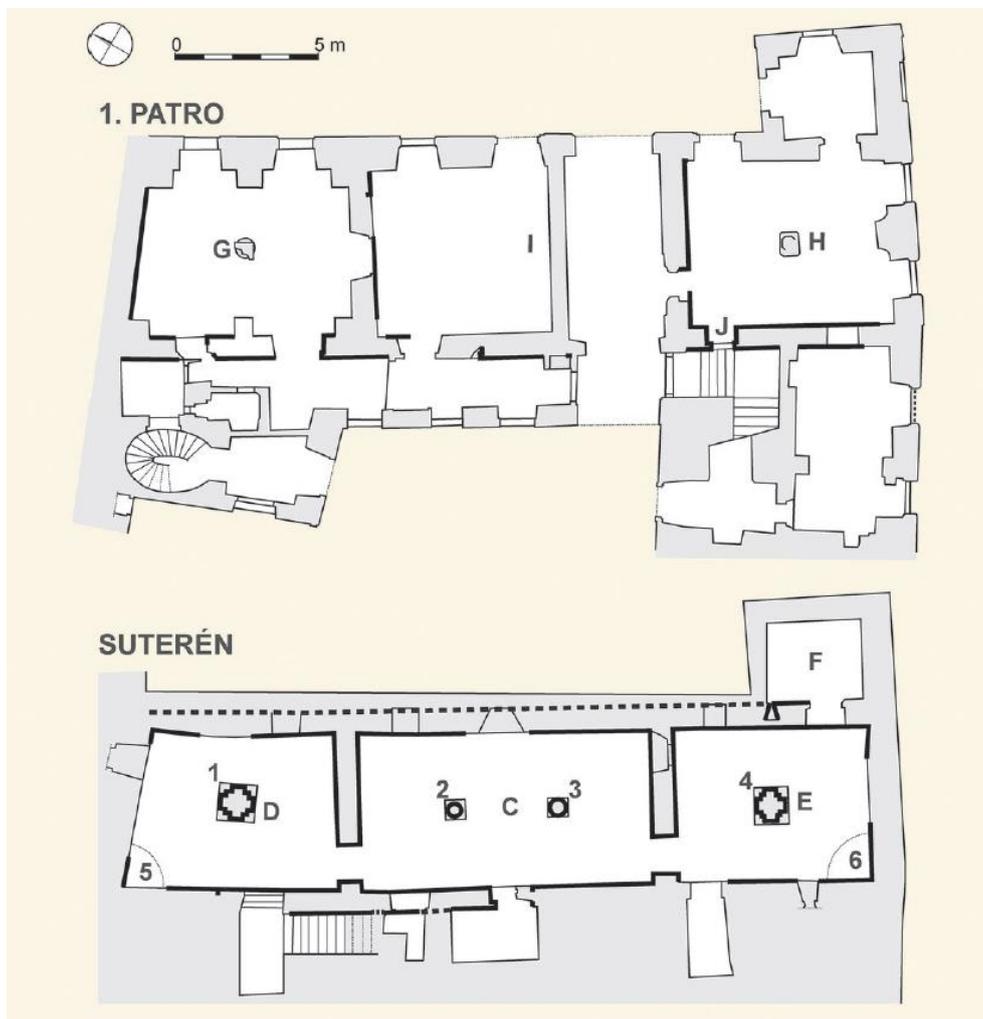


WAC-9 Historical Prague City tour: Wednesday 6th July 2022

Prague-Old Town Romanesque House of the Lords of Kunštát and Poděbrady in

Řetězová Street No. 222/I - N 50°05'07.55", E 14°25'01.64" (12th – 13th century)

