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royal nunneries

at the center
of medieval europe



art
architecture
aesthetics

11th — 14th centuries

Scientific Organization
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Annotations

DRAGOȘ GH. NĂSTĂSOIU (Moscow)

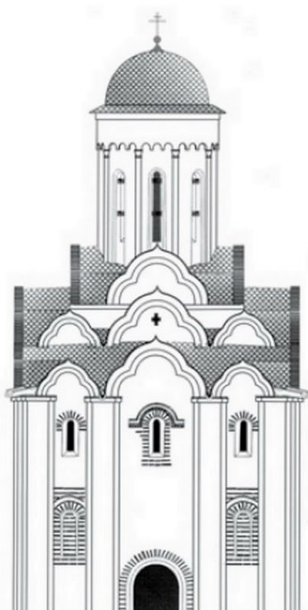
A Holy Abbess between Byzantium and the West: St. Euphrosyne of Polotsk as Monastic Founder and Saint

By examining the evidence in the late-12th century *vita* of St. Euphrosyne of Polotsk (c. 1101/5 – after 1167) and the surviving art associated with this holy woman, this paper addresses the question of female agency and patronage, as well as the models of female sanctity in a trans-regional and trans-cultural perspective, between Byzantium and the West.

Several aspects of St. Euphrosyne's public image are regarded in this paper: her belonging to the princely family, her abbacy, successful diplomacy, pilgrimage, and dynastic sainthood. Born into the Rurik ruling clan, Princess Predslava took the veil at the age of twelve under the name of Euphrosyne, and became the founder and abbess of a double monastery near Polotsk, composed of a male brotherhood and a nunnery. Being a learned woman, Euphrosyne herself commissioned the decoration of her monasteries, copied manuscripts, and arranged the acquisition of precious relics. Thanks to her dynastic and diplomatic connections, she managed to bring from Constantinople a copy of the miracle-working icon of the Virgin of Ephesus, as well as important relics of Christ, by means of which she replicated in Polotsk the sacred topography of the Byzantine capital. Finally, while being in her sixties, Euphrosyne travelled as a princely pilgrim to Constantinople and the Holy Land, where she died sometime after 1167.

Even though it concerns mainly 12th-century Orthodox Polotskian Rus', the activity of St. Euphrosyne displays features typical for the Western cultural paradigm. The young princess envisioned her monastic foundation as a self-governed community, but simultaneously as a place for family commemoration and burial which privileged the position of the princely foundress and her close associates, equally male and female. Ideated by Euphrosyne herself, the iconographic program of her nunnery's church underlines the dynastic connections: it gives prominence to the images of the holy patrons of male family members, including one of the earliest depictions of the Bohemian St. Wenceslas, whose cult

was absent in other Orthodox countries. At a time when Byzantine female pilgrims are unknown, St. Euphrosyne's princely quality allowed her to undertake a pilgrimage to Constantinople and the Holy Land. Finally, even the type of sainthood embodied by Euphrosyne of Polotsk, namely, that of a holy abbess of princely descent, is more reminiscent of Western than of Byzantine spirituality, addressing thus the issue of political and dynastic values.



MICHAELA ZÖSCHG (London)

Beyond Naples. Fourteenth-Century Queens and their Clarissan Foundations in a Transregional Perspective

From the first decades of the thirteenth century onwards, royal families all over Europe increasingly founded Franciscan houses, developed relationships with Franciscan advisors, and employed Franciscan friars as their confessors. Royal women in particular became closely associated with this francescanesimo di corte or philomendicantism, patronised Franciscan communities, entered the female Franciscan ordo sanctae Clarae, and actively shaped a new form of dynastic sanctity infused with Franciscan minoritas or 'lesserness'.

The Angevin queens Mary of Hungary (c. 1257–1323) and Sancia of Majorca (c. 1285–1345) and their Clarissan foundations in Naples are important and comparatively well-studied protagonists within this narrative. Not only did these two royal women play a crucial part in securing their foundations' longevity through financial endowments and by obtaining papal privileges, they also had monastery churches newly erected and lavishly decorated by some of the most famous artists of their time.

Within the context of Italian art history, these royal Neapolitan houses have long been viewed as an anomaly within an otherwise rather fluid and transitory female monastic landscape. However, recent broadening of geographical scope has shown that they are part of a much wider network of royal female patronage for the ordo sanctae Clarae, and that royal women in other parts of Europe pursued similar Clarissan patronage projects at an equally ambitious artistic and architectural scale.

