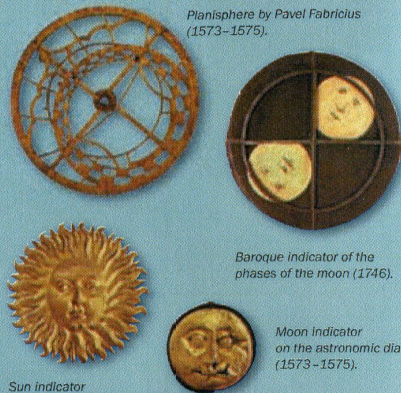


The celebrated Olomouc Astronomical Clock is a major component of the northern façade of the Town Hall. It is set into a lancet-arched bay recess which reaches the not substantial height of nearly fourteen metres. Its current face, a curiosity in the style of socialist realism, bears no witness to its long history, its scientific qualities, nor to the richness of the moving figures which once accompanied its music and its charms. Thankfully, archival sources and museum collections can tell the story of how the astronomical clock has fascinated people since the fifteenth century. Local legend connects its origin to the years 1419–1422.



Planisphere by Pavel Fabricius (1573–1575).

Baroque indicator of the phases of the moon (1746).

Sun indicator on the astronomical dial (1573–1575).

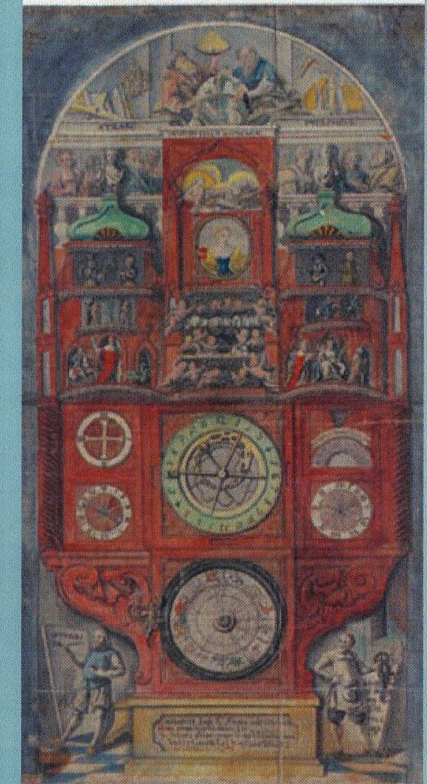
Moon Indicator on the astronomical dial (1573–1575).

Modern research on the process of the Olomouc Town Hall construction puts the origin of the astronomical clock alcove in conjunction with extension of the late-Gothic reconstruction which began in 1474, but the first certain record of its existence dates from 1519. The original clock (the appearance of its face is unknown) was “renewed and improved” during the first large-scale renovations in the years 1573–1575. Participating in this project were a man of letters (an astronomer – the eminent Vienna University professor and personal astrologer to Emperor Maximilian II, Pavel Fabricius) and a craftsman (a clockmaker – Olomouc clockmaker Hans Pohl). The astronomical clock at that time was a visual demonstration of the medieval scheme of the universe, housed in the form of a gothic winged shrine with sculptures and paintings. It contained figures which moved in time to musical and percussive mechanisms, and featured paintings on wooden panels. The universe was depicted as having three spheres: the lowermost being the calendar dial (earthly sphere), above this the astronomical/astrological dial (celestial sphere), and above that sculptures of cherubim with tiny hammers which beat upon a carillon (the heavenly sphere). The Thirty Years’ War affected the astronomical clock as it did the rest of the city. The job of its next rebuilding, in the years 1661–1662, was taken up by the mechanic Martin Kelbl, the clockmaker František Jahn, and Antonín Gerhard – a Jesuit, mathematician, and expert in things astronomical. At that time renovations concerned with enriching the paint-

