

## AN UNKNOWN MEDAL FOR THE FOUNDATION OF SUŠICE MONASTERY, 1651

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A previously unknown engraved medal commemorating the foundation of the Capuchin Monastery in Sušice was acquired by the National Museum in 1960 as part of a large collection formed by the late Josef Michera. This large bronze medal (7 cm in diameter) has on the aversé a crowned Habsburg eagle and an inscription PRO LOCO SUDITIENSTIN BOEMIA (near the town of Sušice in Bohemia). On the reverse a twenty-two line legend states that the medal was made to commemorate the founding of the new monastery: D.O.M.A./ INNOCENTIO X PONTI- /-FICE MAXIMO:/ POTENTISSIMUS ET INVICTISSIMUS/ PRINCEPS FERDINANDUS III ROMANORUM/ IMPERATOR HUNGARIAE ET BOHEMIAE REX/ ARCHIDUX AUSTRIAE ETC EX SINGULARI/ DEVOTIONE ERGA BEATUM FOELICEM DE/ CANTALICIO FRATRIBUS CAPUCINIS HUNC/ CONVENTUM ET ECCLESIAM PROPRIIS LIBERA/ LISSIMISQUE SUMPTIB. EXTRUI CURAVIT. MAIUS/ ALTARE ERIGI VOLUIT IN HONOREM PRAEDICTI/ B. FOELICIS; SACELLUM VERO EIUSQ. ALTARE/ IN HONOREM S. FRANCISCI. HUIUS AEDIFICII/ INITIUM FACTUM EST ANNO CHRISTI/ MILLESIMO SEXCENTESIMO QUINQUA. CE/ SIMO PRIMO LAPIDEM PRIMARIUM PO/ SUIT EMINENTISSIM. PRINCEPS/ ERNESTUS ADALBERTUS CARDINALIS AB HARRACH/ ARCHIEPISCOPUS/ PRAGENSIS. (Under the auspices of God and under the reign of Pope Innocent X, the most mighty and most unconquerable Prince Ferdinand III, Roman Emperor, Hungarian and Czech King, Archduke of Austria etc. because of his particular veneration of the blessed Felix de Cantalice he ordered to be built for the Capuchin Brothers this monastery and church by his own most bountiful generosity. To the esteem of this blessed Felix he wished the main altar to be built and also a chapel with an altar to St. Francis. This building was begun in the year of Our Lord 1631; the foundation stone was laid by the most eminent Prince Ernest Adalbert, Cardinal of Harrach, Archbishop of Prague). (**Fig. 1 obv., rev.**)

The medal weighs 105.14 g and has the accession no. H5-181 484. Although it looks as if the image on the obverse is of superior quality to the inscription on the reverse, they were both engraved by the same hand. To engrave pictorial lines is easier than engraving letters, although, here, the lower serif of each letter is confidently cut in one stroke without the necessity of reworking. The monogram FIII on



Fig. 1 obv., rev.

the obverse is cut in the same way. The engraver will have spent about four days on this medal.<sup>1</sup>

The archivist of Sušice, Antonín Janák, writes that during the foundation ceremony a gold coin worth twenty ducats especially made for the occasion was placed under the foundation stone.<sup>2</sup> The bronze medal from the National Museum seems to be a copy of this made for one of the distinguished guests present. The gold medal buried in the foundations was intended for the distant future when the monastery would have fallen into ruins, as in the case of Roman buildings today. The bronze specimen was created as a memento for the forthcoming generations.

The foundation medal (1659) of the Capuchin monastery at Nisa in Silesia is of similar design. It is a silver disc of 6 cm in diameter, each side of which is surrounded by a wreath. The inscription begins on the obverse with nine lines SEDENTE/ ALEXANDRO SEPTIMO/ PONTIFICE REGNANTE LEO:/ :POLDO PRIMO ROMANORUM/ IMPERATORE FUNDATORE LEO:/ :POLDO GUILIELMO ARCHIDU:/ :CE AUSTRIAE ETC: EPISCOPO/ PASSAUIENSI ET VRA:/ :TISLAUIEN, ETC: and continues with another nine lines on the reverse ECCLESIA/ HAEC ET MONASTERIUM/ CAPUCCINORUM SUMP- TIBUS/ EIUSDEM SER:MI ARCHIDUCIS/ LEOPOLDI GUILIELMI A FUNDA:/ :MENTIS ERECTUM AC EODEM/ IUBENTE PRIMARIUS LAPIS PO:/ :SITUS FUIT ANNO SALUTIS/ 1659 DIE 3 JUNI (In the reign of Pope Alexander VII and the Roman Emperor Leopold I, Leopold William Archduke of Austria etc, Bishop of Passau and Vratislav etc. founded and built from the ground this church and monastery of the Capuchins. At the expense of this Most Serene Archduke Leopold William, and with the assent of the aforementioned, the foundation stone was laid in the year of redemption 1659, the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of June). (**Fig. 2 obv., rev.**)

