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# “BEAUTIFUL PRAGUE” – EXPERIENCING THE ANTIQUITY AND BEAUTY OF A CITY IN THE CZECH SOCIETY OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract:

*This study analyzes the relation of the capital of the Czech lands to monuments, which are characterized as the tangibility of memories. The institutionalization of monument preservation founded on a scientific basis was simultaneous with the inception of modern Czech society. Until that time, sites of historical interest participated in the construction of national history. From the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century guardians of memory attempted to take into account the artistic-historical value of monuments. During the First Republic, preservationists tried to cultivate the relation of society to the tangible heritage of the past. That was the time of the “discovery” of natural monuments, while, on the other hand, there were endangered monuments which, in the Czech consciousness, symbolized the supposedly hostile Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Monuments that became symbols of Czechoslovakness drew greater interest. The First Republic brought the first great conflict between preservationists and so-called modern architects. After the Second World War, the relationship to memorials in Prague, which was practically undamaged, was protected by conservationists loyal to the new regime. While, in the first postwar years, they presented the memorials as a source of national self-confidence and as a magnet for tourism, after the February Revolution (1946) they operated with the concept of the socialist city as a city with a generational memory. Criticism of the regime appeared first in a veiled form in the mid-1970s (volunteers in Olsansky Cemetery trimmed the graves of representatives of the Czech National Uprising in an atmosphere of*

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*depreciation of Czech national identity). From 1988 this was already openly articulated. The target of criticism became the arrogance of the powerful elite leading to unnecessary demolition and inappropriate interference in Prague architecture. Despite virtually no financial resources, the Club for Ancient Prague managed, in the postwar era, to save a great number of valuable memorials in the center and on the outskirts of Prague.*

Keywords: *urban anthropology, city, monument, memory, national movement, socialism*

Urban anthropologists (ethnologists) often begin thinking about research of a city with the assertion that this society (Gesellschaft) ought to be studied through an analysis of the composition of the communities that live in it (Zajonc 2003: 179). This is surely one of the possibilities that would lead to an understanding of the functioning of urban organisms, specific urban worlds. But, if we accept the idea that the anthropologist does not necessarily have to construct his thesis from direct and long-term contact with existing communities, we are offered the possibility of archival research, the possibility of using written sources and, therefore, a choice of other gauges. Our indicator for knowing the capital of the Czech lands and also, from 1918, of the Czechoslovak Republic, a city that became the symbol of historical and modern Czechness will be its relation to monuments. We will follow this relation from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1989. Our starting point documents the logical sequence between the inception of modern Czech society, which is freeing itself – even if only through its elite<sup>2</sup> – from sterile homegrown provincialism and the institutionalization of monument preservation on a scientific basis. As a matter of fact, a scientific and enlightening society, the Club for Ancient Prague, was founded only in 1900.<sup>3</sup> Until that time, monuments were almost the only source of confirmation of the national construct of history in Czech national society and its way of thinking. The forming and formed nation perceived them as proofs of its historical continuity and/or connected them with

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<sup>2</sup> As the Czech historian Jiří Kořalka pointed out, T. G. Masaryk and his circle were constantly criticized for their concept of a modern civil society by the proponents of traditional thinking (Kořalka 1966: 12).

<sup>3</sup> Archive of the City of Prague (AMP), SK XXII/204 (unless otherwise mentioned, the quotations are from these archives).

important events in its past. Monuments, in the words of the Czech philosopher Jaroslava Pešková a "specific expression of human reality" (Pešková 1997: 33), were appropriate because they represent some sort of materialization (according to Pešková, visualization) of memory (Pešková 1997: 34). The building of the Museum of the Czech Kingdom (National Museum) on the Horse Market (today's Wenceslas Square) became a symbol of the Prague revolution of 1849; the Town Hall clock, which was repaired in 1866 and, especially, the building of the National Theater, whose foundation stones were laid on May 15, 1868, symbolized the renaissance of the Czech folk living in Bohemia and Moravia, in two inseparable historical Czech lands. Vyšehrad was thought of as the cradle of Czech education and Prague castle as the seat of the Czech rulers and a symbol of erstwhile Czech glory. That is, Czech remembrance also had an unambiguous spatio-temporal context (Nora 1991). Monuments of important personalities of the Czech National Revival were also included in such discourse (Soukupová 2005: 28-33).<sup>4</sup> It was in no way coincidental that one of the first Prague monuments was dedicated to Josef Jungmann, a key personality of the Czech National Revival. The cornerstone was laid in 1873 during the historical time of the Czech depression. The monument, unveiled only in 1878, symbolized Czech peacefulness, but, first and foremost, the invincibility of the Czech nation which could rely on its own strength alone (Hojda & Pokorný 1997: 54-64). The most important monument of the last century and/or since 1918<sup>5</sup> was the Saint Wenceslas statue. Even though not all the social groups perceived the Saint Wenceslas cult in the same way (besides, no nation represents a unanimous society), the notion of Duke Wenceslas as a peace-loving ruler prepared to defend a culturally mature nation prevailed. (Hojda & Pokorný 1997: 113-116, Soukupová 2005: 27-28, 31, 34-38, 41-43).<sup>6</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, specialists such as architects, engineers and exponents of historical sciences<sup>7</sup> began to prepare society to include

<sup>4</sup> Re: the role of monuments as a form of iconographic symbols in the recent past, cf. the comparative study of Miroslav Hroch (Hroch 2005: 17-20).

