

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Kutná Hora - the historical town centre with the Church of St Barbara and the Cathedral of Our Lady at Sedlec
<i>Location</i>	District of Kutná Hora, Central Bohemia
<i>State Party</i>	Czech Republic
<i>Date</i>	11 October 1994

Justification by State Party

The inner historical town of Kutná Hora and the Convent Church of the former Cistercian Monastery at Sedlec meet the definition of an inhabited historic town in paragraph 29(ii) of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (February 1994) as a town that has "evolved along traditional lines and [has] preserved, sometimes in the midst of exceptional natural surroundings, spatial arrangements and structures that are typical of the successive stages of their history."

From the early 14th century to the early 16th century Kutná Hora was the second most important town in the Kingdom of Bohemia after Prague. This is still apparent in the town's exceptional wealth of historical architecture. Its ground plan attests complex evolution. Its agglomeration of buildings in a wide variety of types and styles forms an imposing and compact whole. Many of the buildings meet the highest European heritage standards, especially for the Gothic and Baroque styles. Sedlec Cathedral, the first of its kind to be built in Bohemia, exemplifies an early heritage preservation project linked with the first grandiose manifestation of Neo-Gothic Baroque architecture. The interiors of many of the town's monuments contain precious paintings, sculptures, and works of applied art. **Criterion i**

The panorama of historic Kutná Hora, bordered on the south by the imposing Church of St Barbara, ranks among the most impressive sights of its kind. Of crucial relevance in this respect is the town's concentration of its main monumental buildings above a pronounced rift in the terrain formed by the valley of the Vrchlice stream. The architecture of the Jagiellonian era (1471-1526) constitutes an important link in the evolution of the late Gothic style in Europe. The Church of St Barbara represents a unique work of cathedral architecture, the construction of which stretched from the late 14th to the first half of the 16th century.

Sedlec Cathedral is living evidence of the brilliance attained by Cistercian architecture at the turn of the 13th century, as well as to an early heritage conservation project carried out at the turn of the 17th century. It is also the first example of Gothic Baroque architecture by Jan Blažej Santini. **Criterion ii**

The historical centre of Kutná Hora is permeated with evidence of the long-vanished medieval silver-mining industry. During the medieval period the town's mines ranked among the largest in the world. Centred on the Osel pit, they covered an area of several square kilometres, reaching as deep as 450 m below ground.

In addition to the historic mines, the whole town is a depository of material evidence of earlier settlement, including the remains of buildings beneath the town gardens and public open spaces. The area of the town is worthy of a priority archaeological rating. **Criterion iii**

Located within the borders of the town there are two monumental cathedrals, both of exceptional interest in terms of both plan and architecture. The Church of St Barbara is the product of a gradual but highly dynamic evolution that lasted for over a century, featuring remarkable vaulting systems and a richly furnished and decorated interior. The most impressive feature of Sedlec Cathedral is its blend of original architectural conceptions from the late 14th to the early 16th centuries, plus element from a major restoration project in the High Baroque period. Kutná Hora also has a large number of architecturally varied and interesting smaller

churches, public buildings, and merchants' houses, mostly from the Late Gothic period but with High Baroque adaptations. **Criterion iv**

The Late Gothic merchants' houses of Kutná Hora are superior in value to similar historical assemblages elsewhere in the Czech Republic. Their medieval vaulted interiors are of particular interest. In sum they are an exquisite document of the housing conditions of the town's inhabitants in its heyday as the silver-mining centre of the 15th and 16th centuries. **Criterion v**

Kutná Hora is a town of great historical renown. It was there that King Wenceslas II launched a reform of the coinage that introduced the Prague *groschen*, a monetary unit that was to survive for a long period as one of Europe's most prestigious currencies and which laid the foundations of the immense wealth of the Bohemian kings, the realm as a whole, and Kutná Hora in particular.