This medal was also engraved but by a more skilful craftsman. It weighs 27 g and came to the National Museum as part of the Nostic collection. In 1666 it was recorded in the inventory of the estate of Otto the Younger of Nostic (1608 – 14. 11. 1665), the Chancellor of both Silesias: “Leopoldi Wilhelmi ArciDucis, fundatio Monasterii,” weighing “2 Loths and ” Kventlik of silver.”<sup>3</sup> Apparently he had obtained it from the Capuchins themselves in his official capacity as the Crown representative. It can be assumed that another specimen of the medal was placed in the foundation stone of the new monastery.<sup>4</sup>

When the German Protestants began to erect the church of Our Saviour in 1611 in Prague’s Old Town they placed gold and silver medals under the foundation stone. Rudolf II asked for a model of the new church and examples of the medal in gold, silver and bronze to add to his collection. Jan Conrad Greuter struck a total of 100 copies of this medal.<sup>5</sup> The obverse shows a half length figure of Christ and an inscription AB HOC SOLO SEMPITERNA SALVS (from this only eternal salvation). The reverse has nine



**Fig. 2 obv., rev.**

lines TEMPLVM/ SALVATORIS/ G.D.ET CAES.RVD.II/ SVB BOHE.REGE MA/ THIAE II FVNDA RVNT/ GERMAI EVANGELICI/ PRAGAE IN VRBE VE/ TERI DIE CAROLI/ A.S.H. 1611 (The church of Our Saviour founded by the grace of God and the Emperor Rudolf II under the Czech King Matthew by German Protestants in Prague in the Old Town on Charles’s day in the year of our salvation 1611). The gold specimen in the National Museum (no. H5-151 001) is 3 cm in diameter and weighs 20.40 g.<sup>6</sup> (**Fig. 3 obv., rev.**)

The custom marking the foundation of a new building is very old and known throughout the world. The Persian King

<sup>1</sup> Details of technique kindly provided by the engraver Petr Kazda.

<sup>2</sup> JANÁK 1937, p. 72, kindly brought to my attention by Mrs Zdeňka Řezničková.

<sup>3</sup> Knihovna Národního muzea, Ms e 21, *Inventarium der freiherrlichen Nostitzischen Verlassenschaft*, fol. 45a.

<sup>4</sup> This medal seems only to be known to Marquard Hergott; HERGOTT 1753, p. 215, tab. XXX.XI.

<sup>5</sup> HREJSA 1930, p. 115.



Fig. 3 obv., rev.

Darius deposited inscribed tablets of solid gold and silver in the four cornerstones of his Persepolis palace 2,500 years ago. Possibly even older is the custom of making a sacrificial offering at the onset of construction of a new building, originally in the form of humans, animals, food and later money. The Romans supposedly had a tradition of walling up one male and one female Greek and one male and one female Gaul in the foundations of a new building.<sup>7</sup> There are coins in the foundations of Roman houses under their mosaic floors, a custom which persists up to the present day. Every year the British mint provides newly dated coins to be placed in the foundations of new public buildings.