This paper will insert the Neapolitan houses into this trans-regional context. Focusing on the three thematic strands of Memory, Meditation and Liturgy, it will compare them to the royal Clarissan houses of Königfelden in Windisch, Santa Maria de Pedralbes in Barcelona, and Santa-Clara-e-Isabel in Coimbra. In doing so, it aims to highlight how the similarities and differences emerging from such a comparative approach not only enhance our understanding of wider contexts, but at the same time also sharpen the profile of each individual royal Clarissan foundation.



ESZTER KONRÁD (Budapest)

'Helisabet filia Stephani regis ungarorum illustris': The image of a Saintly Nun from the Arpad Dynasty as Reflected in the Dominican Sources (Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century)

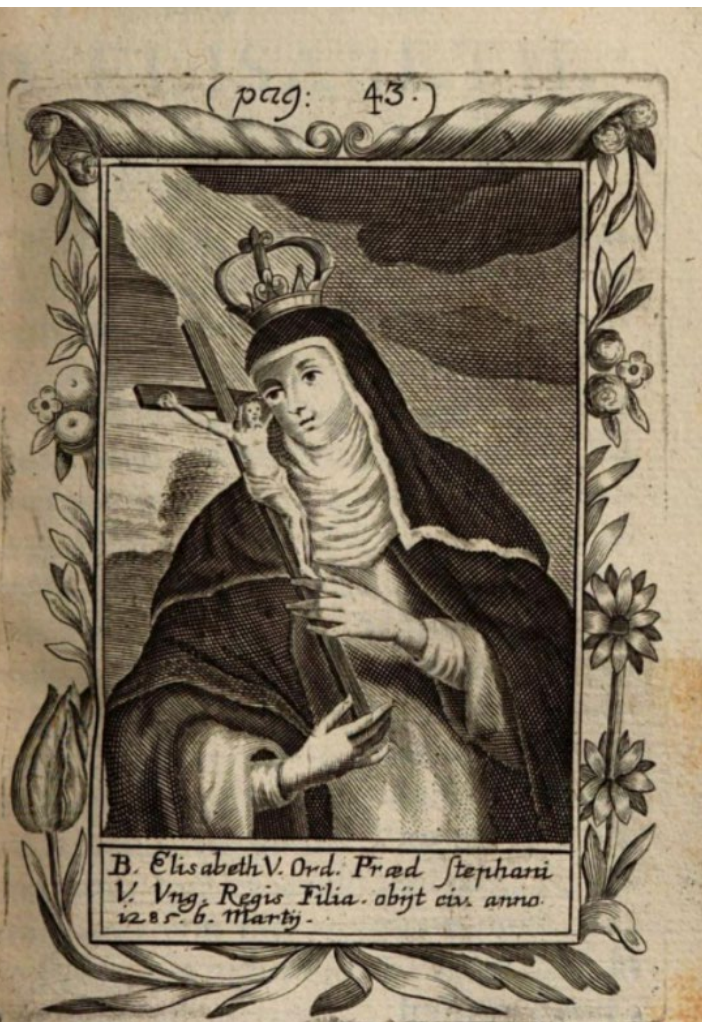
Princess Elizabeth (1255–1325?), the daughter of Stephen V, King of Hungary (1270–72), similarly to her aunt, Margaret of Hungary, was sent to the Dominican monastery on the Island of the Hares in Buda at an early age and later became a nun. Having spent about a decade together in the monastery, after Margaret's death in 1270, Elizabeth was heard as one of the witnesses of her canonization inquisition. She became the prioress of the monastery, which became one of the richest ecclesiastical institutions of Hungary during her leadership.

In 1288, however, she caused a scandal when she ran away from the monastery with the help of her brother, Ladislaus IV (1262–90), to marry a Bohemian aristocrat, Zaviš von Falkenstein. The couple had a son but Elizabeth became a widow in 1290.

It is not clear where she spend the following years, but she moved to the San Pietro a Castello of Naples, transformed from a Benedictine monastery into a Dominican female convent in 1301 by her sister, Mary of Hungary, wife of Charles II, King of Naples and Sicily (1285–1309). It seems that Elizabeth was the central figure in the community of pious women including her sister-in-law, Elizabeth (Isabelle), the widow of Ladislaus IV.

