



Engraving by Johann Berka (1759–1838) of the newly-built Philosophical Library at Strahov Monastery in Prague

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1734 – 1800

Historische Beschreibung der vom Anton Maulbertsch... am Bibliothekgewölbe der königlichen Prämonstratenserordens-Kanonie, am Berge Sion zu Prag, im Jahre 1794, in einem zusammenhängenden Platfond in Fresko dargestellten Kalkmahlerey.

Prague, Barbara Elsenwanger for Anton Petzold, 1797

QUARTO (253 × 205 mm), (21)ff. signed (A)–E⁴ F1 and paginated (16) 1–26 with a view of the library signed *Jo. Berka del et sc. Pragae* imposed on A2 recto (verso blank), plus engraved dedication to the Holy Roman emperor Francis II subscribed by the author (signed by the engraver Johann Berka and inserted after folio B4; verso blank).

PROVENANCE Hartung & Hartung, Auktion 101, Munich, 16 May 2001, lot 1447

Lower margin of title-page renewed using old paper, otherwise a fine copy.

BINDING contemporary calf, gilt border on covers, back decorated in gilt.

A DESCRIPTION of the painted decoration of the so-called ‘philosophy library’ of Strahovský Klášter, the Premonstratensian monastery on the Petřín hill in Prague, written by its Abbot (1776–1800), who had contracted the work in 1793.

The ‘philosophy library’ had been built 1782–1785 (according to designs by the architect Jan Ignác Palliardi) to accommodate the books of the Premonstratensian monastery at Znojmo (near Louka, in Southern Moravia), dissolved by edict of Joseph II in 1784.¹ It adjoined the ‘theology library’, built 1671–1672, and also deceptively named, as both libraries housed books on a very wide range of subjects.²

The principal engraving in our book is a view of the hall (32m long, 10m wide, 14m high) showing its imposing walnut bookcases (made by Jan Lahofer of Tasovice and transferred from Znojmo to Prague in 1792, together with their valuable contents)

¹ Edgar Lehmann, *Die Bibliotheksräume der deutschen Klöster in der Zeit des Barock* (Berlin 1996), pp.313–314, 343, 365–367, 499–500.

² Pravoslav Kneidl, ‘Die Strahover Bibliothek’ in *Librarium* 13 (May 1970), pp.25–38.

and a portion of the ceiling, painted in 1794 by Franz Anton Maulbertsch assisted by Martin Michl. An 'Allegory on the Revelation of Divine Wisdom', it is the painter's last important project (he died in Vienna, 8 August 1796).³ Maulbertsch was the author of a very large number of fresco paintings (including the ceiling of the library at Znojmo, painted in 1778) and is regarded as one of the major artistic personalities active in Central Europe of his generation. This work in consequence is closely studied by historians of central European art.⁴

An edition in Latin, entitled *Historico-Philosophica descriptio picturae novae bibliothecae Fornici inductae in Canonia Strahoviensi*, was also published by Petzold in 1797.

This German version is a scarce book. Eight copies are known to the writer (a copy once in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, is reported lost)

- Brno, Moravská zemská knihovna Brno, ST2-0096.98 • Cambridge, University Library⁵
- Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Bibl. publ. 293⁶
- Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 7 H L L 9, 7406⁷
- Kremsmünster, Stift Kremsmünster, 4°Ga 147
- London, British Library, 11902.dd.10
- Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, 161 C 4
- Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, 103994 - B

³ Klara Garas, *Franz Anton Maulbertsch 1724–1796* (Budapest 1960), p.230 no. 383 and Abb. 301–309; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister & City: the art and culture of Central Europe 1450–1800* (London 1995), p.453; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Painterly Enlightenment: the art of Franz Anton Maulbertsch, 1724–1796* (Chapel Hill 2005), pp.45, 69–70.

⁴ Karl Möseneder, *Franz Anton Maulbertsch: Aufklärung in der barocken Deckenmalerei* (Vienna 1993), provides a facsimile reproduction (pp.207–227; see discussion pp.120–122); excerpts were published by Garas, *op. cit.*, pp.278–281 (Dokument CLIII), and Franz Martin Haberditzl, *Franz Anton Maulbertsch* (Vienna 1977), pp.510–526. For additional images, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CPQMMglj7l>.

⁵ From the library of Count Viczay of Hdervry, with his engraved armorial library stamp (Bibliothecae Hedervarianae); see Cambridge University Library, 'Recent Acquisitions Archive', April–June 2009 (<http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/rarebooks/20090406.html>).

⁶ Digitised for VD18 11428074 (<http://vd18-protos.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/de-slub-vd18/content/titleinfo/11506312>).

⁷ *Slavica Göttingensia: ältere Slavica in der Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen*, edited by Reinhard Lauer (Wiesbaden 1995), 1, p.564 no. 2415.