Countess de Genlis recalls a dinner at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where “I saw a very celebrated character, Sir Sidney Smith ... learned amateur of antiquities. Egyptian pasha sent him a very fine remnant of Antiquity, that had been found in digging under the ruins of an ancient pagan temple; this consists of two large plates of pure gold, with Greek inscriptions, in perfect preservation, stating that they were deposited in the ground along with the foundations of the temple by Queen Berenice, wife and sister of King Ptolemy the founder; this instructs us in a practice of the ancients, of which we were hitherto ignorant, and which has come down to our days, since, in laying the foundation stone of a public building, we always deposit a medal along with it, containing the date and the name of the founder and architect. Sir Sydney Smith had brought these gold plates in his pocket to show them to me; though he had a collection of curiosities, he did not place them in it, but presented them to the British Museum, which is a generous action for an antiquarian.”<sup>8</sup>

We can see that the medal of Sušice had two tasks to fulfil; twenty ducats was not a small sum (this, for example, was the annual income for a carpenter) and the gold symbolised the sacrifice. The engraved inscription recorded the event and at the same time invoked God’s protection (*Deo optimo maximo*). And because nothing in the world lasts forever the medal found in the ruins of the present building in Sušice will help future archaeologists to identify the monastery.

The foundation stone of the new St. Peter’s was laid by Julius II in 1506. The old man fearlessly descended a ladder into an abyss-like opening that had been excavated beside the foundations. He was accompanied by only two cardinals, John Burkard (the Master of Ceremonies), and a few other people. Here he buried an earthenware vase containing twelve medals which had been recently struck, two being large gold pieces, the others bronze, with inscriptions referring to the ceremony.<sup>9</sup> Burkard’s successor was his sworn enemy. He accused Burkard of preparing the foundation ceremony in a high handed manner and even of stealing one of the prepared medals.<sup>10</sup> That would have been a way to put into prior circulation a medal intended for the distant future.

It seems likely that in the Czech lands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the foundation medals were mostly cast and engraved and only a few copies produced and the majority of them remain unknown today. The foundation medal of the church of St. Wenceslas in Prague’s Little Quarter has nine lines on the obverse *DIE SANCTI NORBERTI/ ARCHIEPI/ MAGDEBURGENSIS/ PRIMATIS GERMANIAE./ IOES FRIDERIC, ARCHIEPI9/ PRAGENSIS PRIMAS BOHEMIAE/ LAPIDEM PRIMUM HUIUS/ ECCLIAE PAROCHIALIS/ AD S: WENCESL:/ MICRO 1685 PRAGA* (Joseph Friedrich Archbishop of Prague, Primate of Bohemia [laid] the foundation stone of this parish church by St. Wenceslas in Little Quarter in 1685 on the day of

<sup>6</sup> FIALA 1888, p. 556, no. 4763.

<sup>7</sup> VIDEMAN 1986, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> DE GENLIS 1825, p. 293–294.

<sup>9</sup> GREGORAVIUS 2000b, p. 135–136.

<sup>10</sup> GREGORAVIUS 2000a, p. 636–637.

St. Norbert, Archbishop of Magdeburg and Primate of Germany). The reverse has the bust of the King and the inscription +LEOPOLDVS.I.D.G.ROM.IMPERATOR (Leopold I by the grace of God, Roman Emperor). (Fig. 4 obv., rev.) The medal is cast, weights 28.65 g and measures 6.3 : 4.6 cm and has a loop for hanging.<sup>11</sup> It is not known why anyone would wish to wear this around his neck but that is what participants did at a similar ceremony in Birmingham



Fig. 4 obv., rev.

in 1805. Here the King was represented by his Chamberlain and many wore the foundation medals with the sovereign's portrait made especially for the occasion by Thomas Webb.<sup>12</sup> The wearers of these medals probably wanted to proclaim their loyalty to the absent monarch.

Leopold I laid a medal together with the foundation stone of the new part of St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague, in 1673. It is not known what this medal looked like. An account of the ceremony states that "then the Emperor Leopold by his own hand put on the same spot a gold coin with his likeness and with an inscription, weighing nearly twenty ducats."<sup>13</sup> This description corresponds with the medal mentioned above; its weight with the medal of Sušice.

Patrons who had mints at their disposal had their medals struck. For example: Ferdinand II's foundation of the church of Our Lady Victorious at Bílá Hora, 1628;<sup>14</sup> the Liechtenstein's foundation of the church of Our lady in Valtice, 1631;<sup>15</sup> Albrecht Valdštejn's foundation of the Chartreuse in Valdice, 1632.<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century these medals were dispersed in increasing numbers, kept in numismatic collections and also included in contemporary numismatic books (Heraeus, *Brevis Explicatio Numismatum Caroli VI.* or Schau- und Denk-Münzen Maria Theresia). Surprisingly enough the Jesuits of Lehnice held a foundation ceremony in their already completed academy building in 1735. They did so to emphasise the royal patronage for their school. A medal by Matthew Donner was ordered from Vienna. Charles VI sent his envoy to the ceremony, who, before the ceremony even began, distributed silver medals

together with an explanatory Latin leaflet. One gold and one silver medal together with the leaflet were placed in a lead box and put into the marble foundation stone. After the ceremonial topping-out the bricklayer sealed it in. Returning to the principal's apartments the remaining silver medals were given to the other dignitaries.<sup>17</sup>