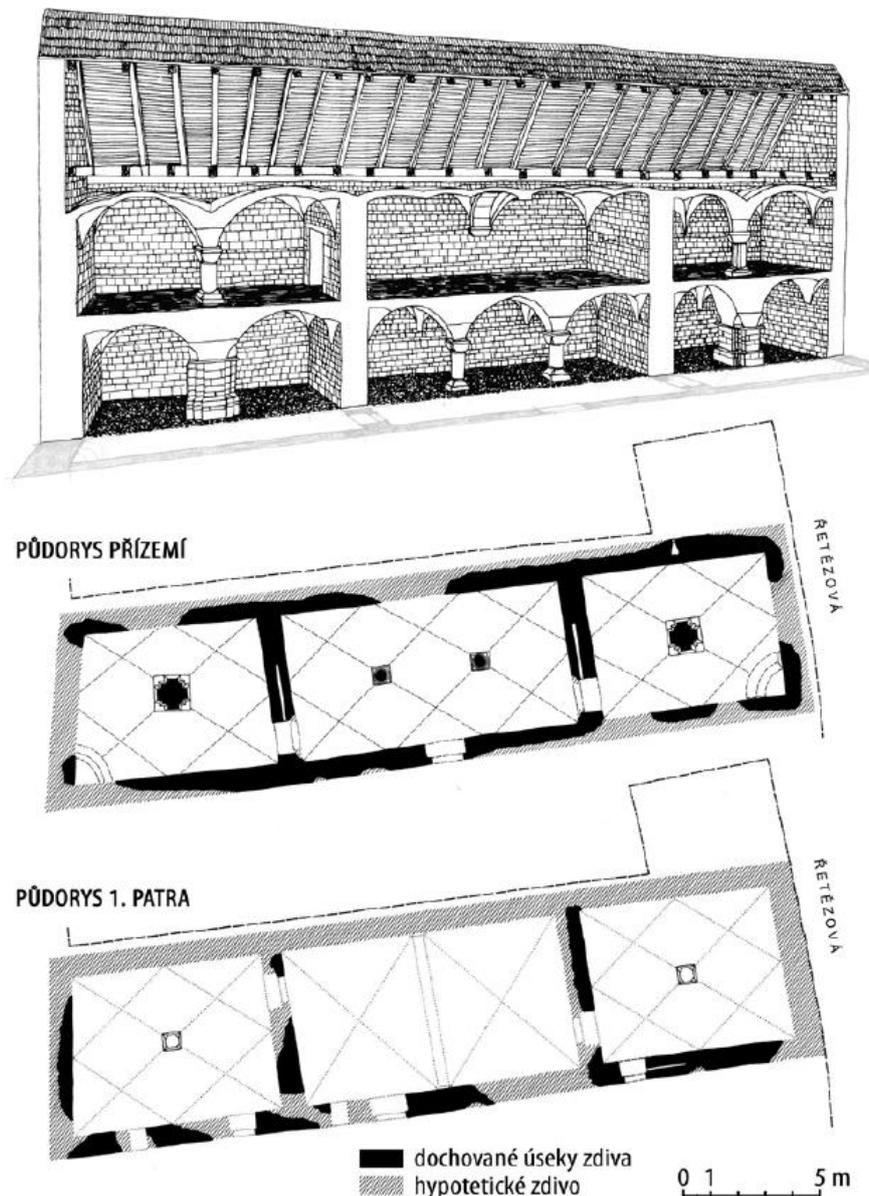
While the settlement below Prague Castle had been developing since the 9th century, the right bank of the Vltava River was for a long time only burial grounds. It was not until the 11th century that craft production (especially ironworking) and commercial activities moved here, concentrated around today's Old Town Square. The merchants' business premises were located in the fortified Týn Court or Ungelt, which was also the administrative centre under the control of the monarch. Just wealthy merchants probably began to settle in the new stone houses made of the so-called "block" masonry that we know from the second half of the 12th and 13th centuries from Prague. One of the most famous is the so-called House of the Lords of Kunštát and Poděbrad in Řetězová Street, which is one of the best preserved Romanesque buildings in Prague. Especially its ground floor, today's basement, has remained almost unchanged since the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries.





Explanatory notes to plan and the map: A - Týnský dvůr, merchants' backroom;

B - house in Řetězová Street, No. 222/I; C - hall; D-E - side rooms of the ground floor; F - later room with a Gothic portal; G-H - side rooms of the first floor (now the ground floor); I - middle room, now divided into a passage and a bar; J - Romanesque portal at the entrance to the original pavilion; 1-4 - central pillars of the cross vault; 5-6 - chimneys of the fireplaces.



Reconstruction and floor plans of the Romanesque palace in Řetězová no. 222 in the Old Town (according to Dragoun - Škabrada - Tryml 2002).

