# Church foundation stones as time capsules in an early modern European Perspective

At the beginning of the vast majority of the history of Christian churches in the early modern era, a foundation stone was laid. It had developed since the Middle Ages as a rite of symbolic construction beginning in Latin Europe and was performed across denominational boundaries and political systems by ecclesiastical and secular authorities to give the starting signal for the construction. Popes, bishops, princes, and municipal magistrates laid the foundation stones for cathedrals, abbeys, and parish churches, but increasingly also for profane buildings, each with their own objectives and political messages which they wanted to convey to the community present, to contemporaries, and posterity. Future generations, in particular, were targeted as addressees of the building process: The builder-owner recalled his construction work through inscriptions and coats of arms on the finished building, printed reports on the ceremony and medals praised him as a benevolent ruler. Besides, the foundation stone itself functions as a reminder. Often it was provided with inscriptions which more or less detailed information about the building circumstances. Also, objects could be inlaid into the stone, which, as a talisman, were intended to give the building additional protection. It thus also took on the function of a time capsule, expressly intended to pass on information about the time of construction in case the foundation stone was to be excavated in the future. Using selected examples from the Holy Roman Empire and Italy from the Renaissance to the 18th century, the presentation aims to show the extent to which foundation stones could also serve as memorials for church communities, but also for political societies.

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