<sup>5</sup> After World War II the Hus cult was at its strongest. The main gathering point of the Praguers became Old Town Square with the Hus monument (Soukupová 2005: 40).

<sup>6</sup> According to the European historian Miroslav Hroch, the auto-stereotype of a peace-loving nation that defends its existence is the typical auto-stereotype of a small nation (Hroch 1999: 160).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., in May 1917 on the society's committee were one government councilor, one librarian, one chief engineer, six architects, three engineers, two lawyers and one JUC, one PhD, one PhC, one court councilor, one bank official, and one historian – Prof. Josef Šusta. AMP, SK XXII/204, Nos. 170 and

monuments in discussions about the character of urban space (and this itself was at the time when the Gothic plan of Prague, especially of Prague's New Town (Vošahlík 1983: 299), was conceived as a monument). This debate, however, was not necessarily burdened by the past, present and future positions of the nation. Custodians of the past tried to take into account the artistic-historical value of monuments.<sup>8</sup> This certainly does not mean that their lines of reasoning would not sound very understandable in tense times of national existence and that the conflict about monuments could not include criticism of state politics. An example of such an approach may be the public protest meeting of the Club for Ancient Prague led by government councilman Luboš Jeřábek<sup>9</sup> on May 14, 1918, against the construction of military hospital buildings in the Royal Garden of Prague Castle. And when approximately 400 people who gathered for a meeting in the Sladkovský hall of the Municipal Building expressed their disagreement about the destruction of the unique monument, only secondarily was the questionable construction disputed by medical argumentation that the buildings were unsuitable for the needs of a military hospital. The proposal to refer this question to Czech politicians transformed the idea of monument protection into some sort of political protest.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the above-mentioned example brings us to the problem of what exactly was considered a monument. The impulse leading to scientific interest in monuments on an institutional basis was negative: the reconstruction of the Prague ghetto at the turn of the twentieth century (Rybár 1991: 102-105; Bečková 1993) was presented under the catchwords of modernization and the grandeur of Prague. The Czech intellectual public, led by the writer Vítězslav Mrštík, was unable to prevent the rapid destruction (Rybár 1991: 104-105). In the beginnings of scientific preservation, included under the term "monument"

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5236 The following year on the board were six architects, two engineers, three doctors of philosophy and one PhD, three lawyers and one JUC, one academic sculptor, one museum specialist, three high officials and one nobleman. No. 142.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. June 10, 1917, the Club for Ancient Prague planned a walk to the Baroque Benedictine monastery complex at Saint Margaret's in Břevnov. AMP, No. 5471. In that same year, members of the Club went through the private collection of pictures of Imperial Councilor Novák, a Gothic monastery of an order of Slavic Benedictines in na Slovanech (Emauzy), a construction site in Podskali, the Imperial Mill in Bubeneč, restaurant buildings of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Stromovka, and a Romanesque basilica in Prosek. No. 2877.

<sup>9</sup> In 1917, the vice president of the Club was the librarian Jan Emler and the second vice president was chief engineer Eduard Schwarzer. No. 170. The same committee also worked the following year. No. 142. After the change of regime (in May 1919) engineering councilor engineer Eustach Mölzer became the secretary of the Club and professor of architecture Antonín Engel became vice president.

<sup>10</sup> AMP, dated. Prague, May 17, 1918.

was that visualization of human memory: one single construction containing every historical style (especially monasteries, churches, but also agricultural and restaurant buildings, memorials, bridges), pictures, statues, but also parks, gardens and the ground plan itself of the historical city. As memorials, however, musical, literary and theatric works<sup>11</sup> also appeared. Momentous and beautiful were the "ancient" and original, embedded in an original whole. Conservationists expected monuments to be protected against any sort of modernization.

The period between the wars influenced the attitude toward monuments in several directions. The wide democratization of society led to the conviction that the protection of monuments could be of concern to many levels of society. Preservationists were indeed convinced that training and education through lectures, outings, walks, tours, reading, exhibitions, etc. would lead to the cultivation of society. Preservation of "old Prague", the awakening of interest in monuments, and also preservationists' supervision during the reconstructions in the city<sup>12</sup> were counted on. For the first time, there were also discussions about so-called natural monuments. Scientific care of monuments even penetrated into the provinces. On the other hand, however, there was a group of monuments from the beginnings of the republic that were in immediate danger. These were Baroque monuments into which was projected the notion of supposed symbols of White Mountain. On November 3, 1918, the Virgin Mary column in Old Town Square was destroyed, but that was only the beginning... (Hojda & Pokorný 1997: 30). The fate of other Baroque monuments remained in question.