Prague Romanesque houses

Prague's Romanesque houses are an important and in Central European unique architectural phenomenon. As part of the great boom of Czech Romanesque architecture in the second half of the 12th century, among the emerging buildings in the Prague suburbs, a new element appeared - stone residential houses. Such buildings had been built only until then exclusively for the very top of secular and ecclesiastical society, but in the growing and developing suburbs of Prague Castle, they are also newly appearing among the lower categories of social elites. The fundamental moment for their emergence was the expansion of the stable permanent settlement on the right bank of the Vltava River, where the qualitatively new forms of sub-castle settlement agglomerations emerged. In the areas closer to the Vltava River aristocratic and ecclesiastical courts occurred since the mid-12th century. In these complexes, the stone architecture is represented by the construction of churches and, more recently, by the building of larger residential buildings, sometimes even in the form of palaces.

In the spatial continuity with the above type of buildings, the beginnings of stone houses, which we associate with the wealth of merchants and the emergence of a new social group of urban patriarchy, were established in places

farther away from the Vltava River (especially in the vicinity of the marketplace, today's Old Town Square) and in close connection with the stabilizing street network.

With the increasing number of such buildings, the precision of their design and the careful workmanship of the basic building units - the marl stone (*opuka*) blocks - is slowly decreasing. The houses from the end of the Romanesque period, i.e. from the second quarter of the 13th century, tend to be of Gothic rubble stone masonry. The end of this construction phase is the construction of the Old Town fortification in the 1330s, whose cubic capacity no longer allows the use of the demanding processing of individual blocks and replaces them with plastered rubble masonry. In the social sphere, the transformation of the sub-castle agglomeration into a medieval town was completed at the same time.

The characteristic features of Prague's Romanesque houses are, in addition to the standard Romanesque appearance and construction of the buildings, some elements that differ somewhat from comparable contemporary production in Western and Southern Europe. Above all, there is the austerity and minimal use of elaborately decorated architectural elements, almost exclusively limited to the capitals and sockets of vaulted columns or the modest decoration of portals. This unsophistication is compounded by the emphasis on the sheltering function of the stone building in the unfortified settlement, which is manifested by the small number of small window openings oriented mainly to the courtyard parts of the building, the access to the house mostly from the rear, covered by the plot, the large number of fixed vaults between the floors and the presence of rooms that are firmly secured from the inside. The buildings are usually two or three storeys high. Unlike in Western and Southern Europe, there is no reliable evidence of the existence of houses with a distinctly tower-like character. The simplest plan form is that of single-room houses, with only small entrance bays extending from their square shape. A relatively common form is a composition with a larger main room, usually rather square, supplemented by a smaller longitudinal side room, which probably served a storage function. However, more complex solutions of three or even four rooms are not lacking, often created in several successive construction phases. The lower storey is almost always of a semi-basement character, with its depth into the ground varying most often between 1.4-2.5 metres. Access to this floor is mediated by a brick entrance door, usually a barrel vault with a staircase overcoming the height difference between the interior floor and the external ground. The nave is usually connected to the building at a corner of the layout, but in larger palatial buildings it has also been recorded as being located on the axis of the building. The interior connection between the different floors is rarely made in the form of a staircase in the thickness of the wall, but separate and distinct entrances to each floor are common, suggesting their distinct function.

The absence of heating facilities in the surviving lower floors leads to considerations of residential parts of the houses on the upper floors, while commercial activities are assumed on the lower floors. A common parts of the interior are rectangular, so-called storage niches, used perhaps most often for the safe placement of lighting sources, as the isolated small and narrow windows could not suffice. The vaults of the individual rooms are vaulted or more often cross vaulted. In smaller rooms, one vaulted bay is recorded, in larger ones, four bays with a central support, or even six bays with two supports formed by columns or pillars. Six bays of cross vaulting can be seen in the lower floor of the Romanesque building in Rott's House (*U Rottů*) in Malé náměstí or in the central hall of the palace in Řetězová Street.

An interesting fact is the almost exclusive restriction of these houses to the area of the later Old Town. In the territory of the New Town they were recorded only in contact with the borders of the Old Town settlement, where they mostly fell victim to the construction of the Old Town fortifications in the 1330s. Their remains have not been discovered in Lesser Town and Hradčany, with only a few exceptions, which may be due either to the older origin of the local settlement and thus the absolute predominance of wooden buildings, or to the absence of Romanesque stone houses, which may be due to the consequences of the fire in the left bank of the Prague core in 1541, when a substantial part of the local buildings was destroyed.