ing elements of the clock concentrated on murals depicting the Seven Liberal Arts on the interior surfaces of the arch. The lower part of the clock still contained Fabricius’s indicating dials with four smaller indicators on the sides. Their dials indicated the quarters, hours, planets and red-letter days and “non-equal” hours. The day of the year was indicated by an angel on the lower calendar dial. In the central portion of the clock was the carillon, above which was a royal portrait and at the same level a reclining sculpture of the goddess Luna. The side “wings” of the clock were animated by a set of mechanical marionettes. On the left was St. Wenceslas, around whom St. George on horseback pursued a retreating dragon. Above them, while the hours were rung, a monk fingered a rosary and an anchorite pulled a bell-ropes. The right side portrayed the Madonna and Child below, circled and adored by the Three Magi. Above this group was a Renaissance cavalier performing the function of a bell-ringer, accompanied by a trumpeter. The last major renovation of the astronomical clock in its original form (based on its conviction that the sun and planets revolved around the Earth) occurred in the years 1746–1747. Again a clockmaker and organmaker came into play, as well as the most famous painter to work on the astronomical clock to this day, the Olomouc Baroque painter Jan Kryštof Handke. For his paintings for the interior faces of the alcove walls, Handke kept to the motif of the



Moving Renaissance bell-ringer figure (1573–1575).



“Depiction of the artistic clock of Olomouc Town Hall at its finest condition in the year 1747”. Watercolour by J. W. Fischer (1805).

Seven Liberal Arts, a choice deferring to the celebration of the natural sciences – Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music. Belonging to these are also Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic. Handke added a final allegory to these to make a round eight – Industry, the essential condition for success in any field. Below on the frontal portion Handke (with great self-confidence) painted a clockmaker and a painter as the two main figures, which can be considered accurate depictions of the two masters themselves.

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  - tours of the Town Hall including entrance into the tower
2. Information about cultural, social and sports events
  - advanced ticket sales for cultural events taking place in Olomouc
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4. Information about the activities of the city government and other institutions within the territory of the city
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In the year 1800 the clock stopped, for eleven years, and soon after provisional repairs it stopped again, and remained so until the year 1898. At that time, at the peak of the boom of historicist style, the astronomical clock was given a Romantic façade, for the first time seriously violating its artistic and technological originality. The firm of Eduard Korhage gave it a new planetarium mechanism, based on the solar-centric planetary system. The painting and sculptural decorations were replaced with the handiwork of architect Robert Dammer, painter Richard Bitterlich, and woodcarvers Bernhard Hoetger and Franz Celler.

The final negation of the astronomical clock's lasting historical worth as an artistic monument was the intervention by Karel Svoboda during the years 1947–1955. This was preceded by the intentional destruction of the clock at the end of the Second World War, which however was not substantially more damaged than the astronomical clock in Prague. It is as if, in the middle of the grim 1950s, the cold pastoral idylls of a Russian children's book shined down upon Olomouc's (at that time named) "Stalin Square", populated however by working, jubilant, athletic Haná locals. Although Svoboda had already in the time of his youth on nearby Svatý Kopeček been a master puppet carver, the job of making the moving figures was however given to his wife Marie. The job of making the glass mosaics with the subjects of the Ride of the Kings, Procession of Haná Beauties, the Worker, the Chemist,



Flight from Egypt (1898), Bernhard Hoetger.

St. George and the Dragon (1898), Bernhard Hoetger.



Inauguration Celebration of the Neo-Gothic style Astronomical Clock, 22 May 1898 (by Olomouc photographer H. Schleif).

and the Allegory of the Twelve Months was given by Svoboda to the Česká mozaika (Czech Mosaics) national enterprise in Nový Bor. The clock mechanism, the only part of the old clock which was to be left in place, was repaired by the clockmaker Konrad Schuster. Its new musical repertoire was prepared by Antonín Schindler and Josef Hama – today, thanks to them, the clock plays the Haná hymns "On the Hill beyond Náměstí," "The Long and Winding Road to Olomouc," and "The Willows Are in Bloom".

In 1990, after the removal of the Olomouc monuments to Joseph Stalin and Czech communist Klement Gottwald, came a question of legal precedent as to whether it would be possible to return the astronomical clock to a dignified appearance. Discussion was tabled at the very outset when the local Monuments Institution absolutely refused to consider the astronomical clock as a monument. Today the question is rather concerned with the consequence of the other fact: that Svoboda's work, in its own way, bears witness to a time which it would be advisable not to forget.

Text: Marek Perůtka  
 Photos: Olomouc Town Archives, Olomouc Natural History Museum, State District Archive in Olomouc

