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A Comprehensive History of the Strahov Library

The Strahov Library is one of the most beautiful libraries in the world. It also has a fascinating history, one that is challenging to piece together. The institution has survived periods of war, stagnation, monastery suppression, and communist rule. This paper is a review of the literature about the Library, including necessary historical information on the Czech Republic, Prague and Strahov Monastery as a whole. The narrative is more or less chronological in nature and concludes with recent developments and an outlook for the Library's future.

St. Norbert founded the Premonstratensian Order after failing to reform the canons of Saint Martin's Abbey in France. According to Kirkfleet, he had a vision while visiting Premontre, a valley in France. When Norbert became Archbishop of Magdeburg in 1125, eastern Germany opened to the Premonstratensians, and Karl Christ states that it is in that region where they had their greatest successes (207). Bibliotheca Strahoviensis notes that the order's motto is "What man gains, he passes on." The origins of the Premonstratensians are linked to the Canons Regular, who followed a more detailed version of the Rule of St. Augustine. This gave the Premonstratensians a literary tradition, but Karl Christ states that they eventually limited their literary studies (206-207). He claims that their earliest statutes from 1130 include specific instructions for a librarian (21). Malecek described the priorities of the order:

From its very beginning this order oriented its efforts to the reform of the life of the clergy, to emphasizing Eucharistical reverence among people and to securing closer contacts between life according to evangelic orders and life of society as a

whole...Premonstratensian monasteries became centres of solemn rites and bearers of education and culture (110).

This is important to understand due to the role Strahov and its library played in local society. For example, the monastery had so much “influence on spiritual, cultural, and social life in Bohemia and Moravia that [it] was the centre of events in these spheres right from the beginning” (Malecek, 111).

The founding of Strahov was not an idea that originated with the Premonstratensian monks themselves:

In 1140 [Czech Prince] Vladislav II of Bohemia founded Strahov Monastery at the suggestion of his close friend, Jindrich Zdik, Bishop of Olomouc, who was a diplomat, politician, and a clergyman. Zdik had visited Palestine, where he had encountered a progressive, reforming monastic order of Premonstratensian monks, famous for their love of learning. The Bohemian kings were, at this stage, still rather raw and uncouth and Zdik hoped that the presence of the monks would add a little polish and culture to the Bohemian court. In fulfillment of this expectation it became a center of culture, with a library and a school, where leading families sent their sons to be educated (Van Gend, 47).

After one attempt at founding a monastery failed, “an invitation was issued to the Premonstratensians whose first representatives arrived from Steinfeld in the Rhine valley” (Sidlovsky, 2).

The first version of the monastery was hastily built out of wood. The church built in the mid-12th century was the first stone building. Before the end of the 12th century, the church and monastery had been completed in the Romanesque style (Malecek, 113).

Architecturally speaking, Prince Vladislav II continued the work of his predecessor, Prince Sobeslav I, whose name is linked to the Romanesque reconstruction of Prague Castle (Cornej, 14). This Romanesque trend influenced “the face of the merchant craftsmens’ settlements below the castle” and “the Romanesque architectural style was also used in the construction of monastic buildings for various religious orders.” These orders include the Premonstratensians, “whose center became the famous Strahov Monastery near Prague Castle” (Cornej, 14).

Bennet notes that the monastery was known for its fine library very early on. Bibliotheca Strahoviensis notes that the first books in the collection were sent from other locales or made by the monastery’s scriptorium. There are few references about the early activities of monks related to the library. Charles IV founded the main university in Prague in 1348 and, according to Bennet, gave encouragement to the Strahov monastery’s scriptoria, leading to work known collectively as the Bohemian School of Illumination (7-8).

From the beginning, the institution faced challenges. Many sources, including Steele, state that the manuscript collection was destroyed by fire in 1258; while others such as Malecek write that there was a fire that did not cause extensive damage (113). The “Concise History of the Monastic Library,” which is found on Strahov’s official website, states, “the buildings (evidently wooden) destroyed in the fire of 1258 were replaced by a Romanesque structure which went on to become an integral feature of the Prague skyline.”

