

SECRET PRAGUE



MARTIN STEJSKAL



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

HRDLIČKA MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

16

Viničná 7

- Open every Wednesday and Friday, 10am–6pm
- Metro: I. P. Pavlova; Tram: 4, 6, 10, 16, 22, I. P. Pavlova stop; Bus: 291, Větrov stop

**A real
cabinet
of curiosities**

Officially opened on 22 October 1937, the Hrdlička Museum of Anthropology is a wonderful institution open to the public two days a week. The museum is named after Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1943), a Czech anthropologist who emigrated with his family to the United States, where he spent most of his life.

Hrdlička is best known for formulating the hypothesis of human migration from Asia to North America across the Bering Strait (which separates Siberia from Alaska).

This small museum (only two rooms), founded thanks to the donation of Hrdlička's personal collection, crams many rare objects into a small space. Exhibits include the death masks of Czech presidents, Egyptian mummies, comparative skeletons of primates and humans, anatomical casts, maps, and much more.

Charles University Faculty of Science, in the same premises as the museum, was the headquarters of the Institute of Theoretical Physics in 1911. A commemorative plaque recalls that Albert Einstein was a professor there in 1911–12.



BAS-RELIEF OF A TRIPLE HANDSHAKE

Karmelitská 18

• Tram: 22, 9, 12, Hellichova stop

6



At No. 18 Karmelitská Street you can see a strange house sign: three linked forearms, shaking each other's hands. This is the Masonic symbol of brotherhood and unity. It also recalls the special Freemasons' greeting.



**Masonic
symbols
as house sign**

OTHER MASONIC HANDSHAKES

This symbolic handshake is found in two other Prague streets: at No. 3 Na Zderaze and No. 73 Vínohradská.

THE MASONIC SALUTE

Freemasons salute each other by shaking hands in a distinctive manner. By pressing with their thumb, they indicate their rank. Using the tip of the thumb of the right hand, an apprentice will lightly touch the first knuckle of the other person's right index finger three times: two rapid touches and one long one. A companion will do the same, but will use his right thumb to touch the first knuckle of the other person's middle finger five times: two rapid touches, a long one, and two more rapid ones. A master will do likewise, but with seven touches: four rapid ones and three long ones.

MASONIC SYMBOLS

The square and compass are other important Masonic symbols: examples can easily be seen at No. 7 Janáček embankment (Janáčkovno nábreží) and at No. 35 Karmelitská, No. 53 Lublaňská, No. 1 Vejvodova and No. 22 Vínohradská streets.

NEARBY

INAUGURAL MEETING OF CZECH FREEMASONRY

7

The first Freemasons' meeting in the Czech lands, initiated by the French and Saxon troops who occupied Prague in 1741, is thought to have been held at the house of a nobleman called Karel David. Known as U kamenného zvonku (At the Little Stone Bell), the house is at No. 10 Dražického Square. The men behind the creation of the Czech Lodges were allegedly the Count of Belle-Isle, Marshal of France, and Count Frederick Augustus Rutowski (illegitimate son of the Polish King Augustus II and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Upper Saxony, based in Dresden), commander of the Saxons. According to some sources, the Masonic initiation activities revived the former activities of Count F. A. Sporck (see p. 122).

SGRAFFITI ON THE COURTS

Míčovna, Královská zahrada
[Ball Game Hall, Royal Garden]
• Tram: 22, Pražský hrad stop



Communists and the Renaissance

Ball Game Hall (Míčovna) is a magnificent Renaissance pavilion built between 1565 and 1569 (during the reign of Ferdinand I) by Bonifaz Wohlmuth in classical style. The hall, on the site of a former shooting range, was the setting for many ball games.

The building, burned down during the Liberation of Prague in 1945, was rebuilt in the 1950s during the Communist era but with the addition of a rather unusual detail: while the rest of the building is in Renaissance style, in the third arch to the left, the sculptor J. Wagner replaced the *sgraffito* destroyed by the Germans with a design referring to the Communist five-year plan (*pětiletka*), symbolised by the hammer (industry) and sickle (agriculture).

This is the only surviving element of Socialist Realism to be seen at Prague Castle.

The hall, 68 metres long and 13 metres wide, was a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture. The former *sgraffiti* have been reproduced, personifying the four elements (Earth, Air, Fire, Water), the seven capital virtues (Prudence, Temperance, Charity, Hope, Courage, Justice, Faith) and the liberal arts (Theology, Astronomy, Geometry, Music, Arithmetic, Rhetoric, Dialectic and Grammar).