The First Republic, however, was also interesting because, for the first time to such an extent, the interests of urbanists and preservationists clashed. This conflict was understandably most evident in Prague. The so-called regulation of the emerging Greater Prague (from January 1, 1922) (Dějiny Prahy II: 294-299)<sup>13</sup> was performed under the catchword "deaustrification." The Czech

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<sup>11</sup> This concept very well illustrates, e.g., a cycle of lectures of the Club from January to March 1918. Václav Vojtíšek, at that time adjunct to the Archives of the City of Prague, gave a lecture on the Historical Development of Prague; K. Guth, adjunct of the Museum of the Czech Kingdom on the Development of Construction in the Middle Ages; architect A. Engl on the Development of the City Plan and Picture of Prague; V. V. Štech, adjunct of the Museum of the Czech Kingdom on Paintings and Sculptures in the Middle Ages and the New Age; Professor Z. Nejedlý on Musical Prague; dean of the Philosophical Faculty of Prague Jan Máchal on the Theater in Prague and K. Híkl on Prague in Literature.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. changed statute from 1920. AMP, No. 3995.

<sup>13</sup> It is not at all coincidental that one of the first lectures of the Club for Ancient Prague concerned

public was completely possessed by the thought that the provincialism of the capital of the Czech lands, provincialism that was also reflected in its architecture, was intentional. The hostile Austro-Hungarian Empire allegedly did not wish to change Prague into a metropolis. Thus, apparently only after the fall of the monarchy did the “mother of cities” make up for the historical delay. Large-scale plans of municipal mass transportation, plans for the regulation of the Vltava and new city gasworks were designed; a green belt around Prague was considered.<sup>14</sup> (Soukupová 1994: 48, 52-53). The center of the city filled with multistoried buildings (Dějiny Prahy II: 312). In the immediate area and outlying districts housing blocks sprang up in green quarters (Dějiny Prahy II: 314). Attempts at modernization were naturally carried *ad absurdum*. Contemporary journalists and so-called modern architects called existing Prague architecture inappropriate and unmodern. From their point of view, a new city ought to be well arranged, tailored to rapid relocation of the population and, at the same time, to quality relaxation. Meanwhile there was a widespread wave of migration. Therefore, on October 25, 1924, so-called modern architects, under the leadership of Jaromír Krejcar, later vice president of the Club, founded a competitive Club for New Prague. Its mission was to be the propagation of modern urban constructions, modern housing, and reconstruction of Prague into a modern European metropolis.<sup>15</sup> A third interesting group, the

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the preservation of monuments during the so-called regulation of Prague. A lecture was given by Zdeněk Wirth, section council of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, in spring 1920. AMP, No. 5193. In spring of the following year, Eduard Schwarzer lectured about the regulation of the Vltava in Prague. No. 45. In April 1932 Engineer Mölzer spoke about monument preservation and the regulation plan of Greater Prague. No. 11657. B. Hübschmann lectured about problems of communication in April 1935. No. 11025.

<sup>14</sup> In April 1925 B. Hübschmann gave a lecture at the Club for Ancient Prague on Greater Prague’s green belt. AMP, No. 9220.

<sup>15</sup> AMP, SK XXII/1269, statutes..., No. 20027. – The Club wanted to reach its goal with meetings, plus public protests, lectures, outings, tours, discussions with other corporations and individuals, letters of thanks to people who fostered the goals of the Club, publications of periodicals, other publications, information about their activities in print, collections, subscriptions, exhibitions, entertainment, social evenings, and support for the founding of similar clubs. Architect Oldřich Tyl became president of the corporation; Viktor Rejmánek (Reimann), a lawyer, became the secretary. In January 1925 there was a change in the statutes. According to them, the task of the club was “to study scientific questions about the construction of cities and villages, to propagate modern urbanism and its international principles, and to attempt to realize those principles gained through scientific study during the construction of Prague and other cities in the Czechoslovak Republic”. Only citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic could be members. No. 11962. Another change took place in March 1928 when Eng. Vladimír Štulc was elected president, the ex-president became vice president, and Eng. Arch. Alois Mikuškovice became the secretary. On December 17, 1936, the Club, which had not performed any activities, disbanded. No. 1269.

owners of historic houses for whom real estate was a source of income, was as a rule, profit-oriented. It was therefore not a coincidence that interwar care of monuments was linked to a request for tax relief for those who took good care of their property.<sup>16</sup>

During this period, the heightened vigilance of specialists was centered on historic sites of the Czech gymnastic movement, Sokol, Prague castle as the seat of the President where widespread reconstruction was carried out in the spirit of new state historicism (Dějiny Prahy II: 348-349) and archaeological research,<sup>17</sup> the completion of the construction of Saint Vitus cathedral, the grounds of Prague castle and Petřín.<sup>18</sup> Another type of interest, however, was aroused by monuments that were designated for demolition in the modern age. Such a fate awaited the Baroque summer villa, Portheimka, and the so-called Dienzenhofer pavilion in Smíchov (1928),<sup>19</sup> which was to make way for a new bridge, or some buildings in Prague's New Town including, perhaps, the area around the grounds of the Gothic monastery Na Františku (the so-called Agnes grounds). And finally the preservationists concentrated on a demand to preserve the Prague panorama, which, according to them, was threatened by the construction of high buildings – so-called skyscrapers.<sup>20</sup>