Regardless, the fire and later conflicts may have led to the spread of the library's holdings:

since some of the Strahov manuscripts have been discovered in other libraries, it would seem that the monks did not spend their lives confined to the monastic precinct: evidently some of the books were kept outside the abbey, especially after the catastrophic fire of 1258 and during the Hussite wars which led to the abandonment of the abbey from 1420 to 1436 (Staikos, 467).

After the fire, the Czech princes were the chief benefactors in assembling the new collection and the Strahov eventually became the repository for the Royal Library (Bennet, 5).

The years of 1419-1436 saw the Hussite Revolutions or the Hussite Wars, an idealistic conflict between followers of Jan Hus and Catholics. Steele states that the second collection was almost totally destroyed in 1420. According to another author, the "ritual vesture and the books in the monastery courtyard...were burned" (Malecek, 113) and it is unclear whether those books were the entire collection or just a small portion. Another version of this time period may explain the discrepancies:

The monastery flourished from both the material and the spiritual aspect until the period of the Hussite movement, when it was attacked and plundered by the citizens of Prague in 1420. It seems that the accounts of then contemporary chroniclers about the burning of the monastery are exaggerated and that the monastery building itself was not damaged to any great extent. On the other hand, it was thoroughly plundered and books, articles of worship and furnishings of

both the church and the convent were burned...the monastery took a long time to recover from this disaster (Sidlovsky, 4).

Malecek also notes that the monastery remained uninhabited for 18 years following 1420. The "Concise History" states that it was abandoned during the Hussite Wars, and Sidlovsky calls the time from 1420 until the end of the 16th century one of "vegetation rather than life for the monastery" (4).

Cecily van Gend writes that the resurgence of interest in the library did not occur until late in the 16th century, when Abbot Kryspin Fuk launched a grand reconstruction and acquisitions effort (47). Malecek also notes that the monastery did not flourish during the 15th and 16th centuries, but differs on the period of rebirth, which he credits to Jan Lohelious' tenure as abbot beginning in 1586. Architecturally, the monastery's "present magnificent form dates from a period of rebuilding in Renaissance style, which started in 1586 at the instigation of Emperor Rudolf II and continued until the nineteenth century" (Staikos, 466).

Chronologically, Strahov's next obstacle was the Thirty Years War (1618-48). Bohemia was based on an estates model at this time, with a central ruler sharing political power with two noble estates and one estate made up of royal towns. In 1526 Ferdinand I, a Hapsburg, was elected king by the estates. Catholic interests gained strength in the region as the Hapsburgs continued to reign. The power struggle between the Bohemian non-Catholic Estates and the Hapsburgs eventually grew into the Thirty Years War. The war ended with a failed attempt by Swedish forces to capture Prague in 1648 (Cornej, 26-31).

At this time Swedish General Konigsmark removed the library's collection. According to Bennet, the collection was given to Queen Christina and when the Czechs appealed to Sweden in the early 19th century for the return of the treasures, they were refused (5). Van Gend claims that it was a Finnish regiment that looted nineteen cases of manuscripts and prints and took them to the town of Turku in Finland (48). Malecek writes that the Swedes took away 19 crates of material, which were later destroyed by a fire in Finland (113).

There was a nation-wide period of rebuilding and renovation, which were reflected at Strahov. Cornej notes that after the Thirty Years War, "one sign of reviving prosperity were the numerous [buildings] built in the Baroque style which put down roots in the Czech lands.... the most characteristic buildings of Baroque architecture are...churches and monasteries" (32). Strahov was no exception, and the library holds the best example in its Theological Hall, which was designed by Johann Dominik Orsi of Orsini and completed in 1671. Sidlovsky credits Abbot Jeronym Hirnheim for the building of the new library, which he states was completed in 1679 (6). The impressive bookcases were made in 1632. The monastery's website, [Strahov Monastery](#), includes a more detailed description of the library:

The Baroque concept of the library is demonstrated by the shelves; unlike the Romanesque treasury system or the Gothic desk system, the books were stored upright. Above the shelves, there are gilded wooded carved decorations with wooden cartouches. This was a rudimentary library aid, because the pictures in the wooden cartouches and their titles specified the type of literature stored on the shelves. Abbot Hirnhaim compiled the Library Rules at this time, in 1672.