PĚTILETKA



naše cesta k socialismu

STATUE OF A DEAD WOMAN

3

Basilica of St George
Náměstí U Svatého Jiří (St George Square)
Praha 1–Hradčany, 119 08
• Tel: 224 372 434 (castle information centre)
• Tram: 22



**Brigita's
ghost**

At Prague Castle, in the choir of the chapel of the Romanesque Basilica of St George, is a startling figure of a dead woman. Brigita, as she has always been known, is shown with her body decomposed, crawling with frogs, snakes and newts.

According to legend, Brigita was a poor girl from Malá Strana who fell in love with an Italian sculptor who asked her to marry him.

During a long trip abroad, the sculptor agonised over his wife's fidelity.

Meanwhile the young woman had become the victim of some jealous neighbours, who by slandering her managed to convince the sculptor of her infidelity. He killed her and hid her body, but it was discovered and the sculptor confessed his crime. Sentenced to death, he repented and made one last wish: to create a statue of his lover exactly as she was found.

SECRETS OF ST GEORGE'S

The Basilica of St George, founded before 920, is the burial place of the Přemyslid rulers.

In the adjoining chapel is the precious *Passional of the Abbess Kunhuta* (Cunigunde), written in the 12th century by the monk Kolda and illuminated by Beneš, which expressed the medieval alchemical creed in the Czech language for the first time.

According to legend, a crucifix supposedly began to bleed as Přemysl Otakar II, "the king of iron and gold", lay dying after the Battle of Moravské pole (Moravian Field). The whereabouts of this crucifix is unknown.

BAS-RELIEF OF THE ROTATING STAR

6

Archdiocese of Prague - Hradčanské náměstí 16 (Hradčany Square)

• Tram: 22, Pražský Hrad stop



**Mysterious
sign
at the Archbishop's
Palace**

The Archbishop's Palace, between Prague Castle and Sternberg Palace, is the current seat of the Archbishop of Prague, replacing the Old Priory near St Vitus Cathedral and the house known as Bishop's Court in Malá Strana, now occupied by the Ministry of Finance.

On both sides of the entrance columns are striking bas-reliefs representing a “rotating star”, an aggregate of the swastika (details opposite) and the hexagram (see following double-page spread).

During the Hussite rebellions the second seat of the archbishop, the former Bishop's Court, was burned to the ground. Archbishop Conrad of Vechta (1413–21) defected to the Hussite camp and the seat remained vacant for 140 years from 1421. In 1561, Antonín Brus of Mohelnice, who was also Grand Master of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star (1561–80), became Archbishop of Prague. Following a donation on 5 October 1561 by Emperor Ferdinand I, the Church received the house near Prague Castle that had once belonged to the nobleman Florián Griespek of Griesbach as the seat of Prague archdiocese and residence of its representative.



ROTATING STAR SYMBOL: A HEXAGRAM AND A SWASTIKA ...

The rotating star is a compound of two symbols: the hexalpa (or hexagram) itself, a six-pointed star made up of two locked equilateral triangles; and the swastika, whose four arms bend at right angles in the same rotary direction.

The two triangles of the hexagram express interlinked celestial energy (marked by the triangle pointing upwards, traditionally emerald green) and the Earth's electromagnetic force (indicated by the triangle pointing downwards, traditionally bright red), a union of spirit and matter made possible by the power generated by the two forces (designated by the swastika).

It is very important to distinguish between swastika and *sauvastika*. The *sauvastika* rotates to the left – it is considered regressive and sinister by Eastern religions and the peoples of Western antiquity, who saw the swastika, rotating to the right, as a positive and evolutionary symbol. Adolf Hitler and his followers appropriated this symbol that had been sacred for thousands of years and turned it into an evil *sauvastika*.

It is indeed the direction in which the swastika and *sauvastika* are rotating that determines their direct meaning: right-hand (positive, solar) symbolises universal evolution and is typified by the swastika adopted by Charlemagne; left-hand (negative, lunar or anti-clockwise) signals that the more immediate context is to subject the timeless and sacred to profane space and time, and is then represented by the *sauvastika* adapted by Hitler.

