

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Pilgrimage Church of St John of Nepomuk at Zelená Hora in Zďár nad Sázavou
<i>Location</i>	Czech Moravian Highland Region
<i>State Party</i>	Czech Republic
<i>Date</i>	24 September 1993

Justification by State Party

The pilgrimage area at Zelená Hora is a unique work of art in that it is the most original work of Jan Blažej Santini Aichl, one of the greatest Baroque artists. His work is characterized by the way in which he blended the ideas of the radical Baroque of Borromini and Guarini with his own deep understanding of Gothic cathedral architecture and the formal principles of late Gothic. In artistic terms, this church is an outstanding work of courage, defying the artistic standards and ideas of his time and extending the limits of the style (criterion i).

The architecture of the church makes it the ideal Baroque pilgrimage site in Bohemia. Its form symbolizes the fundamental orientation of the religious and cultural consciousness of Czech society in the 17th and 18th centuries. The formal language of the structure is a unique product of Santini's genius and so did not have a direct influence on the architecture and art of the period, but it did, however, define a general type of sacred place and as such inspired a number of later projects (criterion ii).

The building is an outstanding example of Baroque *Gesamt-kunstwerk*, linking architecture, other forms of art, symbolism, and other forms of the thought of its period, and so it is outstanding not only in artistic terms but also in the more general historical and artistic context (criterion iv).

The church is directly associated with the origin, definition, and application of the significant and influential cult of St John of Nepomuk, which quickly spread throughout the Catholic world (criterion vi).

History and Description*History*

The Vicar General of the Prague Archbishopric, Jan (John) of Pomuk, died a martyr's death in 1393. In 1719 his physical remains were studied by a commission appointed by the Archbishop of Prague of the day when it was found that his tongue was perfectly preserved, which was interpreted as evidence of his sanctity. This initiated a wave of enthusiasm for the cult of the martyr, and in particular at the Cistercian monastery in Zďár nad Sázavou, near the Bohemian border with Moravia.

This monastery had inherited the role of the monastery at Zelená hora, near Nepomuk, where St John Nepomuk received his early education, which had been destroyed in the Hussite wars. It was monks from Zelená hora who founded the Zďár nad Sázavou house, whose abbot from 1705 until 1738 was Václav Vejmluva, a dedicated follower of St John Nepomuk. He conceived his project to build a church to the glory of the saint which would at the same time demonstrate the relationship between the two Cistercian houses.

The church was intended from the start as a place of pilgrimage. Work began in 1719, three years before the formal canonization of John of Nepomuk confirmed the unofficial status that he had been given in

his native Bohemia for centuries. The architect was Jan Blažej Santini, who had been working for Vejmluva since 1706 on various projects at the monastery. The abbot worked closely with the architect in the design of the church by laying down its ideological framework, based on the symbolism of the saint's tongue and the numerological significance of the numbers 3 and 5 (the saint died at the age of 53).

The unfinished church was consecrated on 16 May 1720, the date of St John Nepomuk's martyrdom. The construction of the main structure was completed by 1721 and its preliminary furnishing and decoration was celebrated by a second consecration the following year, although work on the cloisters and other ancillary elements was not completed until 1727. Major items of its interior furnishings, such as the main and side altars, the pulpit, and the many statues, were added in later years.

The church was a major centre of pilgrimage from its foundation until 1784, when the monastery was abolished. It continued as a place of worship, and in the 19th century the cloister was used as a cemetery; the tombstones of this period survive *in situ*.

Description

The composition of the Zelená Hora pilgrimage complex is based on the aesthetic concept of a perfect central complex with an explicit central vertical dominant. The centrality of the plan is accentuated by the ground plan, which is based on the parallel to two equivalent radials. The number 5 is dominant in the layout and proportions: the ground plan of the church itself is defined by two groups of five radial axes upon which the basic elements of the ground plan and the composition of the mass are organized. In the design of the cloister these ten radials, which intersect in the centre of the church itself, determine the siting of chapels and gates.

The ground plan is geometrically based on a simple design with simple proportional relationships. An analysis of these relationships demonstrates the care with which Santini blended a concern for symbolic measurements and ratios with the creation of an independent spatial reality.

The exterior of the church presents the appearance of a vertical central body that is star-shaped in form, with five points, graded outwards from the centre. Its morphology is simple, the *ordine gottico* forms being interpreted minimally in stucco, thus enhancing the primary impact of the complex geometry of the basic structure. The articulating motifs are reduced to simple pilaster frames, the verticals of which are linked by rustic bands. The portal and window openings have pointed vaultings and simple band frames, thus simplifying the gothicizing forms to one with the symbolic value of the sword of the Lord.