By solving these complicated tasks, the preservationists tactically strengthened their declared loyalty to the republic and to the head of state himself. During the opening of the general assembly in May 1919, the Club for Ancient Prague paid homage to President T. G. Masaryk. The club selected Ernst Denis, a French historian, to be an honorary member.<sup>21</sup> On March 5, 1930, it chose as an honorary member Masaryk himself. This took place on the occasion of his birthday. The vote was justified by the president's supposed pioneering interest in monuments.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Josef Hula, a lawyer, also lectured at the Club for Ancient Prague in April 1937 on this theme. AMP, No. 10675.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., in April 1928 Karel Guth lectured at the Club for Ancient Prague on excavations at Prague Castle. AMP.

<sup>18</sup> This theme was addressed in lectures at the Club for Ancient Prague. For example, in January 1924 Z. Wirth lectured on the development of the interior of Saint Vitus cathedral, and V. Birnbaum returned to the theme of the Tyrš house (formerly Michlovský palace). AMP, No. 6093, 113. In April 1924 Z. Wirth spoke about the Černín Palace. No. 7498.

<sup>19</sup> On October 30, 1928 the Club for Ancient Prague announced a public poll against the razing of the building. AMP, No. 19858.

<sup>20</sup> The problem of skyscrapers was dealt with in an April 1938 lecture at the Club for Ancient Prague by A. Kubiček. AMP, No. 12511.

<sup>21</sup> AMP, No. 5660.

<sup>22</sup> AMP, No. 7574, dated March 6, 1930.

The First Republic's plans ended at the time of the protectorate. World War II and the truly endangered existence of the Czech nation inclined the preservationists to greater interest in monuments in the Czech countryside, which itself became an unusual phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, it was actually the landscape that permitted the Czech nation to see its own, centuries-old succession of generations that cultivated the land. Identification with the Czech landscape was, therefore, a striking compensatory strategy. The Club for Ancient Prague itself<sup>24</sup> propagating tolerated Czechness was therefore not prohibited, in contrast to a number of other Czech corporations. In 1941 it even prepared an exhibition on the theme of Monument Preservation.<sup>25</sup>

The end of World War II, therefore, logically brought a new wave of monument preservation activity. Prague, in contrast to other Middle European cities, was almost completely spared from war damage. Thus its importance within Europe increased. It was considered the best preserved urban complex north of Venice and east of the Rhine.<sup>26</sup> In regard to postwar reconstruction, preservationists actually solved only partial problems: the question of completing the construction of the Old Town Hall, which was partially burned down; renewal of Old Town Square<sup>27</sup> and the completion of the construction of Podskalí under Emauzy which was bombarded in February 1945,<sup>28</sup> the renewal of the Gröbe villa, which, after the bombardment, became a target for thieves.<sup>29</sup> At the same time they could concentrate on their prewar tasks,<sup>30</sup> which were

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<sup>23</sup> This strategy was announced by the Club for Ancient Prague in May 1939. AMP, No. 15037.

<sup>24</sup> Presidents of the club were Z. Wirth; a city official (from June 1940), city official Rudolf Hlubinka (from June 1940), and J. Almer (from April 1941). First vice presidents were A. Kubiček, J. Almer (from June 1940) and Z. Wirth (from April 1941). Second vice presidents were Docent K. Guth, Z. Wirth (from June 1940) and R. Hlubinka (from April 1941). AMP, No. 25826, 21174, 12790, 32459.

<sup>25</sup> AMP, dated Prague, November 22, 1941.

<sup>26</sup> Emler, J. (1947) *Za starou Prahu*. XXII. 9, 66.

<sup>27</sup> March 24. 1946. Zdeněk Wirth gave a lecture at the Club about this problem. AMP, No. 4365. – Further cf. Secretarial report. *Za starou Prahu*, XXII. 9, 76.

<sup>28</sup> The Club supported the design of the architect Bohumil Hypšman (Hübschmann), who endeavored to create a dominant feature of Podskalí.

<sup>29</sup> (1948) Secretarial report. XXIII, 1-2, 8. – The villa began to be reconstructed, but, because there was an insufficiency of slate, it was replaced with asbestos-cement (1949). Secretarial report *Za starou Prahu*, XXIV, 1-3, 12.