Staikos writes “from the end of the seventeenth century the Strahov library started expanding rapidly through gifts and bequests of books, and even of whole collections belonging to church dignitaries and professors” (468).

Around the same time, Saint Norbert’s remains were transferred. Originally, Saint Norbert’s tomb was in Magdeburg (Germany) and in 1596 Premonstratensian abbots (including John Lohelius, then Abbot of Strahov and later archbishop of Prague) petitioned to have the body moved. This attempt failed, and thirty years later the new Abbot of Strahov, Gaspar Von Questenberg made another try. The people of Magdeburg did not give consent until 1626, at which time they were afraid to provoke Emperor Ferdinand II. The remains of Saint Norbert were still safe, 500 years after his death, and on May 2, 1627 there was a huge celebration in Prague for the arrival of the relics, which still reside at Strahov (Kirkfleet, 346-350). To celebrate the 100th anniversary of this event, according to the Strahov website, the Theological Hall was extended by several meters in 1727. It was around this time that the Baroque frescos (in stucco cartouches) were added. Van Gend states that these cartouches depict the “road to education, study, love of knowledge and books” (48). Staikos tells the building story slightly differently, stating that the expansion was necessary in 1721 because the stock of books was growing so quickly and “at the same time it seemed sensible to take the opportunity of redecorating the hall with new frescoes. The decision had to be taken quickly as there were not many years to go before 1727, when the abbey would be celebrating the centenary of the translation of the relics of St. Norbert from Magdeburg to Strahov” (479). So we see that Strahov is not only surviving during this time, but also continuing to expand.

At this point, it is necessary to tell the story of Joseph II, another obstacle that Strahov overcame. Joseph II became Emperor in 1780. After coming into power he wanted “to eliminate anything that could be held to symbolize Bohemia’s autonomy” (Staikos, 472). Soon after the death of his mother, Maria Theresa, he “turned his attention to the monasteries of the Monarchy as part of his all-embracing scheme to reform the Church. He was convinced...that it was the right and duty of the secular ruler to carry out such reform, at least when the pope and the church authorities were failing to do it themselves” (Beales, 192). He adhered to the following principles when deciding which monasteries to abolish or suppress:

First monasteries must be stripped of their extra-territorial character: he abolished all the connections that existed between houses in his lands and superiors or monasteries in other states. Secondly, monasteries must be ‘useful’ and Joseph understood by that adjective ‘contributing to a tangible secular purpose’...Thirdly...no monastery of any kind would be allowed to survive unless it performed a useful function ...either educating youth or looking after sick persons. To these qualifying functions were added, ‘preaching, hearing confessions and attending deathbeds’ and, later still, the cure of souls (Beales, 192-193).

Abbot Vaclav Josef Mayer deserves credit for the survival of Strahov at this point. One source claims “he was the last great personality of the fading Baroque at Strahov monastery and also its last great builder. It is definitely mostly due to him that Strahov was not abolished like a number of other monasteries of all orders under the Emperor Joseph II” (Malecek, 114). Beales supports this view:

he undoubtedly saved some individual monasteries from suppression...In Bohemia, the emperor was asked to suppress the rich Premonstratensian house of Strahov...It had just built itself a second 'philosophical' library to match its 'theological library of the 17th century. In doing so it used bookcases and accommodated books from dissolved monasteries, and placed a bust of Joseph in the pediment of the new building. He declared the monastery too useful to destroy (203).