Elizabeth died in Naples sometime between 1320 and 1325. Despite the considerable scholarly interest in her life and her role in the two abovementioned monasteries, her presence

in the order's hagiographic literature has not yet been systematically explored although she appeared among the illustrious Dominicans by the reformer Johannes Meyer in his *Liber de Viris Illustribus Ordinis Praedicatorum* (1466), and until the mid-seventeenth centuries she was included in at least six Dominican hagiographic or historiographic works. In the presentation I intend to shed light on.



JAKUB ADAMSKI & PIOTR PAJOR (Warsaw – Cracow)
The Architecture of the Dynastic Nunnery of Poor Clares in Stary Sącz and the Artistic Relations between Lesser Poland and Upper Rhine in the Early Fourteenth Century

The Nunnery of Poor Clares in Stary Sącz, located in the very south of the important region of Lesser Poland, counted among the most notable religious institutions of its kind in the medieval Kingdom of Poland. The new female monastery was founded in 1280 by the Duchess of Cracow and Sandomierz, Saint Kinga of Poland (princess of Hungary by birth), who richly endowed it and – most typically – joined the convent just after the death of her husband, duke Bolesław the Chaste of the Piast dynasty. The present paper will focus, however, not on the earliest period of the convent’s history, but on the first tierce of the 14th century, which saw the construction of the present-day church, consecrated in 1332. The architecture of the shrine, although most interesting from the Central-European perspective, gained almost no attention in the art historical research outside Poland. We aim to prove that the erection of this monument was founded by the Polish king Władysław the Short and his wife queen Jadwiga (who, again, joined the convent in her widowhood). This assumption finds multi-layered historical corroboration. The architectural detailing of the new church (especially its window tracery and vaulting corbels) shows unmistakable links to the workshop of the new cathedral in Cracow, begun in 1320 – the very year of the Władysław’s coronation. Perhaps the most interesting is the fact that the master masons active simultaneously in both churches came to Lesser Poland doubtlessly from the Upper Rhine, especially from Alsace and Swabia. To prove that, we intend to conduct the architectural analysis of the Stary Sącz nunnery on the background of a dense network of artistic relations between the south-east regions of the Empire and the Central Europe, showing that the church in question is not only an exemplary case of a dynastic foundation for a female order, but also presents one of the key examples of the artistic phenomenon labelled as “architectural avant-garde around the year 1300”.



ANGELICA FEDERICI (Rome)

*Rome, Barons and Nunneries: Art, Architecture and Aesthetics
in Convents in Medieval Latium*

Although the past two decades have witnessed a substantial rise in the study of religious women as patrons of art, no comprehensive, in depth study has ever been devoted to Rome and Latium. Yet evidence of female patronage in the city and region during the late medieval period is conspicuous. While single case studies on Roman convents do exist, there has been no attempt to investigate female religious patronage in a broader artistic, political and social context. This paper will examine female religious patronage in Rome and Latium during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For the first-time convents will be contextualised within a political, social, and historical framework. The survival of documentary and artistic testimonies including epigraphy, sculpture, architecture and funerary monuments testifies both to an uninterrupted artistic production in Rome throughout the Avignon period, and to the role of nuns as key players in the promotion of these commissions.

Convents have been selected in accordance to the presence of solid artistic, architectural, or documentary data. Surviving evidence such as economic registries, visitation records, and chronicles emphasised that, like their male counterparts, these institutions acted as 'recruitment' centres for women from the Roman aristocracy and upper middle classes. Names such as Boccamazza, Gaetani, Cenci, Colonna, Orsini figure prominently in these documents testifying to wealth and the social status of these convents, of which artistic commissions represent only a *tessera* of an intricate mosaic. As with their male counterparts, nunneries also acted as bastions of effective control over territories north and south of Rome for the region's leading families. It is unquestionable that between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries female monasticism was a culturally defining element in Roman society. The material collected indicates that female religious patronage did not act as a substitute to the vacated papal seat, but rather maintained a continuity throughout a period that has generally been regarded by mainstream historiography as artistically insignificant.