The status of the Church of St Barbara is without parallel anywhere else in western Christendom, since it was set up without any specific ecclesiastical function but simply as a monument to the town's artistic and cultural aspirations.

The town played an important role during the Hussite Wars and was throughout the Middle Ages one of the foremost centres of art in the Kingdom of Bohemia. **Criterion vi**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Kutná Hora is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

There has been human settlement in the Kutná Hora region from early times. There was a mint there in the 10th century AD, associated with the rich deposits of silver ore. It was the latter that determined the earliest occupation in what is now the historic centre of the town, which seems to have been occupied by numerous scattered mining settlements in the 13th-16th centuries. The complex street plan of Kutná Hora is attributable to this early exploitation of the mineral resources, although it preserves what is almost certainly an ancient, non-urban road junction at its core, one road leading to Malín and the other to Časlav, both ancient settlements. Another old road leads to Kolín. The many small mining settlements in Kutná Hora itself are indicated by the small Romanesque parish churches that existed until their disestablishment at the late 18th century: only one survives to the present day.

This pattern of settlement appears to date from the 12th century. The mid 13th century saw major changes in the occupation of the land. The royal fortified towns of Časlav and Kolín were founded in the early 1260s, both closely associated with the silver mining in the area, which quickly developed during the reign of Wenceslas II (1285-1305) into a major industrial region. The extent and intensity of this exploitation of the mineral resources of Kutná Hora is reported in documents of the period from as far away as the Rhineland. It seems to have been uncontrolled: Kutná Hora was a boom town like those of North America during the Gold Rush of the 19th century.

This situation came to an end with the establishment in 1300 by Wenceslas II of a mint at the *Vlašský dvůr* (Italian Court) on the southern edge of what is now the historical centre of Kutná Hora, to produce the so-called "Prague groschen" that was the basis of his coinage reform. In effect Kutná Hora became a Royal mining town, giving it a status second only to that of the capital of Bohemia, Prague. This new status is reflected first not in the town itself but at Sedlec, where Wenceslas established a major monastic house for the order that he favoured, the Cistercians. The earlier Romanesque church was demolished to make way for a magnificent cathedral in the High Gothic style.

The growing importance of the town is reflected in the accounts of the two sieges, in 1304 and 1307, by Albrecht Habsburg. The first was repelled despite the fact that its defences were rudimentary, and when Albrecht

returned three years later he was equally unsuccessful, since by then Kutná Hora was enclosed by massive stone walls. The Hrádek (Little Castle) probably dates from the same period. The early decades of the 14th century saw Kutná Hora being transformed from a chaotic mining settlement into a proper town, and by the middle of the century the definitive system of defences was complete, with its four main gates, moat, and bastions. The present street pattern was evolved from the haphazard communications of the mining boom and what must have been largely wooden houses were replaced by substantial stone houses. Public buildings began to appear, such as the first town hall and a number of churches. Work on the monumental church of St Barbara began in the 1380s, outside the crowded town proper. Although it is of cathedral-like proportions, it has almost always had no more than the status of a daughter church of the parish church of nearby Pněvice.

The Hussite Wars of 1419-34 saw profound changes at Kutná Hora. Sedlec Monastery was destroyed by fire in 1421, to remain in a ruined state until the late 17th century, and there were serious fires in the town itself in 1422 and 1424 which destroyed most of its buildings. However, the wealth resulting from silver mining ensured that it was rapidly rebuilt when peace was restored. Work on the churches was led by two outstanding architects of the period, Matěj Rejsek and Benedikt Ried. The defences were supplemented by an outer wall, with irregularly spaced artillery bastions, and the Hrádek was rebuilt in Late Gothic style. The town was also embellished by many splendid merchant houses and with the system of arcades that is such a feature of Kutná Hora.