Eric Garberson notes "the abolition of monasteries during the reign of Joseph II resulted in vast numbers of books finding their way to the market and being advantageously acquired for the Strahov library" (115). Further, the efforts of Joseph may have ensured that those Austrian monasteries that survived the period would keep standing until modern times. Beales puts forth this idea when he states that "it seems highly likely that [Joseph's] work rendered the surviving houses so acceptable and useful that there was little danger of their undergoing the periodic persecution that afflicted the monasteries of France, Spain and Portugal during the nineteenth century" (308). Strahov did not emerge from this period completely unscathed; as Staikos notes that "many of its books were sold off to booksellers at giveaway prices" (472).

The building of the Philosophical Hall seems to have figured into Joseph's decision to spare the monastery. Its existence is owed to the growth of the collection and the institution, as the influx of works from suppressed monasteries together with several major acquisitions necessitated the building of a second larger hall between 1783-93 (Loschburg, 76). Malecek attributes the need for a new hall to the purchase of two important libraries, those of Jan Clauser and Jan Heidl (115). The amount of time that

this process took is worth noting: Malecek states that “the façade of the hall was built in 1783, the construction of the building proper being realized as late as from 1786, when the danger of the abolition of the monastery had passed” (114). Bennet tells of an unnamed Abbot who was transferred from one of the abolished monasteries in Moravia in 1774. Supposedly, this abbot persuaded Moravian soldiers to sell the books of the abandoned monastery to Strahov. Further, he then transferred the “shelving and casings around which he reconstructed the Library, making the building higher and shorter” (6). According to the monastery’s website (“Concise history of the monastic library”), the façade was built in 1783, but after the purchase of a walnut interior for the library, relocated from the abolished Premonstratensian monastery in Louka the dimensions of the future hall were adapted to the size of the shelves. A further version of the story gives more detail:

The original building for the new library was built from 1783 to 1786, but the abbot did not have sufficient money for bookshelves with the result that the building remained empty. At that time the Premonstratensian monastery at Louka near Znojmo was abolished and so Abbot Mayer bought cabinets for his library from it. However, after the library cabinets had been transported to Strahov it was found that their dimensions did not correspond to the architectural layout of the building...The building was raised in height, a part of the windows was walled-up and one of the walls of the library was completely built...The work involved was all completed in 1792 (Sidlovsky, 28).

Anton Maulbertsch, a Viennese Rococo painter, painted the Hall’s fresco in 1794. It represents “philosophy and the sciences in mutual harmony with religion and is held to be

the last great ceiling painting of European illusionist Baroque” (Loschburg, 76). Sidlovsky states that it “portrays the journey of the human spirit in search of Truth” (28). The same year, “the library shelves were installed in the newly modified hall by their creator, the cabinet-maker Jan Lahofer of Tasovice” (Sidlovsky, 28). Bennet states that the monks were tired of the construction so they set down restrictions that caused the work to be completed in record time (6).

The Philosophical Hall includes books on mathematics, physics, astronomy, literature, poetry, history, and art. Bibliotheca Strahoviensis describes how markings in a specific set of encyclopedias show that these were considered the most important volumes in the Hall, and that this fact shows the Premonstratensian’s tolerance of ideas.

The ornate decoration of both halls is very significant. In Prosperity and Plunder, the author notes, “most of the really well-endowed houses belonged to the Old Orders which had been founded by 1150; chiefly the Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustians, Premonstratensians, and Carthusians...In seeking to make their churches and their services beautiful and splendid, they acted as major patrons of the visual arts” (Beales, 4). Further, the library itself “ranked second only to the church in monasteries of the Old Orders, and the building of a spacious lavishly decorated room to house their books was invariable part of their rebuilding programmes” (Beales, 52). One author gives another explanation of the décor:

it was the architecture and furnishings of the library that communicated a general commitment to the scholarship required by majority opinion... [Decoration] communicated the type of scholarship the library was to serve and the prelate’s position on the thorny questions concerning study by monks. These messages

were directed primarily toward an outside audience...the monastic library was not a place of study but a showroom (Garberson, 27).