JENNIFER VLČEK SCHURR (Glasgow)

Function and Faith: Revisiting the Roles of Hospital, Church, Chapel and Oratory in the Convent of St. Francis, Prague

The Convent of St. Francis in Prague represents a remarkable survival of a medieval hospital, double convent and royal burial site. Now known as St. Agnes' Convent after its illustrious founder, the Přemyslid princess Agnes, sister of King Wenceslas I, it has justly become the focus of considerable international attention over recent years in both historical and art-historical circles. Guided by visual evidence and architectural comparisons which are to be made not only within the Czech Lands but also elsewhere in Europe, this paper offers a reconsideration of the functions and nomenclature of the spaces of care and worship within this significant, thirteenth-century, religious community. These comparisons may provide the insight required for an appraisal of the artistic and aesthetic aspirations, and religious and spiritual allegiances of the founder(s) of these Prague conventual buildings, and may serve to inform us of the buildings' original appearance and use. Tracing the disposition of a selection of buildings, and the progression of the convent's building development during the incumbency of St. Agnes, may shed some light on the day-to-day activity within their walls. The hypothesis presented also leads to a reappraisal of the location of Agnes' possible final resting place including evidence that, following her death, the convent became a place of pilgrimage centuries ahead of the full canonisation which was bestowed upon the Blessed Agnes in 1989.



KRISTINA POTUCKOVA (New Haven)

Fanning the Faith: Hohenburg Flabellum and the Visual Environment of Medieval Nunneries

Made for the illustrious Augustinian nunnery of Hohenburg around 1200 (a community best known for Herrad of Landenberg's twelfth-century encyclopedia *Hortus deliciarum*), this flabellum is one of the few extant liturgical fans that has survived from medieval Latin West. As such, it represents an intriguing example of the range employed in liturgical objects used by medieval women's monastic communities. The Flabellum is kept unfolded at the British Library today, thus allowing us to examine its exquisitely illuminated visual and textual program of the life of St John the Baptist arranged horizontally across a strip of parchment.

Due to their scarcity and relatively marginal role in medieval liturgy, liturgical fans have been neglected in art historical discourse. Yet the extant fans point to a remarkable variety of forms that emphasize the degree of care and inventiveness exercised within women's monastic spaces in German lands around 1200. By exploring surviving evidence from primary sources, from *libri ordinarii* to liturgical exegesis, as well as other extant examples of these liturgical objects, I propose to interrogate more thoroughly the aesthetic and functional impulses that underpin these environments. By focusing on an object that is not at the center of the ritual, this case study explores not only the typology and use of liturgical fans as such, but aims to expand our understanding of the comprehensive and interactive visual structures within the church space and liturgical life of women's convents in the Central Middle Ages.



Poor Clares were brought to Wrocław in 1257 by Anne of Bohemia, Duchess of Silesia and High Duchess of Poland, the wife of Piast ruler Henry II the Pious. Their seat was designated within the area under direct ducal authority, next to a little bit earlier established Franciscan monastery. The monastery complex including the St. Clare's Church and adjacent St. Hedwig's chapel, all thoroughly remodelled in the years 1696–1699, remained in the nuns' hands until 1810. The elite position of Wrocław's Poor Clares and their close ties with the Piast dynasty in the Middle Ages is evidenced not only by the numerous endowments, but also by the fact of establishing in St. Hedwig's Chapel one of the Piast dynasty's family necropolis, providing burial place and space for commemoration of three dukes and their female relatives. What is more, until the mid-14th century, only female candidates from ducal and knightly families were admitted to the Wrocław Poor Clares community, and for the first 200 years of their functioning in Wrocław only ducal daughters were allowed to be abbots.

Have the above circumstances been reflected in the medieval furnishings of the church, St. Hedwig's chapel and monastery of the Poor Clares of Wrocław, especially with reference to artistic objects intended for both corporate prayer and private devotion? Analysis of preserved or known from archival records 8 groups of paintings and sculptures created between mid-14th and the beginning of the 16th c. for the needs of this particular monastic community provides premises to claim that their formal shape, usually decent artistic value and iconography were determined not only by the broad horizons of the well-educated nuns or their devotional and liturgical practices, but also by their strong will to emphasize the unique role of this place in the commemoration of the local Piast dynasty's and glorification of St. Hedwig and Anne of Bohemia.

This paper will focus on the oldest artworks associated with the Breslau monastery, including in particular the reliefs from the retable of the former main altarpiece (ca. 1360), the still very

mysterious figure of the knight (2nd third of the 14th c.) and the figure of Lady Mary, in the Baroque era remodelled as St. Hedwig (ca. 1420). Special attention will be paid to all possible circumstances of their commission, their physical sitting and role in the Wrocław Poor Clares' sacral space. Making an attempt to reconstruct the sacral topography of the medieval monastery in question, combined with the analysis of the preserved written sources and fruits of the Wrocław Poor Clares' scriptorium, could contribute to the reflection on the artistic patronage of members of the Piast dynasty and noble abbots, including their political and dynastic interests, as well as the construction and consolidation of models of feminine holiness.