Prince Joseph Adam of Schwarzenberg ordered his medal for the foundation stone of the rebuilt Postoloprty church in 1746 from the Viennese mint. For the obverse portrait the mint used an old coin die of Philip Christopher Becker who



Fig. 5 obv., rev.

<sup>11</sup> FIALA 1888, p. 540–1, no. 4638. The same specimen was auctioned by Dr. Busso Peus Nachfolger, 381<sup>st</sup> Auction on 2 November 2004, no. 3754.

<sup>12</sup> TAYLOR 1978, p. 79–80, no. 65a.

<sup>13</sup> BERGHAEUER 1736, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> FIALA 1888, p. 552, nos. 4722–4724.

<sup>15</sup> DIVO 2000, p. 50, no. 51.

<sup>16</sup> FIALA 1888, p. 432, nos. 3971–3972.

<sup>17</sup> KLEISNER 2006, p. 482, no. IV.3.73.

cut the Prince's tolar in 1741 when he came to power, aged 19, after his mother's death. His father (shot during Brandýs hunt 1732) made a promise to build the church but the wars of the Austrian Succession (begun in 1741) prevented the project. The obverse has a bust of the young Prince and the inscription IOSEPH.D.G.S.R.I.PRIN.IN.

SCHWARZENBERG (Joseph by the Grace of God, Prince Schwarzenberg of the Holy Roman Empire). On the reverse under a Prince's crown are crossed branches of laurel and palm and the inscription POS.PRIM.LAP./TEMPLUM/ B.V.MARIAE NASCENTI/ SACRUM/ AMPLIOR.OPER.EREXIT/ EX VOTO/ MDCCXLVI./XV.OCTOB. (on the 15th October 1741 he laid the foundation stone of the church of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary as avowed. He renovated the sanctuary more splendidly). The mint sent him one gold medal, weighing 10 ducats, and four silver ones together with a bill for 53 Florins 30 Kreuzers. The silver specimen in the National Museum (no. H5-186 497) weighs 28 g and is 4.1 cm in diameter.<sup>18</sup> **Fig. 5 obv., rev.**

In 1751 the foundation medal for the Establishment for Distressed Gentlewomen in Brno was laid together with the first stone by the President of the Chamber Henry Cajetan Blümengen, in the name of the founder, Maria Theresa. The medallist, Matthew Donner, was paid 60 Florins for the die for the inscribed reverse.<sup>19</sup> The obverse die was a customary portrait that was already available to the mint. It is a double portrait of Maria Theresa and Franz of Lorraine with the inscription IMP.FRANC.AUG.ET M. THERES.AUG. (Emperor Franz, the ruler and Maria Theresa, the ruler).

On the reverse a wreath surrounds a fourteen line text MARIA/ THERESIA AUGUSTA, / PIA, CLEMENS, IUSTA, / SANCTIS TRIBUS MAGIS/ DEDICATAE,/ PRO SACRIS VIRGINIBUS,/ SUB INVOCATIONE DIVAE/ ELISABETHAE,/ AD FAMULANDUM/ DEO ET PROXIMO/ DEVOTIS, HUIUS AEDIS/ PRIMUM LAPIDEM/ PONENDUM IUSSIT/ MDCCLI. (in 1751 Maria Theresa, faithful, clement, just ruler commanded the foundation stone of this building, given to the Three Holy Magi and dedicated to virgins of St. Elisabeth, serving God and Man to be laid). The legend was composed by the Court Poet John Charles Newen, who also alludes to the Empress' motto "with justice and clemency."<sup>20</sup> This tin medal in the National Museum (no. H5-82AEVIIIb163) weighs 23.76 g and is 4.9 cm in diameter. (**Fig. obv., rev.**)