That same author details that Strahov's program for decoration was a "prescription for monastic study regulated by virtues and proper study habits and pursuing the ultimate goal of divine wisdom" in one hall, and "...true enlightenment through Ecclesia founded on teachings of Christ" in the other (172-173).

Returning to our timeline, the period of the late 18th century until about 1870 is referred to as the Czech National Revival. Cornej attributes the movement to a reaction against "the insensitive introduction of German as official language and curtailment of Bohemian traditions" (35). Strahov's website states that the monastery was a haven for the movement, and was represented there by the librarian G. J. Dlabae, sometimes called Bohomir Jan Dlabac. Bennet credits him with expanding the collection of Czech manuscripts and books "so that the Library again became a center of Czech culture" (6). He was an Enlightenment author who "accumulated a valuable collection from the Humanistic and Revival period and began to collect newspapers and magazines of his time which form a unique collection in the library today" (Garberson, 115).

At the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, the library became famous throughout European cultural circles. Numerous visits by important people are recorded in the oldest guest book first used in 1792. Women were initially only allowed to enter the library sporadically because of the imposition of monastic seclusion ("Concise history of the monastic library"). During this time period, in 1812, Empress Marie Louise gave the monastery a six volume botanical work and the four volumes of the muse francais published in Paris between 1803 and 1809. These gifts are

now housed in a case inlaid with mother-of-pearl on the west side of Philosophical Hall. Staikos tells us that “from 1801 onwards a number of avid collectors gave their books to Strahov...whenever a monk died his books went to the abbey library, and there was an unceasing inflow of new stock from institutions such as the Czech Academy of Science and Art, as well as documentary records from local archives in Bohemia” (473-474).

The Library’s collections grew slowly during 19th and early 20th century. Garberson notes that Cyril Straka was a librarian and historian who led the effort to revive the library in the 1920s, replacing the late 19th century period of stagnation (115). Malecek supports this, stating that this period was “characterized by an unusual endeavor to treat the library fund on the part of...Cyril Straka” (115).

The German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia began on March 15, 1939 and in November of that same year all Czech universities were closed (Cornej, 59-60). One article estimates losses to special libraries stemming from Nazi occupation as the following: 48 monastic libraries, sixteen parochial libraries, eighteen libraries of nobility, two significant private libraries, and 42 special museum and archival libraries. Further, the “whole loss of books, manuscript books, and incunabula of all these libraries is estimated at 2,000,000 volumes” (Zivny, 877). Another article, written in 1959, claimed that “libraries in Czechoslovakia have suffered no losses to speak of during the war, and their buildings are intact” (Kristeller, 84). No specific information on Strahov during the Nazi occupation could be found.

Communists took control of Czechoslovakia in 1948. By 1950 the holdings of the Strahov Library totaled 130,000 volumes. At this point in history, there is some confusion

as control of the Library shifts from the Premonstratensians to the Communist government, and then back again. The website explains the process thusly;

After 1950, when monastic orders and congregations were forbidden in Czechoslovakia, their members executed, interned, and imprisoned, and their property confiscated, the Strahov Library was incorporated into the newly established Museum of National Literature, and the monastic archives, music collection, picture gallery, and exhibits were dispersed to other state institutions.”

Strangely, this was in many ways beneficial to the institution. For example, a museum librarian in 1955, discussing castle libraries, noted “under the old regime most of them were reserved for a small minority of scholars; but the Czechoslovak State has made their treasures accessible to research workers on a wide scale” (Lifka, 96). Steele notes “after considerable alterations to the building the Library was opened to the public in 1951” (68). A 1966 article titled “The Preservation of Historic Architecture in Czechoslovakia” discusses the restoration and renovation of buildings with the goal that they could then be put to “some socially viable use” (Fitch, 121). This program began in 1960, and included Strahov as a monument that is “absolutely unique and irreplaceable, either artistically or historically or both” (Fitch, 126). It was during this program that the Romanesque structures of the Strahov were unearthed:

[Strahov] was taken over by the communist regime, the religious being interned and placed in civil employment...The monastery was subjected to thorough archeological research and transformed into the Museum of National Literature. In the course of the said archeological research the long forgotten Romanesque

form of the monastery was revealed and reconstructed in a sensitive way
(Sidlovsky, 8)

The same author who stated that Czech libraries suffered no losses during WWII writes that “former private and church collections have been taken over by the state, that is, they have been transformed into public libraries or archives while remaining in their former location, or have been annexed...” (Kristeller, 84-85). A positive viewpoint is displayed by Loschburg, who wrote, “since 1953 the memorable rooms of the old Premonstratensian monastery have housed the museum of Czech literature, a source of attraction to countless thousands of enthusiasts” (78). One author, writing about music libraries in 1961-1962, stated that the Premonstratensian foundation “was abolished in 1948 and its library nationalized because of attitudes ‘inimical to the Government.’ The institution has been transformed into a ‘National Letters Memorial’” (Plamenac, 593). Interestingly, he was unable to examine the manuscripts he requested because key authorities were unavailable and the materials in question were locked in those authorities’ quarters. This author found the catalogue deficient, but was told that a new card catalog was in the making (Plamenac, 594). In 1964, Bennet wrote, “today the Library is under the competent direction of Dr. Zdenek Kirschner who is a rare combination of scholar, administrator and public relations expert. The rooms and books are kept in perfect condition and the exhibitions are tastefully arranged by a master hand” (8).

In 1969 the Museum (also known as the Memorial of National Literature) organized an exhibition of Czech literature in exile. The exhibition title translates to Returns. Benes writes, “it was welcomed with great enthusiasm despite the intervention

of the regime which tried to eliminate some of the more radically ‘anti-communist’ writers” (113). This attempt at censorship was unsuccessful, since objectionable works were simply placed behind glass, so all visitors could still see them.

Although some positive aspects and activities of the time have just been reviewed, it must be remembered that the survival of Strahov during this period was not the norm, and that the Premonstratensians had been kicked out of their monastery by the State. No information on specific actions was available, but one source wrote the following about similar institutions in the Czech Republic; “In 1950 the religious orders were disbanded. The monasteries were looted, their libraries destroyed and their buildings used for industry or agriculture. Out of 15,000 monks and nuns, 12,000 were put in concentration camps or imprisoned” (Lawrence, 69). As for the building itself, the video Bibliotheca Strahoviensis states, “most of the buildings have been ravaged by time, as well as by the previous totalitarian communist regime, which neglected the upkeep of religious buildings for almost half a century.”

Communist rule of Czechoslovakia ended in 1989. Sidlovsky sums up these more recent developments:

After the change in the political situation in 1989 the monastery was returned to the Premonstratensian order, which began to realize a costly reconstruction of the building. By 1994 the church had been restored, a new technical network constructed, the Strahov picture gallery newly built and the Strahov library renewed (8).

A recent article announcing that the Museum will soon have a new facility laid out the situation more clearly than other sources (PNP refers to the translated abbreviation of Musuem of Czech Literature):

The PNP was established in 1952 as the Museum of National Culture in Prague's Strahov Monastery after the monastery premises were confiscated from the Premonstratensian Order by the communist regime. The museum then took over the monastery, including the valuable Strahov library housing 130,000 volumes as well as collections from other monastery libraries. A year later, the institution turned into a musum focused on national literature alone. In 1990, the literature museum had to return the Strahov Monastery to the Premonstratensians on the basis of the restitution law that enables original owners to claim their property unlawfully confiscated by communists. The PNP had to leave most of the monastery premises and was allowed to use only a small part. That is why the museum cancelled some displays and the Institute for Czech Literature, seated in the monastery, had to move into another building ("Gov't approves new building for museum of Czech literature").

The Premonstratensians received a grant from the Czech Ministry of Culture to digitize its rarest writings. Additionally, in 1991 the monastery began converting its library catalog into an electronic format. About 30% of its pre-1950 and nearly all of its post-1991 acquisitions are now in the electronic database. Thirdly, the library has a website, now available at www.strhovskykloster.cz. These developments enhance public access to and knowledge of the institution ("Case 403, Strahov Monastery, Prague (Czech Republic)").