The Romanesque stone houses form one of the most valuable parts of Prague's Romanesque architecture stock, not yet found in any other of our cities. Their number is comparable to that of the most important and most im-

pressive medieval urban centres in Western and Southern Europe (e.g. Regensburg in Bavaria or Cluny in Burgundy). In their time, they, together with their numerous churches, must have made a striking impression on the face of the suburban settlement with their elegant contrast of white, carefully crafted stonework with the predominantly timber buildings. They are an important material source for understanding the completion of the development of Prague's sub-castle agglomeration into a magnificent medieval city and the head of the Kingdom of Bohemia.



A part of the Old Town of Prague with known remains of the Romanesque houses. The palace layouts are known from Řetězová and Husova Street (Nos. 222 and 240). In the area of Jilská Street and in the southern part of the Old Town Square, small Romanesque houses are accumulated beneath the current plots (nos. 449, 451, 452, 457, 478, 479), (detail after Dragoun - Škabrada - Tryml 2002).

Rotunda of the Finding of the Holy Cross

Small and simple building made of smaller marl stones (*opuka*) cut in rows consists of a round nave vaulted into a dome with a roof lantern, and half-round apse at the Eastern side. Apse is decorated by an arched frieze. At the top, there is a lantern with compound Romanesque windows, with, at the very top, gold-plated cross, crescent moon, and an eight-pointed star.

The first written mention comes from 1365, when the rotunda was a parish church, but the building is much older. It was built on an important trade route that led from Vyšehrad to the Vltava River crossings. It is possible that it originally belonged to one of the old town mansions as a private sanctuary. There was a presbytery nearby, which had disappeared during the Hussite wars (first third of 15th century), and a cemetery was around the church building. In 1625, the rotunda was given to the Dominicans of the Old Town Monastery by the Church of St. Giles. In 1784, under the reign of Joseph II the sanctuary was shut down as part of ecclesial reforms, and the chapel became a warehouse. In 1860 there were plans to tear down the church due to construction of a new house. By the initiative of Ferdinand Břetislav Mikovec and Josef Mánes, the Umělecká beseda organisation intervened to save the building, and they succeeded. Town council bought the rotunda from a private owner, and architect Vojtěch Ignác Ullmann committed to restore the exterior for no reward. Ullmann also designed an altar,

decorated by the painter Jan Popelík. At present, the rotunda is in use by the Old Catholic Church in Czech Republic and it is administered by Prague Old Catholic parish. Regular worship services are held here.



The House at the Golden Ring

The beginnings of the House at the Golden Ring (Týnská 630/6, Old Town) are related to its immediate proximity with the Tyn Court which in the Middle Ages served as a fortified refuge for foreign merchants arriving in Prague. Under the protection of Bohemian princes and kings, the merchants could lodge as well as store, declare, and sell their goods there. In the past, there was a defence trench as part of the fortification on the site of today's House at the Golden Ring. In the 13th century, the trench was backfilled and replaced by a barrier wall. Its fragments with embrasures have survived in the house's interior.

The house received its current layout in the second half of the 15th century by joining together two older houses. The earliest building stage is evidenced by two Early Gothic cellars, which survived in the house, dating from the second third of the 13th century. Further renovations took place throughout the 14th century. The first written record about the house dates from 1402, and it was first called the House of the Golden Ring (*ad aureum anulum*) in 1429.

Exactly when the house was built is not known. The oldest records of the house date back to the 14th century and are connected with the names of Dietrich Rechcer and the Prague purgator of the vineyard mountains Tomášek. Regarding the early period, fragments of Late Gothic murals have survived on the first floor as well as the Renaissance painted ceiling from the 16th century, when the house belonged to Jan Kaše. Of the original Gothic house, however, only the entrance portal, the mazhaus (it is known that beer and wine were served here) and a few fragments (e.g. the wooden ceiling in the cross-court wing on the first floor) have survived. Around 1609, the house was significantly rebuilt in the Renaissance style, it was raised by another storey into its present appearance. The Late Renaissance oval skylight window above the entrance portal comes from that time as well as the crested vaults and spiral staircase in the entrance hall. The interiors were later partially renovated. An arcaded courtyard with Tuscan-style columns and arches was then created. Later on, however, there were also modifications in the Baroque style. In the 19th century, the courtyard balconies and outside facades were rebuilt in the Classicist style and the house sign – a 17th century relief of a ring – was replaced with a copy.