In 1754 another 60 Florins were paid to Donner for the reverse die (with the inscription) for the foundation medal created for the Establishment for Distressed Gentlewomen in Prague Castle. This medal was also paid for from the Empress' private purse. In addition she was required to pay the Viennese mint 180 Florins "for two silver medals given to the court architect Nicolas Pacassi with the likenesses of both Majesties and the inscription, to be placed under the foundation stone of the newly built Establishment for Distressed gentlewomen in Prague."<sup>21</sup> The obverse has the



**Fig. 6 obv., rev.**

same official portrait of the ruling couple with the inscription IMP.FRANC.AUG.ET M.THERES.AUG. (Emperor Franz, the ruler and Maria Theresa, the ruler). The reverse has palm and laurel branches and six lines of inscription IMMACULATAE/ BEATAE.MARIAE.VIRGINI/ FRANCISCI ET THERESIAE/ AUGUSTORUM.MUNIFICIA.PIETATE/ VIRGINES ILLUSTRIS FUNDATAE/ AN.CH.MDCCLIV. (founded in the year of Christ 1754, to the glory of the Immaculate and Blessed Virgin Mary, for well-born maidens by the bountiful Imperial piety of Franz and Theresa). The silver medal in the National museum (no. H5-59 194) weighs 34.82 g and is 4.9 cm in diameter. (**Fig. 7 obv., rev.**)

<sup>18</sup> TANNICH 1938, no. 43.

<sup>19</sup> FLEISCHER 1932, p. 59, no. 84.

<sup>20</sup> KÁBDEBO 1880, p. 74, no. 43.

<sup>21</sup> FLEISCHER 1932, p. 67, no. 129–130.



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### Illustrations

Fig. 1. (obv., rev.) Medal for the foundation of Sušice Monastery, 1651, National Museum, Prague, H5-181 484. Photo: Tomáš Kleisner.

Fig. 2. (obv., rev.) Medal for the foundation of Nisa Monastery, 1659, National Museum, Prague, H5-133ARVIII. Photo: Tomáš Kleisner.

Fig. 3. (obv., rev.) J. K. Greuter, medal for the foundation

of Our Saviour in Prague, 1611, National Museum, Prague, H5-151 001. Photo: Tomáš Kleisner.

Fig. 4. Medal of the church of St. Wenceslas in Prague, 1685, private collection. Photo: Busso Peus.

Fig. 5. (obv., rev.) F. K. Becker, Medal of Postoloprty Church, 1746, National Museum, Prague, H5-186 497. Photo: Tomáš Kleisner.

Fig. 6. (obv., rev.) M. Donner, medal for the Establishment for Distressed Gentlewomen in Brno, 1751, National Museum, Prague, H5-82AEVIIIb163. Photo: Tomáš Kleisner.

Fig. 7. (obv., rev.) M. Donner, medal for the Establishment for Distressed Gentlewomen in Prague Castle, 1754, National Museum, Prague, H5-59 194. Photo: Tomáš Kleisner.

### Resumé

#### Tomáš Kleisner

#### Neznámá medaile k založení kláštera v Sušici z roku 1651

Článek uveřejňuje dosud neznámou rytou medaili k založení sušického kláštera kapucínů. Doplnuje ji o další české barokní medaile do základů staveb ze sbírky Národního muzea a cituje řadu osvětlujících dobových zpráv. Zvyk připomínat založení stavby je prastarý a rozšířený po celém světě, drobné medaile byly při slavnostech kladení základního kamene rozhazovány mezi zúčastněné a do základů. Oblíbená středověká sbírka Zlatá legenda připomíná ke dni Všem svatých stavbu antického Pantheonu: „*Když však stavba vystoupila do určité výšky nad zem, zdálo se, že se klenba nemůže udržet pro velký průměr, a proto celý vnitřek zaplnili zemí, a současně s hlinou tam házeli denáry. Potom dovolili, aby si každý, kdo by chtěl hlinu vynášet z chrámu, nechal všechny peníze, které v hlině najde.*“ Zlatá legenda, která svým mimořádným rozšířením výrazně formovala myšlenkový svět Evropy, vycházela znovu a znovu, jak v 16., tak v 17. století. Obecně rozšířený zvyk vhadovat mince do základů vykládá jako matnou pověrečnou připomínku úspěšného dokončení stavby Pantheonu a řecli bychom jakousi úlitbu za zdárné dokončení stavby.

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