
Historical Residence of CU

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Carolinum is a national cultural monument, a symbol of Charles University. From the 14th century there was a residence of the oldest building of the Prague University- Charles' or the Great Hall of residence (Collegium Caroli) which was founded by Charles the IV for the twelve masters of the Prague university college.



A unique monument belongs to CU since 1383 when the son of the University founder, king Wenceslas IV, obtained for the college one of the most imposing Old Town palaces which had been built shortly before by a rich patrician, a royal mint master and a banker, Johln Rotlow (Rotlow). After reconfiguration Carolinum served since 1386 not only as a residence of the Prague professors who taught and lived here, but also as a ceremonial assembly point of the University and a residence of the rector, academic representatives and the offices.

The Renaissance adaptation has not markedly changed the appearance of Carolinum. It got its new face during the large Baroque reconstruction completed by the architect Frantisek Maxmilian Kanka in 1715-1718 who has notably carried out a detailed stylistic reconstruction of the college with its typical baroque portico in Zelezna Street.

The building of Carolinum was most significantly changed in this century when architect Jaroslav Fragner carried out a large reconstruction of the campus in 1945-1959 which was completed by creating a courtyard of honour and a ceremonial entrance with a predominant fountain decorated with three lions- a masterpiece of a sculptor S. Hanzlik (1968). Jaroslav Fragner has respectfully preserved the medieval parts of the building, including the details covered by Kanka, and has created a monumental architectural complex. Architect Tomas Santavy has carried out the recent reconstruction in 1996-1997, adhering to Fragner's concept. The functional aspect is predominant; the building has been laid out as a ceremonial residence of the university life. A new lecture hall (the so-called Imperial Hall) has been built on the first floor, and conference halls in the basement, two new elevators have been installed, and a reconstruction of the technical background has been carried out, the Great Auditorium has been modernized so that Carolinum can serve Charles University in the present-day.



The newly-established Imperial Hall on the first floor has been given the name because of the three portraits of empress Marie Teresie and her sons Joseph II and Leopold II. The portraits were painted in 1799 by the notable artist Barbara Kafftova-Steinerova. She is also the authoress of the three portraits of the professors of Prague faculty of medicine on the side wall of the hall. In the adjacent corridor there is a marble crucifix from 1870 which is a masterpiece of the sculptor Emanuel Max.

The fundamental ground plan disposal of the building is based on the Romanesque-Gothic premises of the original palace, which were once countersunk first floors of the thirteen-century houses (now with a permanent exposition on the university's history), above which Rotlow Palace was built in the 1360s. A Gothic reconstruction at the end of the 14 century, suggesting monastery premises in many aspects (cross corridor with a cloister), adapted the building for university purposes. The medieval college rooms were intended not only for classes but also for accommodation and the university administration headquarters. On the first floor there were the

offices of the rector, of the university notary, the university treasury (fiscus), and a carcer for the members of the academic community. Other rooms were specifically used for classes.



The Great Auditorium is the central room of Carolinum, on the second ceremonial assembly point of the academic community, a hall where graduation ceremonies take place. The architect Fragner designed the hall. In the head of the hall there is a Gobelin tapestry with motifs of the old University (Charles IV on his knees handing the university foundation to Wenceslas, the patron of Bohemia), with passages of Charles' foundation and with symbols of university faculties. The tapestry has been designed by M. Teinitzerova and made in M. Teinitzerova's atelier.

The statue of the university founder Charles IV by a sculptor K.Pokorny (1950) dominates the hall. Above the front part of the auditorium there are the crests of the royal countries of the Kingdom Bohemia. A Gothic oriel of the Great Auditorium and the original university chapel belong to the most charming architectural parts of the building. In front of the oriel there is the marble tomb of professor Mathias Kollin of Choterina, a humanistic professor of classical languages in the half of the sixteenth century. A Gothic side portal, the so-called Hus' Gate, and an early Baroque main entrance portal from the beginning of the 17 century belong to the oldest architectural links of the hall. A Baroque organ situated above the Allegories of the Muses by V.Sychra (1949) comes from a Jesuit monastery in Chomutov and has been placed here during the postwar reconstruction of the hall.

Connecting space between the Great and Small Auditoriums serve as a cloakroom for academic dignitaries and as an assembly point for students and graduates. In the vestibule of the Great and Small Auditoriums there are portraits of the Prague archbishops who held the office of university chancellor (the portrait of cardinal Arnost Adalbert Harrach, a replica of the 17 century is the oldest one). A shield of stone (a red lion) of the Rotlews who were the original owners of the palace is situated above the portraits. The vestibule ceiling is covered with wooden boards with painted symbols of the sciences, a masterpiece of R.Wiesner (1948). Above the staircase in front of the Great Auditorium entrance there is a plaque to the memory of the victims of the totalitarian regimes and of the World War Two. At the foot of the staircase on the first floor there is a bust of LLD Milada Horakova, the CU graduate, who was executed by the communist totalitarian regime on 17 June 1950.

A Baroque oil painting of the patrons of medicine, St. Cosmas and Damian, at the head of the hall, and portraits of Prague medicine professors remind of the original purpose of the Small Auditorium which served as a medicine faculty lecture hall. The Small Auditorium is decorated with paintings of the Baroque painters J.Heintsch, P.Brandl, J.Molitor and others. The early-eighteen-century portraits of rectors Jan F.Low of Erlsfeld and Nicolas Franchimont are the oldest ones. A Small Auditorium played an important role in university life because the elections of university rectors took place here.

The staircase of the Small Auditorium leads to the third floor, to the lecture hall and conference halls, where a part of Carolinum picture gallery is situated- especially portraits of Hapsburg rulers reminding of foundation rights of the state towards the university, and portraits of the Prague archbishops as university chancellors.

A central room- the representation rooms of Charles University rector on the second floor- is decorated with Baroque paintings of half

17 century which originally were a part of the Great Auditorium decoration. These paintings reminding of the Prague theology patrons (St. John at Pathmos), philosophy patrons (St. Catherine), and medicine patrons (St. Cosmas and Damian) are a masterpiece of an outstanding Prague painter Charles Skreta and his atelier. An adjacent room contains portraits of rectors and eminent Prague university professors of the 19-20 century (from the left: K.Englis, B.Bydzovsky, K.Maly, V.V.Tomek, and R.Palous) whose authors are the excellent portraitists H.Boettinger, V.Stretti, and others. The Patriotic Hall (by the architect Kanka) was originally a university library, but since the end of the 18 century it was the head of the Czech Scholarly Association whose name the hall then had. In this hall there are busts of eminent personalities of Czech Science and a portrait of T.G.Masaryk by the painter O.Peters (1932) which was formerly at the head of the Great Auditorium.