The arms of the swastika, formed by four Greek gammas (which is why it is also known as the gamma cross), are a symbol of universal action and the ongoing transformation of the Life-Energy to Life-Consciousness. In this sense, it has always accompanied the saviours of humanity such as Christ. Christ is depicted in the ancient Roman catacombs at the centre of a spiral-shaped swastika, as the representative of the spiritual core where God is present.

So is this the message of this circumgyratory hexagram carved on the façade of the Archbishop's Palace in Prague: that universal life sprang from Christ, has evolved in the faith, and that it is to Christ we must return at the end of time, in other words at the end of the present cycle where everyone and everything is constantly evolving?

More about the symbolism of the hexagram on the following double-page spread.

MERMAN SCULPTURE

U Tunglů house

Vyšehradská ulice 8

• Tram: 3, 7, 17, 21, Výtoň stop

5

“ **The water
sprite of Podskalí**

The mysterious house called U Tunglů on Vyšehradská Street features a striking statue that looks rather like a monkey.

The statue is in fact a water sprite (merman), illustrating a common legend in Podskalí, a village that is strongly connected to the waters of the Vltava.

According to this legend, the merman of Podskalí (almost every village in the Czech Republic has its own water sprite) once drowned the son of a fisherman. In retaliation, the boy's mother continued to take out her revenge on the merman's children until he promised to stop luring the children of Podskalí to their deaths.

Another story about this house claims that it was haunted for a while by a headless monk.

Today, Vyšehradská Street follows the old road that connected Vyšehrad to the Old Town, before the development of the New Town.

WHAT IS A MERMAN?



The water sprite or merman (masculine of “mermaid”, *wasserman* in German, *hastrman* or *vodník* in Czech) is a fabled being in Czech and German folktales who lives under water where he keeps the souls of the drowned hidden in little pots. With his green skin, large eyes and webbed fingers, he looks distinctly like a toad. One day this creature haunting the lakes captured a young woman, shut her up in his palace under the water and got her with child. She wished to return to the land for a single day and promised to return. The merman agreed, but when the

young woman broke her promise he went to fetch her at the home of her mother, who refused to give up her daughter. In his anger, he whipped up a storm that dumped the body of their child on his wife's doorstep.

Czech composer Antonín Dvořák, noted for turning folklore into romantic music, based his 1896 opera *Rusalka* on this tale.

KRAKONOŠ-RÜBEZahl SCULPTURE

17

Čerchovská 11, Praha 2

• Metro: Náměstí Jiřího z Poděbrad; Tram: 11, Náměstí Jiřího z Poděbrad stop



**Personified
symbol
of sovereign
mountains**

The street leading from Rieger Gardens (Riegerovy sady) to the Žižkov TV Tower is called Krkonošská, after the mountain range on the Czech-Polish border (Krkonoše or “Giant Mountains”). Its legendary ruler was Krakonoš-Rübezahl, a mountain giant,

the spirit incarnate of the region, which is why his imposing statue is leaning against the corner of a house at the junction of Krkonošská and Čerchovsk streets.



WHO WAS THE REAL KRAKONOŠ?



The name Rübezahl-Rybrcoul appears in Czech and German folklore from the 15th century onwards, first as a spirit of the mountains and forests and then a demon of the wind, giant and genie. From the 16th century, his earlier name of Rübezahl was used as a term of ridicule.

The Germans devised the name from *Rübe* (beetroot) and *zählen* (to pay) because in many legends Rübezahl paid not with money but with beets.

Another etymology gives the source as Lucifer (Devil), which if read backwards spells Repicul.

In *Miscellanea historica regni Bohemiae*, a 1679 treaty by Bohuslav Alois Balbin, a Czech Jesuit, he was described as a ghost sitting on the steep slopes at the peak of Mount Sněžka, swinging his dangling legs and shouting monotonously.

He also sometimes takes the form of a monk, miner, hunter, old man or wild horse, frog, rooster or crow.

Joining the pilgrims, he taught them the secrets of Nature and the mountains, but if insulted he turned into a terrible demon, taking over the natural elements and causing lightning, rain, hail or snow in summer.

People used to go up into the mountains at the source of the Elbe and sacrifice black roosters to him.

Until the mid-17th century, Rübezahl-Rybrcoul was a demonic local figure little known to the Krkonoše people.