The collection remains impressive:

the fund of incunables of Strahov Library is the biggest after the collection of the National Library in Prague. Its most valuable part consists of 16 Czech incunables...The funds of manuscripts and incunables described so far are stored in safe deposit rooms and, apart from a few exceptions in the entrance exposition, are not accessible to visitors...A mutual comparison of the size of the Philosophical Hall and the Theological Hall (approximately 50,000 to 16,000) bears witness to the wide scientific interests of those who built up Strahov Library (Malecek, 115-116)

Another description of the library from 1995 notes that it is “the second oldest church library in Bohemia with an uninterrupted existence. It has about 140,000 volumes in its stocks, some 2,000 of which are manuscripts and 2,600 incunabula...The library still functions as a scientific institution accessible to all researchers. It has its own catalogue and study” (Sidlovsky, 24).

Strahov can look forward to a formidable presence in Czech culture for a long time to come. In 2004, President Vaclav Klaus became the first president of the Czech Republic to visit the monastery and its library. He delivered a statement about the value of preservation (“Klaus becomes first Czech president to visit Strahov Monastery”).

The library at Strahov has never been immune to external factors in the Czech Republic and this will continue to be the case. In 1997, the Sunday Times claimed that the Strahov archive contains unpublished materials on 130,000 Jews who had property stolen by Nazis. According to the article, there were documents containing names, places, and bank accounts in this secret archive. A Charles University historian stated that such

documents were not in the monastery (“No documents in Strahov on 130,000 robbed Jews – Czechs”).

On March 22, 2006 the Czech government declared that the Museum of Czech Literature will be moved to the former Chinese embassy. This should remedy some of the difficulties and space shortages that plagued the Museum after the Premonstratensians regained ownership of their monastery in 1990 (“Gov’t approves new building for museum of Czech literature”).

On the other hand, Strahov could use some help in the image and public relations department. Myla Goldberg (the author of Bee Season) wrote Times Magpie, a Walk in Prague in 2004, and she describes her frustration at the limits placed on visitors to Strahov and the Klementinum:

Strahov’s library rooms are arrayed like meticulously prepared corpses, their coffin lids opened to permit cautious viewing...It is sheer bibliophilic cruelty to refer to such sepulchers as libraries. Library implies interaction with the books it contains, even if one’s intercourse is limited to reading spines and inhaling the room’s intoxicating must (70).

While I do not share her view, our group had more access than the average tourist. Her description is disturbingly reminiscent of comments made by writers in the 1960s regarding their Strahov visits.

I would like to discuss the creation of this paper before concluding. Researching this topic presented a few challenges. I found frustrating statements glossing over entire eras in the library’s history. For example, Malecek writes “endeavors of all enemies of the Church were directed...also against the Strahov. It suffices to recall the anti-Church

policy of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, or the trials of the fifties of the present century” (111) when in fact I did not think that sufficed, and would have preferred much more information. I can only hypothesize that the Library and researchers writing about it prefer to focus on Strahov’s accomplishments and its future. Other obstacles included poorly translated sentences or the lack of translated materials (for example, Strahov has its own journal and I found a few other sources that appeared very relevant that were only available in Czech). I would imagine that someone doing a similar research project in a few years would have more material at his or her disposal. Of course, anyone who knows the Czech language would also have access to more sources. One idea for further research would be to examine primary source material and find out exactly what happened to the collection stolen by the Swedes following the Thirty Year’s War. The Nazi era would be another gap to fill in with extensive research. Lastly, any effects of World War I and the resulting political changes (including the formation of a Czech-Slovak nation) on Strahov and its library deserve scholarly attention.

In conclusion, the library at Strahov monastery has overcome a multitude of obstacles, and it is a remarkable institution, especially in light of its history. Since its recent organizational restructuring and embrace of technology, I have no doubt that it will continue to thrive and adapt as one of Prague’s finest cultural resources.

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