The Expansion of Prague: The Astronomical Clock

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Prague, capital city of the Czech Republic, is bounded by the Vltava River. Nicknamed “The City of a Hundred Spires,” it’s known for its Old Town Square, the heart of its historic core, with colorful baroque buildings, Gothic churches and the medieval Astronomical Clock, which gives an animated hourly show. Completed in 1410, pedestrian Charles Bridge links the Old Town and Lesser Town. Prague boasts a number of interesting areas, including Rotunda and the Vyšehrad Castle. Foundations are laid to St. Vitus Cathedral in the 10th century, and, in 1741-1742, and conquest by troops of the Russian Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. The Prague Astronomical Clock, or the Prague Orloj, is mounted on the southern wall of Old Town Hall in the Old Town, capital city of the Czech Republic, is bisected by the Vltava River.

Prague comprises of four main areas which are scattered just south of the river bend. The eastern bank features Old Town. The Charles Bridge connects the eastern and western banks. The western bank features the medieval castle region. The residential and industrial areas of Prague occupy the old city centre and move up to some distance along the Vltava River.

Since 2001, the 57 municipal districts have been grouped into 22 numbered administrative districts (Czech: správní okrasy), for national government purposes.

Prague Astronomical Clock

The Prague astronomical clock [1] or Prague orloj is a medieval astronomical clock located in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. The clock was first installed in 1410, making it the third-oldest astronomical clock in the world and the oldest one still operating. The Orloj is mounted on the southern wall of Old Town Hall in the Old Town Square. The clock mechanism itself has three main components: the astronomical dial [2], representing the position of the Sun and Moon in the sky and displaying various astronomical details; “The Walk of the Apostles” [3], a clockwork hourly show of figures of the apostles and other moving sculptures— notably a figure of Death [4] (represented by a skeleton) striking the time; and a calendar dial with medals [5] representing the months. According to local legend, the city will suffer if the clock is neglected and its good operation is placed in jeopardy. A ghost, mounted on the clock, was supposed to nod in head in confirmation. According to the legend, the only hope was represented by a boy born on New Year’s night. The four figures flanking the clock are set in motion on the hour, and represent four things that were despised at the time of the clock’s making. From left to right in the photographs, the first is Vanity [6], represented by a figure admiring herself in a mirror. Next, the second is Lust [7] (holding a bag of gold represents greed or usury. Across the clock stands Death [8], a skeleton that strikes the time upon the hour. Finally there is a figure representing lust and earthly pleasures [9]. On the hour, the skeleton rings the bell and immediately all other figures shake their heads, side to side, signifying their uncommon “to go.” There is also a presentation of statues of the Apostles at the doorways above the clock, with all twelve presented every hour.

In the 18th century, Prague saw a series of dramatic events, especially in connection with the war of Austrian inheritance after the accession of Maria Theresa to the throne. For instance, occupation by the French, Bavarians and Saxons in the years 1741-1742 and conquest by troops of the Prussian King, Frederick the Second (1744).

In 1867 the number of inhabitants of the historical core of Prague exceeded 100,000, and the suburbs were also densely populated. The historical core was still surrounded by the city walls, the New Town segment of which was being partly arranged as a park with the moats filled in places. Due to the Industrial Revolution that was happening the city grew and became more complex with more factories and businesses. A port was built in Karlín and, in 1881, steam navigation started on the Vltava. To connect Prague with the provinces and the rest of Europe, a station for the state railway steam trains was built inside the city walls in Žižkov Street in the 1940s.

On February 12th, 1994, the city’s historical boroughs— Hradcany, Lesser Town, Old Town, and New Town — were united in one entity, Prague, the capital of the Czech kingdom (with ca. 760,000 inhabitants). Prague comprises of four main areas which are scattered just south of the river bend. The eastern bank features Old Town. The Charles Bridge connects the eastern and western banks. The western bank features the medieval castle region. The residential and industrial areas of Prague occupy the old city centre and move up to some distance along the Vltava River.

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