TERESA D'URSO (Naples)

Book Patronage and Spiritual Agendas in Angevin Naples: The Painted Breviaries of Two Poor Clares from the Corpus Domini Monastery

It is well known that during the first half of Trecento the church in the royal foundation of Corpus Domini in Naples (later Sta. Chiara) was quickly enriched with chapels and altars, with the active support of lay people connected to the royal entourage. Less explored is the patronage promoted by the monastery's Poor Clares and by lay women actively involved in the spiritual practises promoted by the Franciscan order.

In this paper, I will address this issue by analyzing two significant case studies regarding the patronage of deluxe liturgical books: an illustrated breviary made for an unidentified Sister (Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, ms 407) and a second breviary painted for Countess Agnese della Ratta (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, ms a III 12) shortly before she entered the Neapolitan monastery (ca. 1347–1348). Produced between the fourth and fifth decades of the 14th century in the workshop of Cristoforo Orimina – by then the most appreciated illuminator at the Angevin court of Naples – these manuscripts offer crucial insight into their patrons' artistic preferences and strategies of self-representation. A close reading of the illustrations reveals the peculiar iconographic choices and religious practices developed by the Sisters, while at the same time offering tangible proof of the influence of Franciscan spirituality on the female élites during the reigns of Robert and Joanna I of Anjou.



AVITAL HEYMAN (Tel Aviv)

A Duel in the Abbey: Abbess Agnès and her Façade in the Abbaye aux Dames at Saintes

Agnes of Barbezieux served as abbess for thirty long years (1134–1174) in the Abbaye aux Dames at Saintes, the first Benedictine abbey in the Charente-Maritime, a courtly foundation of Geoffrey II, Count of Anjou, and his wife Agnes (1047). Thanks to the royal support of Eleanor of Aquitaine, a paternal relative of Abbess Agnes, the abbey was substantially enriched. The papal confirmation of the Abbey's assets and privileges strengthened the prime rank of the Abbey. The elaborated sculptural program of the Abbey's façade reflects the confrontation of Abbess Agnes with a series of usurpations, which she treated in a non-canonical way. The conflict resolution mechanism she employed is reflected in the iconography, and represents metaphorically the self-image of the female abbey and of its mother superior. An ambiguous history of a lordly attack against Abbess Agnes – some historians believe that she was actually raped, adds another level to the sculpted imagery. Her authoritative role as a female, acting in a hostile male surrounding was imaged in stone, to memorize the palpable ways she exercised in her search for crisis resolution. Thus, the Massacre of the Innocents seems to reflect the male violence against the Abbey and its mother superior. The scene of a judicial duel, represented on the façade, denotes an actual chivalrous combat arranged by Abbess Agnes, as is testified by the Cartulary of the Abbey. The Eucharistic aspect, depicted on the façade, provides the expected desire for salvation for the victorious lord, nominated by the abbess to fight on her behalf, whereas the defeated evil lord was destined to die without extreme unction, deprived thus from the Kingdom of Heaven.

