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České země uprostřed Evropy na mapách a plánech Národního archivu / The Czech Lands in the Centre of Europe on Maps and Plans of the National Archives

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The Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union came to an end on 31st December 2022. Included in the programme there had been a range of key issues to be dealt with. Unfortunately, some interesting project aimed at culture somehow faded out and were only appreciated by participants in sessions of relevant European panels. One of such events was an exhibition making available the jewels of cartographic heritage deposited in the Collection of Maps and Plans, Prague 1568–1954 (1999) deposited in the National Archives in Prague. Specifically, that was the exhibition on historical manuscript maps dating from the 17th to the early 19th century.

Most of them originate from activities of Bohemian and Moravian provincial and court institutions and their institutional predecessors. Part of the collection includes valuable map prints, atlases and wall maps dating from the 16th to 20th centuries. Additionally, the exhibition shows archival material from more archival collections of the National Archives (e.g. the Collection of Mining Maps and

Plans; the Presidium of the Bohemian Gubernium; the Directorate of Imperial Private and Family Estates; the Ancient Manipulation; the Collection of Graphics, Drawings and Paintings, 16th–20th centuries), as well as archival fonds and collections of the state regional archives in Bohemia and Moravia, and the Saxony State Archives in Dresden. There are also three-dimensional objects on loan from other memory institutions that deserve mentioning.

The exhibition was held in the grounds of archives in Prague's Chodovec. The opening took place on 13th September 2022. As usual for both archivists, the exhibition was a travelling one, and was hosted, e.g. by the Czernin Palace where its opening took place on 26th October. The reviewed publication is an exhibition critical catalogue in Czech and English versions. The catalogue is also available in an electronic form on the website of the National Archives.¹

¹ <https://vystava22.nacr.cz/> – (2022–12–23).

The exhibition project has two basic spheres. One of them is devoted to the themes illustrating relations that either unite and or separate the Czech lands from Europe. In the view of the fact that the exhibition frame making available cartographic works dating from the 17th to the early 19th century, it is only relations between the Czech lands and other states and territories of the Central European Habsburg Monarchy that are documented. In the catalogue, the reader will find works divided into thematic sections: border lines, forests, mineral wealth and mining industry, rivers and hydraulic structures.

Perhaps, the most attractive sub-chapters of this part are transport containing maps of imperial roads, customs maps and plans of the city and the port of Trieste; architecture and urbanism showing plans of buildings from the national and foreign architects' workshops, e.g. Mathey, Orsi, Lurago, Nobile, Le Nôtre etc. Among the most interesting is a set devoted to the castle complex in Ostrov nad Ohří with gardens, where elements of Mannerism and early Baroque are wedded to each other; the castle Troja in Prague; or ecclesiastical architecture in the unique building style of the so-called Baroque Gothic (Kladruby, Žďár nad Sázavou, etc.).

Another sphere of the exhibition presents the things that the Czech lands have been giving to Europe and how during their development. Since these works are included in this collection, only a small sample has been selected. Specifically, it is material devoted to the national stud farm in Kladruby nad Labem famous for breeding the Czech breed of Old Kladruby carthorses, maps and plans relating to Czech spas and the Czech spa business, and evidence of a unique style, Czech Baroque Gothic demonstrated in plans by brilliant architect Jan Blažej Santini-Aichl.

The exhibition feature and space had significantly limited the amount of the presented archival records, therefore, it was only a fraction of relevant ones that was made available. The catalogue contains 66 plans and 9 photographs, which is a larger quantity of cartographic documents than the number shown at the exhibition. Considering the extent of the collection having 2,248 maps (4,121 map sheets) according to the register of the National Archival Heritage, yet it is just a minor part of the archival collection. We can only hope that other parts of the collection will be made available in the context of differently conceived exhibitions and publications.

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