<sup>30</sup> There was a certain continuity in the Club for Ancient Prague in its officials: in March 1946 Emanuel Poche, vice-director of the Museum of Decorative Arts became president; J. Almer became first vice president, J. Mannsbarth became second vice president and Eng. Adolf Janoušek became secretary. AMP, No. 6354, 27673, – From June 1950, the vice president was Eng. Ludvík Prisching, second vice president J. Mannsbarth and secretary Ministry Councilor Eng. Adolf Janoušek. AMP. – In March 1952 Docent L. Prisching was again voted president, E. Poche first vice president, J.

primarily esthetic changes of the Hradčany (Castle Quarter) panorama,<sup>31</sup> the Vyšehrad panorama,<sup>32</sup> the renewal of several public spaces (e.g. Bethlehem Square, Kampa, Prague parks) and the strengthening of its institutions.<sup>33</sup> Further, they tried to save Portheimka, to remove advertisements from Prague historical buildings (e.g. agitation posters of the Communist publishing house Svoboda on Slovanský dům – the Slavonic House – on the street called Na příkopě), to remove ruthless alterations of memorials during the protectorate, and to repair many valuable monuments, including house signs<sup>34</sup> and imperial graves in Olšanský cemetery.<sup>35</sup> The postwar city also met with greedy owners who let their objects decay so they could then tear them down<sup>36</sup> or with, e.g., architectonically inappropriate projects (construction of a student city in the New Town) and/or with spontaneous reconstructions.

Nevertheless, a relation to monuments was developing. Shortly after World War II, monuments were valued as documents of the mature architecture of the Czech "metropolis", as a magnet for tourists and, at the same time, as national property and a source of national pride.<sup>37</sup> One of the first postwar exhibitions, *Prague Castle in the Middle Ages*, presented the Castle as a symbol of Czech history.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, preservationists endeavored to have the Bethlehem Chapel<sup>39</sup> proclaimed as national property and to have it reconstructed. Places connected with the so-called National Resistance, mainly the crypt of the Saint Charles Borromeo church on Resslova Street, the hiding place of the assassins of Reinhard Heydrich, Deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia,<sup>40</sup> began to be considered national monuments. Also valued were Jewish monuments, of course mainly as a kind of publicity for the Czechoslovak Republic abroad (Soukupová 1005: 47). 1960 saw the opening of the Pinkas

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Mannsbarth second vice president and Josef Mayer, an official, was voted secretary. The organization counted circa 1000 members, mainly officials, professors, architects, artists and students. AMP, XXII, 204.

<sup>31</sup> Hubinka, A. (1947) *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 68-69.

<sup>32</sup> (1947) Regulation of Podolí below Vyšehrad. *Za starou Prahu, Bulletin for Monument Preservation*, XXII, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. memorandum of the Club presented to the central national committee on March 10, 1948. (1948). Memorandum. *Za starou Prahu*, XXIII, 3-4, 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> (1947). Secretarial report. *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 76-78.

<sup>35</sup> (1948). Secretarial report. *Za starou Prahu*, XXIII, 3-4, 6-9.

<sup>36</sup> Emler, J. (1947). *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 66.

<sup>37</sup> Emler, J. (1947). *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Prisching, L. (1947). *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 67.

<sup>39</sup> (1947) Secretarial report. *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 78.

<sup>40</sup> Mannsbarth, J. (1947). *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 10, 106.

synagogue as a memorial to the Czech victims of the Shoah (Soukupová 2005: 51). In 1968, at a time of worsening Israeli-Soviet relations, the synagogue was closed. Both the Maisel and the Old-New Synagogues were closed to the public (officially for reconstruction) (Soukupová 2005: 52). After the February Revolution (1948), preservationists tactically began to consider monuments a valuable source of education for the construction of a socialistic city. President Klement Gottwald positively appreciated their loyalty<sup>41</sup> and donated a financial gift to the Club for Ancient Prague (at that time having 378 members from Prague and 70 from other locations).<sup>42</sup>

Despite that gesture of Gottwald's, preservationists often had to confront the opinions that monument preservation was outdated romanticism, an expression of sentiment or bourgeois patriotism.<sup>43</sup> Not even their loyalty to the new regime prevented the 1939 demolition of the so-called Brauner house on National Street and Perštýn, a classicist building from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seat of the famous Union Café, gathering place of intellectuals and artists. The dům U kaštanu (Chestnut Tree House), originally an inn reconstructed in classical style, the site of the founding of the Czechoslavonic Social Democratic party (1878),<sup>44</sup> was also endangered. The future Museum of the Origins of the Czech Worker Movement was finally partly demolished to make way for roads. (Poche 1985: 383)

The old-new attempt to harmonize the original character of Prague with the demands of modern man on the move in the city was perceived as the greatest problem of postwar Prague conservation. The problem of urban mass transportation dragged on through all of the postwar history of expanding Prague, especially the so-called roads on the left bank of the Vltava.<sup>45</sup> Preservationists were especially upset by the noisy tramways in the narrow streets of the Old Town, disturbing the statics of the old buildings.<sup>46</sup> They also viewed with skepticism plans of an elaborate construction of underground trains which, accord-

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<sup>41</sup> In 1950, the Club for Ancient Prague chose the premier, Antonín Zápotocký, as honorary member. AMP, dated April 7, 1950.

<sup>42</sup> (1949). Secretarial report. *Za starou Prahu*, XXIV, 1-3, 15. (1948). *Za starou Prahu*, XXIII, 9-10, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Vaněček, J. (1951) Why do we protect architectural monuments? *Za starou Prahu*, XXVI, 1, 1.