The relative lack of Renaissance buildings in the town graphically illustrates the sudden decline in its fortunes in the early 1540s, when the silver mines became exhausted. The economic stagnation of Kutná Hora was exacerbated by the after-effects of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48): although the town was not itself directly affected by the war, it fell into a deeper decline and over two hundred of its 574 houses were deserted or demolished. The establishment of a Jesuit college in the 17th century did little more than endow the town with a striking new architectural feature, similar to the High Baroque renovation of Sedlec Cathedral in the early 18th century by Jan Blažej Santini and the work of Killian Ignaz Dientzenhofer at the Ursuline convent and the Chapel of the Holy Trinity.

The dissolution of Sedlec Monastery in 1785 was followed by the deconsecration and demolition of many of the town's smaller churches, and others disappeared in the first half of the 19th century. It was not until 1850, when Kutná Hora became an administrative centre of some importance, that the town began to revive and to begin to concern itself about its architectural heritage.

Description

The Vrchlice valley forms the southern and south-eastern limit of the historic centre of Kutná Hora, which then rises up to the north and north-west before reaching its highest point. The eastern part is known as the Lower Town and the western, which ends with a terrain rift above a steep precipice, as the Upper Town. It is the latter which contains most of the monumental historic buildings of the town and, because of its altitude, it imparts a special quality to the urban panorama. It is, in fact, the overall historic *townscape and urban fabric* of Kutná Hora which is its most outstanding and impressive feature.

The earliest parts of the *Vlašský dvůr* (Italian Court), including the south-east tower, date back to the early 14th century. The Chapel Royal is High Gothic and has an impressive interior. However much of the impact of this building, which was at one time the economic hub of the town, was lost in the "purist-utilitarian" late 19th century reconstruction. Adjacent to the Italian Court is the mid-14th century *Church of St James*, which is notable for its interior furnishings, many of which date back to the Late Gothic period.

The *Hrádek* (Little Castle) is an interesting example of a Central European Gothic *palazzetto*, still retaining its original interior and exterior. Of especial note are the intricately ornamented Late Gothic oriels and the vaulted first-floor interior of the tower-shaped structure on the west side.

The pre-eminent symbol of Kutná Hora is the *Church of St Barbara*. Its architecture reflects the desire of successive generations of citizens between the 1380s and the mid 16th century to embellish it with further symbols of the town's affluence. It began as a group of eight radial chapels whose trapezoidal interiors are arranged in horseshoe form and separated by inset massive trihedral piers. This design required the provision of a central axial pillar, which had a crucial influence on the conception of the building's external appearance. The plan provided for a three-aisled basilica, which was modified at the beginning of the 15th century with the addition of wider outer chapels. This phase was only partly completed when the Hussite Wars broke out in 1419, and was not resumed until the closing decades of the century. Matěj Rejsek was responsible for completing the

high choir, which he supported with bold double-arched flying buttresses, and the final form of the presbytery, his masterpiece. Following his death in 1506 the final stages of the work were entrusted to the Royal master-builder, Benedikt Ried, who redesigned the vaulting and roofing in a form consistent with the new architectural principles of his day. The quality of the surviving *churches* is high. Among the most outstanding are the Church of St John of Nepomuk and the Ursuline Convent, the work of K.I. Dientzenhofer.

Little of the town's extensive 14th-16th century *fortifications* survives to the present day. The main interest in the rest of the historic town centre lies in the wealth of *private houses*. The facades of many of these feature a wide variety of Gothic detailing, whilst others reflect Baroque and 18th century taste. However, the structures themselves are for the most part medieval in origin, as confirmed by a detailed scientific survey, which revealed Gothic barrel-vaulted cellars and lower storeys. They were two-storeyed in their original form, upper storeys being added in later periods. The early arcading was largely removed in the 19th century, but it has been replaced at certain places, on the basis of surviving documentation, as part of a modern renewal project. There are also a few examples of high-quality Renaissance domestic architecture in the town, and some exceptional High Baroque buildings.

