



# CAPUCHIN CRYPT IN BRNO

## Where are you standing right now?

**The crypt is just one part of the monastery of Capuchin friars** who have lived here almost uninterruptedly since 1656. They serve mass and confess in the church, lead various communities of believers and, of course, take care of the entire area. They also spiritually serve as hospital chaplains and help out in parishes around Brno. You can read a little bit about the history of this place on the panel at the cash desk.

Two other Capuchin communities live in Prague, one is in Olomouc and one in Sušice.

## Why do we have mummies here?

In the basement of the church, where you will enter in a moment, the Capuchins buried their brothers and also benefactors between the years 1656–1784. You can find a tomb under almost every church. Here, however, the bodies of the dead were gradually dried by the air flow. **So there was a natural mummification, which was not intended.** 24 Capuchin monasteries were built in the Czech lands during the 17th century according to the same architectural pattern, including a church with an underground crypt and vents for ventilation. However, only in Brno did the buried bodies turn into mummies.

More than 150 Capuchins and around fifty benefactors of the order rested under the church. However, only forty of them have remained to this day in the form of mummies.

The bodies of those dead, which have decayed over the centuries, are reburied in a brick, sealed ossuary and you will pass by it later on.

## Philosophy of the crypt

The Capuchin crypt is a very specific place that requires a comment. **One space serves as a burial place for the dead and at the same time as an opportunity for living visitors to contemplate.**

Although there is no specific mention about this concept, we do know that Capuchins accompanied visitors through their crypt already in the first half of the 19th century. And sometimes they still do it today.

However, the philosophy of the concept is clear: *Memento mori* (Remember Death), which in various forms permeates all the halls of the crypt is not primarily intended to frighten us **but rather it is supposed to confront us with the reality of our life, with the way we deal with it.**

Or in the words of a classic: our life resembles a "fragile bubble, it disappears, it leaves, it perishes, as we have barely seen the world".

In addition, the crypt also opens up an interesting insight into society which in the 17th and 18th centuries surrounded the communities of Capuchin friars.



The Latin inscription above the entrance to the chapel *Tu fui, ego eris* means *I was you, you will be me.*

## CHAPEL

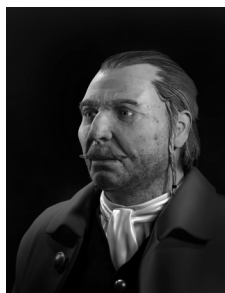
# 1

The chapel originally served as a so-called **winter choir**, i.e. as a room for the brothers to pray in the winter season. It was warmer here than up in the monastery. Of course, the Capuchins also had a "summer" choir that is located directly above you. They have been using it during all year for some time now.

In 1872, **Baron Trenck** was reburied in the chapel. In the 1970s, **the reliquary of the Christian Klemenciána** was moved here. The altar under the reliquary dates from the mid-17th century and it is still used for services today.



*Trenck's portrait from the mid-18th century...*



*...and from 2018 according to anthropologists.*

### František Trenck

**Undoubtedly the most famous "inhabitant" of the crypt**, and at the same time a complicated person who lived in a difficult time full of wars.

A fearless professional soldier, the commander of the dreaded Pandurs. When Trenck was a prisoner sentenced to life in Špilberk, he asked for spiritual help from a local Capuchin priest. The chronicle of the monastery proves that the time spent in prison moved his conscience and from an **adventurer, warrior and hedonist he became a penitent, begging God for forgiveness of his sins**. He donated part of his wealth to charitable purposes and wished to be buried in the local crypt.

The panel to the left of the altar will explain how František Trenck is related to the fact that **the Capuchins opened their crypt to the public**. You will also learn more about a big event in 1872, about a stolen and returned thumb or about an anthropological survey.

## FRESCOES

# 2

We borrowed these copies of **baroque frescoes** from our colleagues from Loreta in Prague, where their originals are located in one of the crypts: **they depict the Christian concept of death**. You can think of frescoes as one coin that has two sides. On one hand, there is the fact that everything passes and we all die one day (Altar of Death, Chronos, and Bubblegum Boy). On the other hand, there is hope that death is not the end (The Resurrection of Lazarus).

**Objects excavated during the reconstruction of the floors in the spring of 2024** are displayed in the middle of the hall. Under the window you can see pieces of Renaissance portals that the Capuchins used as stairs while building the crypt.