<sup>44</sup> (1949) *Za starou Prahu*, XXIV, 1-3, 1.

<sup>45</sup> The history of urban mass transportation is, however, older. In 1897–1905 a network of tram tracks was already built in Prague (Fojtík & Liner & Prošek 1980:13). Re: postwar problems, cf., e.g., Mannsbarth, J. (1947). *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 70-71.

<sup>46</sup> The Club also protested against the restoration of the tramway lines in Celetná Street in the Old Town. Secretarial report. Cited above, page 8.



*The sculpture was recently restored. Archives of the City of Prague, SK XXII/204, The Club for Old Prague.*

ing to them, would carry the risk of static damage to buildings. (In 1948 the underground railway was even labeled “an Old Town grave.”) As early as 1948, the Club for Ancient Prague hosted a lecture by Eng. A. Janoušek on the ravages of vehicles, the straining of roadways with heavy cars and on the bad state of the roads, as well as on the destruction of Prague cobblestones by the tram tracks. He saw the solution in the construction of housing near factories and/or a reduction of the need for workers to use mass transportation.<sup>47</sup> Nor was there praise for trolley-buses, which were not appropriate because of the overhead wires. The esthetic character of the streets was unequivocally given precedence over the quality of the atmosphere; however, after the Second World War there was an insufficient number of buses<sup>48</sup> (buses had been recommended), and also generally of tires<sup>49,50</sup>. The first stage of the construction of the underground (called “metro” in Prague) was realized only in the years 1974 to 1985 (Čech & Fojtík & Prošek 1992: 8). Nor could the traffic problem in the historic city of Prague be solved. In 1973 the number of autos in Prague rose to more than 160,000 (Pošusta & Lukáčová & Háber & Prošek, 1975: 52). By December 31, 1990, 428,769 motor vehicles were registered (Čech & Fojtík & Prošek 1992: 5).

The preservationists’ work was naturally complicated by so-called all-society interest. For example, shortly after World War II, when women made up the essential work force, the Central National Committee of the Capital City of Prague decided on the construction of a nursery school in the historically valuable Seminary Garden. The Club for Ancient Prague issued a protest. Even more dangerous than the nursery school, however, was the government regulation of October 1945 concerning the construction of a highway joining the west and the east of the state. It was to have run in Prague along the Vltava.<sup>51</sup> Apart from this, there was an attempt of so-called roadway fanatics to open the narrow streets of Old Town to automobiles.<sup>52</sup> Along with these difficulties was

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<sup>47</sup> (1948). *Za starou Prahu*, XXIII, 6-8, 41-42, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. (1949) *Za starou Prahu*, XXIV, 1-3, 2. – Prague had regular bus transportation from 1925. The first buses appeared in its streets in 1908 (Pošusta & Lukáčová & Háber & Prošek, 1975: 29). Janoušek, A. (1948).

<sup>49</sup> After liberation, Prague had only 95 autobuses, many of which were incapable of operating, and 23 trolley-buses. Transportation was ensured mainly by tramways. (Pošusta & Lukáčová & Háber & Prošek, 1975: 46, 44).

<sup>50</sup> Janoušek, A. (1948). *Za starou Prahu*, XXIII, 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> Janoušek, A. (1947). Lesser Quarter river roads. *Za starou Prahu*, XXII, 9, 81-82.

<sup>52</sup> (1948). Secretarial report. *Za starou Prahu*, XXIII, 1-2, 7-9.



*Autumn cleaning in Olšanský Cemetery, 1986. Archives of the City of Prague, SK XXII/204, The Club for Old Prague.*

the unavailability of essential building materials for delicate repairs of historic buildings.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1950s the historical center of the city, which, as a result of the Shoah and the postwar expulsion of the German population, had already visibly begun to deteriorate. This – along with a change of ownership – caused the state<sup>54</sup> to begin taking care of it. Despite the declared interest of Communist leaders in monuments, the care was poor. In December 1950, Member of Parliament Gustav Bareš spoke at the constitutional conference of the city committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the People's House about Prague as the pride and the heart of the republic, a city with a deep memory. At the same time he outlined the large creative plans of the new regime. According to them, the

<sup>53</sup> Janoušek, A. (1950). *Za starou Prahu*, XXV, 4-5, 29.

<sup>54</sup> (1951) Who embraces the creation of monument preservation. *Za starou Prahu* XXVI. 3, 21.

Šverma bridge (completed in 1958), a new building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, a National Gallery, a large square for manifestations of the people, and a new university complex would be erected. Žizkov, Libeň, and Vysočany would be reconstructed; a new quarter in Pankrác would be built, etc. The pioneers were to get their own building; the progressive journalist Jan Neruda was to have his own monument. Large houses were to be built for workers to alleviate the postwar dearth of housing. In 1946 the university had begun to adapt the Karolinum to its needs. In 1951, the little summer palace of Hvězda (Star) was reconstructed to house the Museum of Alois Jirásek.<sup>55</sup> But despite clear instructions from the Party, there were various concepts of the future appearance of Socialistic Prague. Some Prague architects wished to remake Prague into a city of skyscrapers, while others pictured extensive quarters of private houses.<sup>56</sup>

A change in the relation to memorials came about only in the 60s. In the Club for Ancient Prague work began under a new board.<sup>57</sup> At the same time there was an increase in the number of members.<sup>58</sup> Czech preservationists began to be interested in the care of monuments in Western Europe. In Prague they concentrated on the renewal of the historic core of the city and the so-called Royal Road, on modifications of the area around the National Theater, and on the problem of an underground train system. A special committee in the Club worked on monuments of the Hussite era.