The Lower Town is less richly endowed with high-quality buildings than the Upper Town, largely because it was ravaged by fire on several occasions. The reconstruction after the severe fire of 1823 resulted in an austere but homogeneous character being introduced, which was diversified by later additions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The *Cistercian Monastery of Sedlec* is 1.5 km north-east of the historic town centre. The complex lay in ruins after being burned down by the Hussites in 1421 until work on its reconstruction began in 1693 under the architect P.I. Bayer. He was succeeded by Jan Blažej Santini, who made it the first building to which he applied his own concept of Gothicizing Baroque. The original three-aisled structure was enlarged to five aisles and the presbytery terminated in a pentahedral apse. The result is a masterpiece, combining the restoration of an outstanding Gothic structure with the innovativeness of Santini's Gothicizing Baroque in extraordinary harmony.

In addition to its visible heritage, Kutná Hora also possesses a buried heritage of exceptional importance. Little is known of its organization and layout before the 13th century founding of the present urban settlement. Such archaeological work as has been carried out indicates that there is an enormous potential for the investigation of the pre-urban settlement and the early silver-mining industry, which is almost completely unexplored anywhere in Europe.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Ownership of the historic centre of Kutná Hora and Sedlec Monastery is divided between the central Government (5.8%), the town administration (10.5%), private individuals (76.8%), the Roman Catholic Church (1.9%), and others (5.0%). Questions of ownership arising from recent political changes in the Czech Republic are now stabilized.

The town was designated a National Heritage Reserve by Government decree in 1950 as part of a renewal scheme for selected monument and historic towns and cities. This was confirmed by inclusion of Kutná Hora on the Official Register as a Heritage Reserve under the terms of Law No 22/1958 on Objects of Cultural Heritage, and updated by a decree of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Socialist Republic in 1987. In order to protect the immediate and wider surroundings of the Reserve, a Heritage Conservation Zone was established in 1982 by decree of the Cultural Section of the District National Committee at Kutná Hora.

In addition, Vlašský dvůr was declared a Monument of National Cultural Heritage in 1962, a status also accorded to the Cathedral of Our Lady at Sedlec.

Management

The responsible agencies are the Municipal Authority at Kutná Hora, the Cultural Division of the District Authority at Kutná Hora, and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. Associated with the bodies are the Central Bohemia Heritage Institute and the State Institute for the Protection of National Heritage.

Systematic urban development activity began in Kutná Hora in 1960, when work began on the master plan for the cultural heritage reserve of the historic centre. This was revised in the 1980s and ratified in its present form in 1994. This plan covers all aspects of conservation and urban regeneration. Careful consideration is being given to mitigating the unacceptable aspects of tourism, for which the town authorities are developing a policy, one of the main planks of which will be avoidance of the commercialization of the heritage.

Maintenance and regeneration were formerly part of a State plan under which funds were allocated centrally. Responsibility has now passed from the State to individual owners, but State funds are still available to boost local budgets and assist individuals. The proceeds of the current programme for the privatization of municipal properties are being used to set up a special fund to help in speeding up the regeneration of the historic centre.

Discussions are currently in progress for the restitution of the Ursuline Monastery to the religious community; however, it is anticipated that the present cultural use will be maintained. It is hoped also that the Jesuit complex, at present in military use, will also be made available for cultural use.

A significant feature of the conservation policies in Kutná Hora is the fact that there is strong support among the inhabitants of the town, who are fiercely proud of their heritage. This is vividly illustrated by the fact that over eight thousand citizens signed a document supporting nomination to the World Heritage List.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Conservation and restoration have a long history in Kutná Hora, dating back to the work of Bayer on Sedlec Cathedral at the end of the 17th century. The mid 19th century saw the establishment in Vienna of the Central Commission for the Preservation and Inspection of Architectural Monuments, which was responsible for work at the Church of St Barbara and several churches in the decades that followed. The Office of Head Conservationist for the Land of Bohemia, set up in Prague in 1911, became the State Office for the Protection of the National Heritage following World War II, a body which continued conservation and research work in the town.