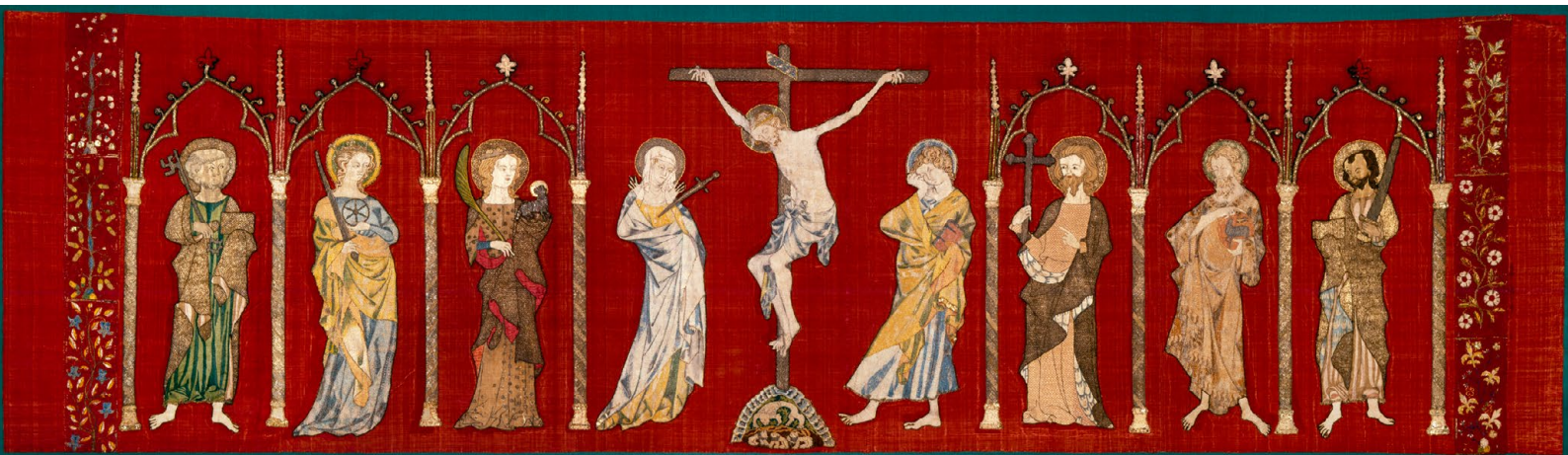


SUSAN MARTI (Bern)

Agnes from Habsburg (ca. 1281–1364) and her Franciscan Double Monastery in Königsfelden

Königsfelden near Brugg in Switzerland was founded in 1309 as a Franciscan double monastery in commemoration for the German king Albrecht I who has been murdered in 1308. His daughter Agnes of Habsburg, married from 1296 to 1301 to king Andrew III from Hungary, joined her mother as patron of the new foundation and acted from 1317 until her death in 1364 as head of the foundation. She drafted, among others, regulations for the liturgical duties of the male and the female community there, she provided around two third of the church's treasure (the few surviving objects are now the highlights in the medieval collection of the Historical Museum in Bern) and she gave the Hungarian double cross as the coat of arms for the new convent.

In my paper, I would like to focus on the visual cross-relationship between the fixed and the mobile decoration of the church. The church treasure has not yet been given enough consideration in the research on Königsfelden. Agnes used with preference heraldic elements, patron saints and donor portraits as dynastic representations, thus creating a dense aesthetic reference system across spatial boundaries and artistic media. What representational, religious and political meaning did she ascribe to the visually omnipresent reference to the Hungarian kingdom (and Hungarian saints) in the context of the Habsburg memoria? Agnes von Habsburg, who always referred to herself as “Agnes, former Queen of Hungary”, used her wealth and her family network to shape the convent as a place that combines monastic services for the dead with the representation of the ruling family. To which extent she and her mother were influenced by other royal Franciscan nunneries or double monasteries, especially from central Europe, in doing so is a still open question.



GIULIA ROSSI VAIRO (Lisbon)

Seeing Double in Odivelas: Nuns and Monks in the Monastery of St. Denis, a Royal Pantheon in Medieval Portugal

The Monastery of St Denis at Odivelas was founded near Lisbon in 1295 by Portugal's King Dinis and his queen-consort, Isabel of Aragon. Placed under the tutelage of the Abbey of St Mary of Alcobaca, it was the last Cistercian nunnery to be established in the kingdom.

Although the foundation stone had been laid in 1295, only in 1318, did the monastery become the royal pantheon, following the decision of the king and queen to be buried in its church, thus it became the first building created *ex novo* by the Crown for this purpose.

In that same year the king introduced a funerary chaplaincy of five monks from Alcobaca whom he tasked with celebrating five daily masses for his soul at the abbey-church's main altar. This tiny community was housed in a hospice built opposite the nunnery. Although separate and economically independent institutions, their proximity and the fact they were both patronised by the king made them a *de facto* "double convent", something unique in Portugal.

At this time also, the royal mausoleum, comprising two sarcophagi to be centrally located between the choir and the apse, was conceived but only partially realized because of the failure of the pantheon as a consequence of the civil war (ca. 1319–1324). Therefore, the Queen opted to be buried in the Monastery of St Clare and St Isabel, a house of Poor Clares she had founded in Coimbra with the King's support (from 1317).

Nowadays, in the church at Odivelas, only the tomb of King Dinis is to be found, a little-known masterpiece of European funerary sculpture which, in addition to commemorating the virtues of the monarch, presents an extraordinary iconographic programme reflecting a highly unusual double community and testifying to the abbey's evolution.



Video walks through the Prague Nunneries:



St. George's Basilica at the Prague Castle

<https://youtu.be/kwAV8dpBxac>



Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia

<https://youtu.be/zwDoBvjEcxY>



Dominican Church of St. Anne

<https://youtu.be/9xlrEHdRObk>



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