During the so-called normalization, there was a drop in the membership of the Club for Ancient Prague.<sup>59</sup> Under the new social conditions, preserva-

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<sup>55</sup> (1952) *Za starou Prahu* XXVII, 1-2, P. 75.

<sup>56</sup> Chamrád, V. (1951) *Tvorba*, 1. – Vice mayor Eng. Chamrád also wrote about a new sport center and new arterial roads. *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> In June 1959 Architect Alois Kubiček became president, Dr. Jarmila Brožová first vice president, Eng. Jaroslav Pudr second vice president, Josef Mayer first secretary, and Dr. Milada Matyášová second secretary. From December 1963 Architect Eng. Bohumír Kozák took over as president, A. Janoušek as first vice president (from October 1964 Eng. Jaroslav Pudr), Josef Mayer as second vice president (from March 1966 Univ. Prof. Karel Krejčí), Dr. Jiří Špét as first secretary (from October 1963 historian Vladimír Sakař) and Dr. Zdeněk Dušek as second secretary. From June 1969 a new function, third secretary, was taken over by Eng. Jiří Novák.

<sup>58</sup> On December 31, 1962, there were 1109 members (of whom 983 were from Prague), on Dec. 31, 1963, there were 1044 (932 from Prague), on Dec. 31, 1965, there were 1041 (of whom 106 were from outside of Prague), on Dec. 31, 1966, there were 1050 (of whom 112 were non-Praguers), on Dec. 31, 1967, there were 1059 (of whom 114 were non-Praguers), on Dec. 31, 1968, there were 935 (of whom 96 were non-Praguers).

<sup>59</sup> On December 31, 1969, the Club had 814 members; on Dec. 31, 1970, 823 members; on Dec. 31, 1971, 827 members; on Dec. 31, 1973, 823 members (of whom 76 non-Praguers), on Dec. 31, 1974,



*A periodical of the Club for Old Prague. Archives of the City of Prague, SK XXII/204, The Club for Old Prague.*

tionists concentrated on cultural work and on celebrating the anniversaries of the representatives of the Czech National Revival (e.g., in 1970, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the painter Josef Mánes; in 1976, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the historiographer František Palacký), and also of the heroes of the Prague Uprising (1945). In November 1971 their postwar dream was

838 members; on January 1, 1975, 871 members and, on December 31, 1975, 962 members. In February 1970 B. Kozák was elected president; K. Krejčí became first vice president; J. Novák became second vice president. The posts of secretaries were filled by Z. Dušek, Eng. Zdeněk Mertl and V. Sakař. In 1972 Professor of Architecture Emanuel Hruška and K. Krejčí (in 1978 O. Hora) were elected vice presidents; V. Sakař, Eng. František Petroušek and Dr. Oldřich Hora (in 1978 Z. Dušek and F. Petroušek) were elected secretaries. In January 1980 E. Hruška (in 1988 the lawyer Oldřich Hora) captured the presidency; the vice presidents were O. Hora and preservationist Josef Mayer (from 1988 Eng. Architect Karel Firbas a Jiří Novák); remaining as secretaries were Z. Dušek (from 1984 Eng. Zdeněk Mertl, from 1985 Eng. Jiří Novák, from 1988 electrotechnician Josef Hrubeš) and F. Petroušek.

realized: the historic core of Prague was proclaimed a state historical reservation. Despite this, during those very years, many monuments were destroyed. Enterprises and cooperatives championed unsuitable modifications of doors and gates that were replaced by standardized metal gates meant for factories and they favored shops in historically valuable buildings. Garages appeared on ground floors. Buildings with glass facades (the Máj department store constructed between 1973 and 1975 on the corner of National and Spálená Streets and the House of Children's Books, a steel skeleton from 1966–1969, constructed on the site of the Brauner house). A fashionable wave of interest in antiques led to numerous thefts of relics (from Olšanský cemetery bronze sculptures and metal lanterns disappeared and from the Charles Bridge gilded parts were stolen from statues at the beginning of the 80s). The thefts were also often accompanied by vandalism.