After the publication of several tales by J. P. Prätorius (in *Daemonologia Rubenzalii Silesii* of 1662 in three volumes, and *Satyrys Etimologicus* of 1672), stories about Rübezahl began to spread, particularly in Germany, where he was of interest to academics. Writer of fairy tales K. A. Musäus drew upon the work of Pretorius.

Krakonoš, the Czech equivalent of Rübezahl, is a made-up word which from the 19th century replaced Rübezahl in general use.

The name occurred for the first time in V. Hájek's *Kronika česká* (Czech Chronicle) as “Krkonoš”, perhaps an allusion to the Ptolemaic Krokontoí, as a geographer of antiquity referred to the Krkonoše – Giant Mountains.



CUBIST DOORWAY OF THE CHURCH OF ST ADALBERT

U Meteoru

- Tel: 283 892 404
- Open during Mass: Sunday at 10am, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 5pm
- Metro: Palmovka; Tram: 10, 24, 25, Stejskalova stop



***A forgotten
Art Nouveau
gem***

In the centre of Libeň, near the castle but hidden behind houses, you'll find the stunning Church of St Adalbert (St Vojtěch), a forgotten gem of Czech Art Nouveau architecture.

The wooden church by architect Emil Králíček, built between 1904 and 1905, comes as a great surprise to its infrequent visitors, with its Cubist doorway and strange square tower topped by an onion dome, which rises to 23.7 metres in height.

Intended as a temporary expedient due to lack of funds, the church has finally been preserved for its architectural quality.



NEARBY

Also in Libeň, the pretty Art Nouveau building in Zenklova Street belonging to Sokol (a gymnastics association founded in the 19th century) was also built by Králíček in 1909–10.

CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL 3

Kinského sady

• Tel/Fax: 224 920 686

• Visits by appointment. Also open during Mass on Sunday at 10am and Monday at 8am

• Tram: 6, 9, 12, 20; Bus: 176, 510, Švandovo divadlo stop



A moving church

It was in the second half of the 17th century that the superb wooden Orthodox Church of St Michael the Archangel was built in the village of Velké Loučky near Mukachevo (in present-day Ukraine). In 1929 it was dismantled log by log and transported to the heights of Prague's Kinský Garden, where it was reassembled.

The church was a gift to the city from the inhabitants of Ruthenia, a region on the borders of Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania – before Ruthenia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945, Prague was its capital.

The church is built in Bojkov style, which incorporates popular Baroque elements characterised by three roughly rectangular wooden sections on top of which are wooden towers with shingle-covered roofs and onion domes.

The ensemble stands some 14 metres high and 8 metres wide, although the highest tower rises to over 17 metres.

White, green and red – the three colours that typify the Orthodox religion and symbolise faith, hope and love respectively – are incorporated in the decoration of the towers and the interior.

The building has been used by the Orthodox Church since 2008.



MICHLE WATER TOWER

19

Hanusova, Praha 4–Michle

• Metro: Pankrác; Bus: 118, 124, 170, Brumlovka stop



In Hanusova Street, bordering the Michle and Krč neighbourhoods, stands the Michle water tower, a stunning building topped by a massive copper-roofed drum.

Built in mortarless brick between 1906 and 1907 by the renowned Czech architect Jan Kotěra, it figures among Prague's outstanding Art Nouveau buildings.

Until 1975, the tower brought the waters of the hydroelectric plant at Podolí to the Vinohrady and Vršovice water department: nowadays it is only used as an underground reservoir. However, plans are under way to turn it into a cultural centre.



*One
of Prague's
outstanding
Art Nouveau
buildings*

NEARBY

TWISTED STREET LAMP RECALLS TRAGIC DESTINIES

20

Folimanka Park - Praha–Nusle

Street lamp under Nusle Bridge

• Tram: 6, 7, 18, 24, Svatoplukova stop

Connecting the New Town with the southern districts of Prague, Nuselský



most (Nusle Bridge) was built in 1973. At 485 metres long, 26.5 metres wide and 42.5 metres high, and towering above the Nusle valley, it's the highest and largest bridge in the city. Because of its height, the bridge has attracted would-be suicides from the earliest days of its construction: between 200 and 300 people have thrown themselves to their deaths in the valley below.

In the 1990s, a guardrail 2.7 metres high was installed to prevent suicide attempts.

In 2011, the sculptor Křištof Kintera installed a modified street lamp in Folimanka Park: twisted at the top and entitled "Of One's Own Volition – Memento Mori", it commemorates the tragic loss of human life.