In the years 1990–2016, the Prague City Gallery administered the house and reconstructed it under the supervision of the architect Vlado Milunić (also one of the authors of the “Dancing house”). During the reconstruction, joist ceilings and murals were restored.



Ungelt

In the early Middle Ages, this building was a fortified merchant's court, separated from the rest of the town by a moat and a wall. It was necessary to pay for protection, and this fee evolved into a compulsory duty (Ungelt in Old High German). Since the 11th century, this place was the centre of international trade in Prague; all foreign merchants who came to Prague had to gather here. In addition to the customs house, which functioned here until 1774, there was also a church and a hospital in Týnský dvůr. The Latin name of Ungelt was *Laeta curia* (Merry Court). From the 14th century onwards, Prague townspeople began to build residential houses around the yard. In 1689, during the so-called French fire, the courtyard burnt down to a large extent, which is why most of the houses have Baroque facades.

The Prague Castle

The essential guide through history of Prague Castle is provided by the permanent exhibition THE STORY OF THE PRAGUE CASTLE in the Old Royal Palace. Follow two main visitors routes: The Main BLUE, explaining the development of the Prague castle from prehistory to the present day and the YELLOW, describing important phenomena in its history of including the material and spiritual culture of the clergy and Royal Court based on archaeological investigations.

The landscape context of the Prague Castle is the Prague Basin with a dominant feature in the form of an elongated promontory of the Hradčany ridge. It is delimited by the Malá Strana (Lesser Town) basin from the south and on the northern side, it is separated from the Bruska ridge by a narrow, up to 30 meters deep, valley of the Brusnice stream. In the middle of the Prague Basin, the Hradčany promontory represents a naturally protected, strategically situated and highly visible position from practically all directions (Herichová 2020; Maříková-Kubková & Herichová 2009; <http://www.prazsky-hrad.cz>, layer georelief). At the beginning of Prague Castle permanent occupation, the configuration of the terrain was significantly limiting for the extent of the used area and the organization of its inner space. Gradual and very slow change was later induced by the extensive construction of fortifications and monumental church architecture.

The sacred function of the Prague Castle promontory has very probably prehistoric origin (Funnel Beaker Culture 3500 BC and Knovíz Culture 1200 BC). Before the introduction of Christianity in Bohemia, we imagine the settlement of the Hradčany ridge as very similar to the settlement pattern of the prehistoric period. The inhabitants of the western area, like the inhabitants of Malá Strana, were engaged in production activities, which are recorded by excavated burnt levels and remains of the metallurgical slag. At the eastern tip was the cult area and at the Bruský ridge the necropolis, where burial activity continued long after the construction of the first Prague Castle churches.

The role of Prague Castle as spiritual centre of Prague Basin and whole Bohemia was the background for its later development into fortified seat of the religious and state authorities. The process of interrelation between population of Bohemia, Bavaria and other parts of East-Frankish Empire has very old roots and Prague was located on the natural crossroad of important trade routes.

Although the historiographical tradition seeks to move the roots of Czech Christianity further east, the baptism of Prince/Duke Bořivoj in Moravia it does not change the fact of mainly western orientation of the earliest Christianity in Bohemia influenced by missions from Bavaria. With Christianity occurred also arrival of new inhabitants (clergy) that settled in a privileged area of Prague - between the pagan cult area, the settlement and the elite assembly (place of investiture) the district of the Church of the Virgin Mary (the oldest in Prague Castle, is believed to be built by prince Bořivoj around 884, but it is probably of even earlier date). The construction of the church of St. George and the rotunda of St. Vitus in the eastern part of the promontory, and the area connect with the legendary Žiži (Zhizhi) hill on the III. castle courtyard, remains untouched by Christian architecture until the 70s of the 10th century. In 973, the diocese of Mainz was founded and its seat was built there. One hundred

years later, in 1060, the construction of a Romanesque three-nave two-choir basilica began, together with bishop's district, followed by gradual urbanization of the entire castle area.



Georelief of the Prague Castle promontory with three main activity areas.



An Aerial view of the Prague Castle promontory