In the following era, also, the horizons of the city were changing. Tall buildings that spoiled the panorama of Prague rose in Pankrác. In 1965 the Club began its lost battle for the preservation of the Těšnov station, a neo-renaissance building from 1875, one of the most beautiful stations in Central Europe (in 1975 it gave way to a north-south arterial road) and architectonically one of the most valuable buildings of the rebuilt old Žižkov. At the same time it concentrated on the conservation of the old parts of Olšanský cemetery, the modification of the Baroque building complex of the Benedictine monastery of Saint Margaret in Břevnov, the completion of the construction around the National Theater, disregarding the character the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Můstek, the Ungelt and the reconstruction of the Gothic building U kamenného zvonu (At the Golden Bell) in Old Town Square. To the credit of the Club, the classicist Hansen House on Na příkopě was saved. The greatest work, however, was carried out by volunteers in the second cemetery of Olšanský (e.g. in 1977 they put in over 1000 hours of volunteer work).<sup>60</sup> It was apparently this activity, which stretched out over the 1980s, that secured the Club growing favor among average Praguers: in the autumn of 1979, it again had more than 1000 members; in 1986, 1189; in 1989, approximately 1300. At Olšany there were also memorial gatherings at the graves of leaders of the Czech National Revival (in 1978 the journalist Václav Matěj Kramerius, the wife of the composer František Škroup, a creator of hymns, the journalist Karel Havlíček Borovský; in 1979 the play-

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<sup>60</sup> In 1974–1982, volunteers worked 11,770 hours; in 1974–1985, they worked 19,349 (work of the members of the Club for Ancient Prague in Olšanský Cemetery II in 1986).

wright V. V. Klicpera; in 1980 and 1989 the wife of the composer Bedřich Smetana). The volunteers fixed up the grave of the philosopher Bernard Bolzano and the wife of the composer Zdeňek Fibich. The stimulating Czech society constructed its new identity on the tradition of the Czech National Revival. On the official level, interest grew in the monuments of the time of Charles IV (in 1978, the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death was celebrated). Promotion of the revival tradition was tolerated and even supported.

Volunteer activity emboldened the preservationists. In 1979 the Club for Ancient Prague issued a memorandum against the destruction of the iron construction of the Vinohradský Market (1902), in which was found a document about the growth of Vinohrady at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It further protested against a new television tower on Petřín hill<sup>61</sup> (in 1981 there was a resolution to transfer the construction to the area of Mahler park in Žižkov)<sup>62</sup> and against the callous reconstruction of the Čertovka stream. It was successful in the cases of the rescue of the Romanesque Mary Magdalene rotunda in Prague 6 – Přední Kopanina – and the Palace Hotel from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and of the reconstruction of a classicist chapel in Háje in Prague 4. Nor could they solve the transportation problem in Prague, which was transformed into a crossroads in the second half of the 1980s and lost its human scale. Closed shops and emptied apartments in the center of the city and/or the moving of Praguers to housing estates outside the center contributed to the loss of the intimacy of the historic town.<sup>63</sup>

Even before November 1989 the Club for Ancient Prague had openly criticized incompetent authorities. The greatest disagreement was over the television tower in Žižkov. It was criticized for its brutal domination of the Prague skyline and/or as a metallurgical and petrochemical combine that violates the private nature of Žižkov and Vinohrady. Not less vigorously did the preservationists come to the rescue of the Žižkov School on Comenius Square.<sup>64</sup> The genius loci of old Žižkov actually managed to save it at five minutes to twelve!

<sup>61</sup> The Club stimulated the revitalization of Petřín: the putting of the cable car into service, the repair of the restaurant Na nebozízku, the repair of the observatory, and the renovation of the park.

<sup>62</sup> Even though they were successful in a certain way, in 1983 the Club warned that the construction of a television tower would be useless after 2000 because of the progress of technology. AMP, Report on activities... in 1983.

<sup>63</sup> Cf., e.g., Announcement of the Club for Ancient Prague 1986 from February 13, 1987, pp. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Fuka, Z. (1987). From the activities of the technical committee of the Club for Ancient Prague. *Reports of the Club for Ancient Prague*, pp. 18 and 26.

## Conclusion

Everything began with the demolition of the unique monumental complex of the Prague ghetto. For the first time, to an unprecedented extent, there was a conflict between the demands of urban modernization, including all the negative consequences of this process, and its relation to the past. The importance attached to the various monuments was interconnected with tension and a changed way of thinking. The modern Czech no longer had to think back on the historical situation of his nation when looking at a monument. A monument could only authentically document a certain time and esthetically beautify the city. If, however, it came into conflict with the so-called majority interest, often even populism, it was in real danger. That is, monuments always stood on the border between the past and the passionate present. The original was perceived as beautiful by specialists. The administration of the city and its ordinary inhabitants, however, could give preference to other values: comfort, presumed usefulness, etc. The society of 1948–1989 as a whole was, in a controlled manner, cut off from its past. Therefore it is not surprising that it also lost the ability to identify with its monuments. However, it did not lose the ability to regulate itself during that period. Tolerated and even valued volunteer activity at Olšanský cemetery was certainly something more than meaningful free-time activity. Every grave of a “nation builder” that was tidied up could strengthen devalued national identity. Gradually society regained the awareness of certain values that it would be a pity to lose. This activity could undoubtedly be a certain form of protest against the ongoing removal of memories that could be reduced to only a certain part of history which was, besides, purposefully modified.

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