By the way, in the 19th century this room served as a **woodworking workshop** for the Capuchins. The glass show-case is nothing more than the walled door to the backyard through which you came to the cash desk.



## BUILDERS AND BENEFACTORS

# 3

This room originally served as an **access corridor** between the church and the crypt; a staircase lead there.

The **uncovered spot in the middle** shows the remains of the bourgeois buildings from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. It is probably a farm building belonging to one of the houses that used to stand here. The remains of the building were discovered during the reconstruction of the floors, along the entire length of the crypt. In the next room, archaeologists also uncovered part of the street paving.

Also note the **small openings in the vaults**. It is a ventilation. When the Capuchins wanted to use the basement spaces without windows (the ones on the right are modern), they had to ventilate them somehow. These vents opened above the church vault and air flowed through them.

Today only one is functional. The remaining vents were destroyed during the Josephine reform in 1784, when burials in city centers were banned. Thanks to the air flow we have also preserved a large number of original **baroque coffins**, and you can see the restored lids on the walls.



František A. Grimm

### The Grimm family

This family of famous builders and architects was connected to the Capuchin community not only by work and donor relations, but above all by friendship. Two of Mořic Grimm's sons and one of his grandsons even joined the Capuchin order.

The Grimm family was apparently reburied into these premises only during the first half of the 20th century. According to the newspaper article from 1942, the remains of the Grimm's were already lying where you see them now.

## BENEFACTORS FROM THE RANKS OF NOBILITY

# 4

This part of the crypt is younger than the ones you are about to enter. It was built in 1726 by Mořic Grimm who you are already familiar with.

The **angel statue**, like other sculptures in the crypt, comes from the workshop of the Brno sculptor and restorer Jaroslav Vaněk. It probably dates from the 60s of the last century.

To the left of the angel there is a sign on a **boundary stone** placed below the level of the crypt, dated April 29, 1739, which announces: "The Church plot of the Capuchin Fathers, let no one disturb." That's right: there is **another cellar** below you. During the reconstruction of the floors, parts of its load-bearing vaults were uncovered.

The inscription near the angel *Sic transit gloria mundi* means *Thus passes the worldly glory*.

## BENEFACTORS FROM THE RANKS OF BURGESS

# 5

You can very well see here the difference between the height levels of the individual halls of the crypt. **It is a remnant of an earlier Renaissance building** which we have already mentioned in the previous halls. Before the Capuchins started building their church, they first had to come to an agreement with the owners of the three town houses that stood there at the time. The Magnis couple eventually came to their aid and left the recently purchased buildings to the Order.

**The Capuchins demolished them for the most part and skilfully used what they could find.** It was primarily a cellar that was used to build a crypt. However, they apparently filled up a part of the underground – this is how the space between the Grimm's and the tomb with the remains of the Capuchins appears. We also assume that, as in the previous halls, there are other cellar spaces below this one. It is typical for historical buildings in the center of Brno that they have basements on several floors.

**In the corner on the left, you can see the ossuary** built by the Capuchins in the 1990s. The remains of the dead, whose bodies decayed over time, are kept also in a closed coffin next to the ossuary.

### The Orelli family

The Capuchin Chronicle mentions a chimney master Barnabáš Orelli as an "important" and the "most generous" benefactor of the Order. His wife Viktorie, brother Ignác and sister-in-law Marie Alžběta were also buried in the crypt.

The mystery for us is a **nameless boy** who is buried here, and whom the Capuchin Chronicle does not mention at all. According to an oral tradition, he was twelve-years-old and served as an altar boy in the church. Likewise, the Chronicle does not mention a medical doctor **František Preisler**.

## CAPUCHIN FRIARS

# 6

The burial place of the Capuchins is undoubtedly the most impressive place of the whole crypt. **The very simple way of their burial reflects one of the charisma features of the Order: poverty.** Today, we could somewhat inaccurately translate it as voluntary modesty. Living in poverty does not only refer to possessions but also refers to mental freedom from the need to own someone or something. Both of these contribute to greater openness towards God and other people.

Capuchins, like all Christians, **perceive death as a gate through which they pass to God.** Saint Francis of Assisi even calls her "sister" in the Canticle of Brother Sun which he composed just before his death. Francis awaited his last day with joyful confidence that he would finally meet his God.

**These spaces full of prayers** of entire generations of friars and later also laity invite you to stop and meditate. Do not be disturbed...

The inscription on the back wall: *What you are, we were, what we are, you will be.*