The first major project after World War II was completion of the long-term restoration project at the Church of St James. The large-scale national programme launched in 1950 included reconstruction of the Hrádek, maintenance of the Vlašský dvůr, and renovation of a number of the historic merchants' houses. A systematic historic buildings survey was carried out in 1961 as part of the process of drawing up the detailed area plan, and this was followed by an archival survey. In the 1970s there was a systematic survey of the construction history of all the architecturally valuable blocks in the city centre, on the model developed for Prague.

Groundwater changes and collapses in the ancient mines caused serious static damage to a number of buildings in the 1960s and so a phased salvage and stabilization plan for cellars and basements was implemented. Some ancient buildings proved incapable of repair or consolidation and so had to be demolished.

There have been several major renovation projects in the past two decades involving merchants' houses, the Ursuline Convent and Church of St John of Nepomuk, and the Hrádek (conversion to house the municipal museum).

Authenticity

The authenticity of the ensemble of the town layout and the architectural features of Kutná Hora is attested by the systematic surveys that have been carried out since the end of World War II. Most of the urban fabric is intact and preserves the evidence of its organic growth. Individual buildings survive with a remarkable degree of authenticity of design and materials. Some of the religious and public buildings underwent substantial restoration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but this is not deemed to have exceeded or transgressed the norms of 20th century conservation doctrine. The future of this level of authenticity is assured by the provisions of the 1987 Law on National Heritage Protection and the 1976 Law on Construction Activity, which have strict standards designed to ensure respect for authenticity.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS sought the scientific opinion of its International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages in preparing its evaluation. The President of this Committee, Dr Tamás Fejérdy (Hungary), visited the property as the ICOMOS expert in January 1995.

Qualities

The urban landscape of Kutná Hora is one of high aesthetic quality, the jewel of which is the Church of St Barbara, which is an exceptional example of Late Gothic architecture and had a profound influence on later architecture in central Europe. Sedlec Cathedral is also of great importance in architectural history as the first large-scale work in the Gothicizing Baroque style of Jan Blažej Santini.

The existence of Kutná Hora is indissolubly linked with its great silver mine (part of which can still be visited), from which its prosperity depended. That prosperity is dramatically illustrated by the wealth of late medieval buildings, and also by the unique status of the Church of St Barbara.

Comparative analysis

Kutná Hora has a considerable measure of uniqueness. Whilst it forms part of the large surviving stock of medieval towns that survive in central Europe, the circumstances of its creation are unparalleled, in that what had been a mining boom town was abruptly converted into a Royal industrial and administrative centre, a situation not to be found in any of the other historic towns in this region.

Its role as a centre of silver mining and production is comparable with that of other European towns, including two that are on the World Heritage List - Goslar/Rammelsberg, Germany (No 623) and Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia (No 618). In the New World Potosí, Bolivia (No 420), Guanajuato, Mexico (No 482), and Zacatecas, Mexico (No 676) were also silver-producing communities. In all of these cases, however, there was controlled urban development, unlike the unrestrained growth of Kutná Hora up to the assertion of Royal control by King Wenceslas II

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

One of the most interesting aspects of Kutná Hora is the immense potential for achieving a better understanding of medieval mining and metallurgy that lies beneath the ground. ICOMOS hopes that the relevant authorities will encourage and facilitate a carefully planned programme of excavation and survey aimed at learning more about this little-understood aspect of medieval society, which is of fundamental importance in interpreting the economic, social, and political origins of modern Europe.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*.

In its urban fabric and its buildings Kutná Hora constitutes an outstanding example of a medieval town whose wealth and prosperity was based on its silver mines. As a result it was endowed with many buildings of high architectural and artistic quality, notably the Church of St Barbara, which had a profound influence on subsequent developments in the architecture of central Europe. Its stock of well conserved domestic buildings is also of great significance, since they illustrate the social and economic parameters that distinguish settlements of this kind exceptionally well.

ICOMOS, September 1995

