

Abstract:

The cult of St. John of Nepomuk was one of the characteristic features of life in the Habsburg Empire and other European catholic countries in the early modern period. The origins of veneration for the medieval martyr were tied to Prague, to his tomb in the cathedral, to the Metropolitan Chapter. The saint became famous above all for the conviction that he gave his life for the preservation of the confessional secret. With his death he preserved the good name of the Czech Queen Joan, who confessed to him; on the other hand, he is said to have punished those who were disrespectful of his own posthumous reputation and grave. He therefore became an immensely popular defender of honour and reputation, values highly valued in the early modern society. Under the influence of the Prague Chapter, St. John's veneration was taken up by the Habsburgs, the Catholic rulers who ascended the throne of John's torturer, Wenceslaus IV, and John's spiritual daughter, Joan. They venerated the saint as one of the patron saints of the Bohemian kingdom, which they ruled. The recatholicization of this kingdom and its associated countries enabled the growth of St John's veneration, which by the end of the 17th century had already begun to spread vigorously beyond their borders. At the beginning of the 18th century, this development was fundamentally strengthened by the establishment of the Confraternities of St. John of Nepomuk, which set themselves the goal of spreading St. John's veneration. Almost all the adult members of the Habsburg family enrolled in two of these prestigious spiritual institutions, thus spreading St John's devotion farther from Vienna as well. With their approval, his cult also spread to areas recaptured from the Ottoman Empire, and to areas in southern Europe that came under their direct sphere of influence. Reverence for St. John also developed among some other European Catholic rulers, the church elite, the nobility, and all other strata of society. The Baroque man would explain his personal reverence for this saint by the fact that he felt an inner impulse and spiritual motivation to do so, and that he could rely on the saint's help in everything he turned to him for. The ecclesiastical approval of John's veneration by papal Rome came at his beatification (1721) and later canonization (1729). But even before these official pronouncements, John of Nepomuk had already become a universally venerated saint in a great part of Europe. This was undoubtedly also because his story contained very attractive themes, sometimes of an archetypal nature (silence – speaking).