The main impression given by the interior is its loftiness and the upward orientation of the space. This space is divided into two by the conspicuous gallery at the base of the vaulting. The central space opens into five niches; of these, four are partitioned horizontally and the fifth, on the east, is filled by the main altar.

The church retains many of its original furnishings, which include the main altar, designed by Santini and representing the celebration of St John of Nepomuk in heaven and the four side altars, also designed by Santini and depicting the four Evangelists.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The church is owned by the Czech State. It is legally protected as a cultural monument under the provisions of Law No 20/1987 of the Czech National Council, implemented by Decree No 66/1968 of the Czech Ministry of Culture on State Care of Historic Monuments. Law No 50/1976 on Territorial Planning and Building Regulations (the Building Law) also applies to Zelená Hora. Both specify penalties for activities that damage or destroy historic buildings and their settings. (It should be noted that, because of the changed social, political, and economic situation in the Czech Republic, new laws to replace these two statutes are being drafted.)

The monument was listed in 1963 as an important monument by the South Moravian Regional National Committee. In the classification of monuments in the Czech Republic carried out in the 1970s the church was assigned to Category 1, and it was deemed to meet all the criteria for declaration as a National Cultural Monument.

In 1993 the district authority in Zďár nad Sázavou established a conservation zone around the church to protect its surroundings.

Management

The church is managed directly by the District Office in Zďár nad Sázavou, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture. The Monument Conservation Institute in Brno and the State Institute for the Care of Historical Monuments is consulted on technical matters.

Also involved with the protection and restoration of the monument is the independent society, Cisterciiana Sarensis. This was set up in 1990 and its objective is to rehabilitate the area, to abolish the cemetery in the long term, and to consider the eventual restoration of the original landscape around the monument.

A detailed plan for the development of tourism is being drawn up, in advance of plans for the restoration of the environs of the monument.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Despite the imminent abolition of the monastery, the Cistercian Order restored the church after a serious fire in 1784, the roof and facade of the church being restored in 1792-3 and the cloister in 1794-1802. Essential conservation work continued on the church, financed by the Cistercian Order, the owners of the estate, and local entrepreneurs, throughout the 19th century, although funds were often lacking for repairs to the cloisters, gates, and chapels. In the early 20th century reconstruction work was carried out on the church roofs and cloister; work planned on the facades and interior was interrupted by World War I. The last major repair campaign on the church, planned by the State Institute for the Reconstruction of Historic Towns and Monuments, included the replacement of the roof cladding and restoration of the facade, began in 1974 and was completed in 1985. The restoration of the roofing of the cloister was suspended in 1982; attention has now been turned to the preparation of a new programme.

A review of the whole restoration programme, based on surveys by the State Institute for the Care of Historic Monuments in Prague, with methodological assistance from the Brno Institute, is currently in preparation.

Authenticity

The basic structure of the church and its cloisters remains as it was when building was completed. Restoration of the roof following the 1784 fire was hampered by lack of funds, and so a somewhat simpler design was adopted. Part of the interior furnishings were sold at the same time, when an initial decision was made to allow the structure to fall into ruins, and so there are certain elements in the interior that have been brought from elsewhere.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

The property was visited in April 1994 by an ICOMOS expert mission, which commented favourably on the management and conservation and confirmed its authenticity.

Qualities

The church is an outstanding example of Baroque architecture, displaying great imagination and inventiveness, and as such may be considered unique.

Comparative analysis

The *Penguin Dictionary of Architecture* describes Santini's work in the following terms:

He worked sometimes in a Baroque (derived from Borromini and Guarini) and sometimes in a neo-Gothic style. His speciality was the latter, a carpenter's Gothic, gay, naive, and very personal, with a predilection for star-shaped forms (derived from Borromini) in his elegant and airy vaulting... But he was a freak, and had no influence or followers at all.

This somewhat harsh judgement is tacitly acknowledged in the justification by the State Party, and so any comparative analysis must relate to Santini's own work. A comprehensive study of his work by a Czech scholar, Dr Mojmír Horyna, places the pilgrimage church of Zelená Hora at the pinnacle of his oeuvre, along with the church of the Virgin Mary at Kladruby, also the subject of a nomination to the World Heritage List. This opinion is confirmed in the expert mission report of Erland Lagerlöf.

A less detailed assessment by Professor Bruno Queysanne of the Ecole d'Architecture de Grenoble stresses the high aesthetic and spiritual quality of Santini's work, comparing it with that of Borromini in Rome in the way in which the structure itself symbolizes the underlying spirituality. Unfortunately Professor Queysanne assigns the same importance to the Kladruby church.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

Two points will need to be followed up in the event of this property being inscribed on the World Heritage List. First, a careful study needs to be made of the proposed new Czech legislation, in terms of its scope and its application, in particular at Zelená Hora.

