

The Tower of Jihlava: *QUA LUNA NESCIS*



The northern tower of the Saint James the Elder Church in Iglau

Friends of clocks and bells, welcome to the interesting and picturesque region midway between Prague and Brno. Admirable clocks to see beautify towns of Pelhřimov and Havlíčkův Brod. They are conveniently located near each other. Other landmark clocks in the region exist, but here, let us concentrate on Jihlava. Especially if you travel with children, the town will please you for its highly rated ZOO. There, relaxing at the *Igel* river meander, one can realize that the heart of Vysočina (Highland) is placed strategically above an ancient river crossing. As you may know, Jihlava (Iglau) has captivating history and not only as the prosperous silver mining town next to slightly younger Kuttenberg.

The Emperor Sigismund (Zikmund in Czech), as the fourth and at the same time the last Bohemian King of the House of Luxembourg, triumphed over the Calixtines (Hussites: *conservative Utraquists and radical Taborites*) by the Compactata of Basle promulgated at the assembly in Iglau in 1436. The demonstration of the will by the Emperor marked the end of the Bohemian Holy Wars (1420 – 1437). For the predominantly anti-Hussite Catholic Iglau, the event promised prosperity in line with the regained importance.

The historical town square is dominated by the northern tower at **the Saint James the Elder Church**. Commendably, the tower has been accessible for the public in the year 1991, on the occasion of 555 years anniversary of the mentioned assembly.

It is truly intriguing place. However, its current condition is foul. The meager fee is in exchange for the terrific view of course, but one cannot ignore a mezzanine filled with debris, a clock in shelter covered by avian excrements, a clock room behind a crude plank boarding, voided flat of a tower keeper on the top, and more.



Debris and the stone weights on the mezzanine (2008)

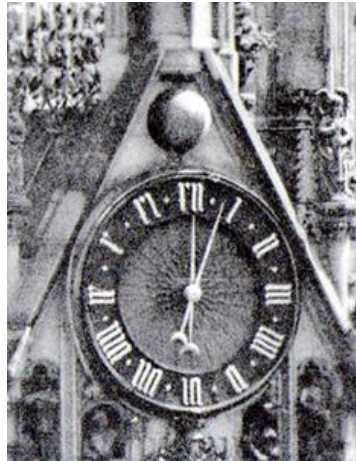


The King Zikmund rendered in Galery of Czech postcards VI. by Karel Rélink in 1929

The two Gothic towers of the church were built in the 14th century. The northern one was extended as the watch post. Frontal vestment of the building was decorated with graffiti and inscription. Chisel roofs surmounted the towers before a late reconstruction.



Rouen, (Seine-Inférieure) in 1930s'



Frauenkirche, Nürnberg in 1940s'?



*Uherský Brod
in 2008*

Till the times of Gustav Mahler's youth (1860s'), the tower had borne a functional feature of a half sunken moon ball. Why this kind of attribute? Firstly, it is a very old feature in use on the cathedral and public astronomical clocks like in Strasbourg and Rouen. Certainly, the other astronomical clocks indicated phasing of the moon like in Padova, Bologna, Kuttentberg, Lübeck, Frankfurt, Olomouc, Stralsund, Prague, etc, but here, we are concerned with the deep-set kind of the Lunar indicator occurring in Nürnberg, Linz, Mantua, Rouen or Dubrovnik. The nearest one to Jihlava is in Uherský Brod in Moravia, implemented in 1958. The currently defunct ball in Jihlava has remnants of a motion work gearing visible on the inside of the tower. Three or so stone weights chucked on the mezzanine bear witness of a defunct tower clock. That clock probably moved a 24-hour dial with a single hand.



The defunct phasing moon of Iglau

PALLIDA LUNA PLUIT, RUBICUNDA FLAT, ALBA SERENAT. The pale Moon rains, red winds, white serenes. The medieval saying substantiated weather forecast. But what if the Moon remained unseen for several days due to the bad weather? Who needed to know where and at phase the Moon was?

The natural cycle of the lunar phases determined the time for the man past the Middle Ages. Since the antiquity, practical life demanded of the man some knowledge of the basic celestial phenomena, for direction finding and the ritual cycle of the year. The Moon dictated the fundamental religious feast and served to mark other events. A phasing moon indicator on public buildings enabled to organize worshippers about the movable, the Moon dependent Easter. In

earnest, it bolstered rule, being beneficial to the Church and authorities. Later purpose might have been as the attractive and unique display.