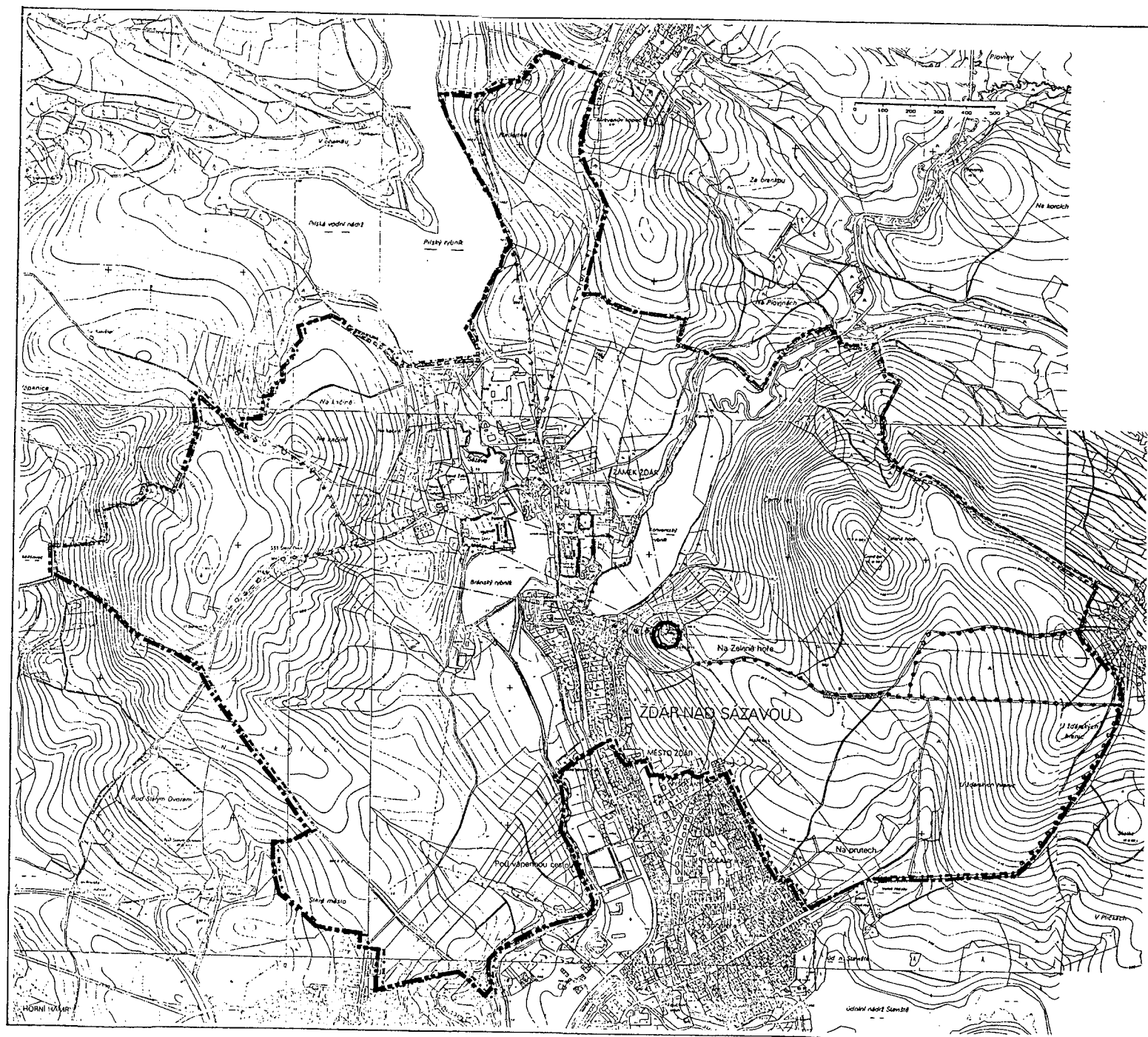
Secondly, a review of the restoration programme is currently in progress. It would be desirable for this to be submitted to ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee for comment.

Recommendation

That this nomination be referred back to the State Party, with a request for further information of the impact of the new Czech legislation on the protection of ecclesiastical monuments and on the restoration programme currently in progress. In the event of this information being supplied, ICOMOS recommends that the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria i and iv:

- **Criterion i** The Pilgrimage Church of St John Nepomuk at Zelená Hora, Žďar nad Sázavou, is a masterpiece of Baroque Gothic architecture.
- **Criterion iv** The Church of St John Nepomuk is an outstanding example of an architectural style that spanned the transition between the Gothic and Baroque traditions.

ICOMOS, October 1994



Zelena Hora : delimitation du site et de la zone tampon /
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