Monks like Augustines prayed at midnight. Some of them had a clock to look at. Even if not astronomical, a clock enabled to time position of the Moon accurately enough. In maritime countries, indication of the lunar phases made convenient if not important timing of tides. Also the astronomical clock of Prague has sported the phasing moon, from the very beginning posing as the wonder, day and night. The moon of the horologe indicated when 'the lantern' shone in the night. However, mandatory lit lamps had to be carried, when walking the streets of the Old Town of Prague during the Renaissance as the measure against the high crime.



A peculiar device of the phasing Moon of the Astronomical Clock of Prague



Turret clock of Iglau (2008)

In point of fact, night hours did not mean a lot for the public after dark. However, for pernoctalian like watchmen, burgesses, and astronomers such as Tycho Brahe, the life went on after dark. Galileo Galilei mentioned *Hora prima noctis*, the night hour, in *Sidereus Nuncius*. Next to the astronomers, the moon of the horologe revealed its position to astrologers, among them being, sometimes, the leading Church authority. Besides, the Moon reminded the time of paying dues. So, a horologe with the phasing Moon indicator had multiple impact.

A contemporary turret size clock enclosed in a glass cabinet on the dial floor moves the four-12-dial. It strikes quarter and hour cymbal bells of considerable size hanging higher on the tower gallery. Standing under them, when ringing, is earsplitting experience comparable to ringing a sizable bell. I estimate the clock was made in mid-1950s', considering the blue paint and construction of the clock as seen, including the check (chapter) dial. The cutout

cabinet shelter and a beam inscription suggest that age as well.

The gallery is 40 meters (162 ft) above the ground and at the sea level of 556 meters (2260 ft). It was the place of work for a tower keeper, watchman, and troubadour in one. He is mentioned in the town's records for the first time in 1561. At the time, he used to have a staff of two sidesmen. Emphasis on his duties changed. A serious duty comprised of watching for fires and enemies. Lighter duty included performing fanfares welcoming distinct guest and blowing hourly trumpet calls. Newly, this feature is employed at the Old Town Hall Tower in Prague. A number of towns remember a troubadour and a watchman. Well known is



Two cymbalons of Iglau

the hourly trumpet call by a troubadour Heynal Zbysek in Kraków, Poland, who lives in the tower. Till recently, a watchman, tower keeper and legendary bellman Mr. Zdelovec sang an Old Bohemian nightly song and sounded cornet from the leaning Tower in Domažlice.

Among daily duties performed by the tower keeper of Iglau was winding a going train of the clock. Provided the clock was striking, he had a lot of additional winding to do. The going train likely propelled the Moon feature with the hour dial, but a separately wound train cannot be ruled out.



*A different story:
The Townhall of
Německý Brod
(Havlíčkův Brod) after
1902.*

In the old times, watchmen, troubadours and bell-ringers recruited from the poor. In exchange for the duty, they received free bed, meals, clothing and other benefits. Eventually, a reliable watchman had to be paid for. A record from March 24, 1624, reveals that the tower keeper Adam Lang asked for salary increase. In Jihlava, the duty was officially ended in 1924. However, the tower keepers' lasted out on the premise till 1949. Consistently, the last tower keepers living in the towers and winding clocks in Bohemia occurred in the Black Tower in České Budějovice (till 1966), Mr. Sámek in Český Krumlov, Mr. Kacigr in Jindřichův Hradec, Mr. Kubík in Klatovy, Mr. Koblasa in Kardašova Řečice, and Mr. Grodl in Havlíčkův Brod.

Havlíčkův Brod (Deutsch Brod; *German Ford*) in the region mentioned earlier, used to be the rival town to Jihlava. According to a legend, Iglaus' allied with neighboring towns and besieged Brod in 1472. Supposedly, they killed all (Czechs) Hussites and gained control over the prospering town owned by Mikuláš of Lipé from 1452.

The current clock automaton, the skeleton of Hnát (a Limb bone) with a scythe possibly dates to a reconstruction of the Townhall after a great fire in 1834. A postcard dated 1902 reads that the dial of the clock was temporarily without hands and that the skeleton clapped a jawbone and rang a bell every hour. It reminds us a betrayal by a bribed watchman, who did not sound alarm. Its inscription **QUA HORA NESCSIS** (Which hour you don't know?) can be suited to Jihlava as: **QUA LUNA NESCSIS**, Which Moon you don't know?

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