

Holy Trinity Column in Olomouc - Monument included on UNESCO's World Heritage List

The city of Olomouc is a town in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. With a population of more than one hundred thousand inhabitants it ranks as one of the five largest cities in the Czech Republic and is considered as an important industrial, commercial, administrative, but also cultural and historic centre of the region known as Central Moravia.

Its history goes back to pre-historic times. Results of archaeological excavations show that there has been a continuous settlement of Slavonic tribes since the 5th century A.D. The first writings date back to the 11th century, and a bishopric was founded here in 1063. Until the 30 years war Olomouc was the capital of Moravia.

All periods of history have left behind traces that are today admired and appreciated as part of the cultural heritage. The historical core of Olomouc is considered to be the second largest and second most beautiful centre in the Czech Republic, after Prague. One of its monuments, the Holy Trinity Column, has recently achieved international recognition. In 2000 it was added to the World Heritage List drawn up by UNESCO.

The Holy Trinity Column was erected between 1716 - 1754. In 1715 a burgher of Olomouc, the stonemason Wenzel Rener, suggested a proposal to the City Council - this was to erect a column celebrating The Holy Trinity, which would be so high and so

beautiful that it would not have a counterpart in any other city. It was Rener who designed the concept of the column, who had it built in his workshop until his death in 1733 and who funded most of the construction with his own, private money.

The Holy Trinity Column is 35 metres high and richly decorated. Only some of the more than fifty sculptures and reliefs can be mentioned in this short article. There are 18 sculptures of saints, larger than life-size, the work of the sculptor Andreas Zahner, on three storeys of the column. From the three-storey base a tall column emerges, bearing a group of sculptures showing the Assumption: two angels supporting Our Lady. These lead the eye to the summit group of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit, - guarded by the Archangel



Michael with a flaming sword. The whole column is made of sandstone, and the two groups - the Assumption and the Holy Trinity are worked in gilded copper.

Many Marian, Trinity or Plague columns were erected, especially in Central Europe, in the 17th and 18th centuries. The one at Olomouc is distinguished from all the others. Not only does its size and the abundance of sculptural decoration set it apart, but also worth noting are the materials used - a combination of stone and gilded copper. Its size is so great that it was possible to place a small chapel into the body of the column. From a town-planning point of view it should be noted that the monument, which is positioned in the central square of the town, crowns the Baroque reconstruction of the town and dominates the city centre.

The inclusion of the Column on the World Heritage List was celebrated with a spectacular ceremony that took place in Olomouc on Friday, August 31st, on the eve of the National Launching of European Heritage Day. Another reason why this particular date was chosen was that the renovation of the column that had taken more than two years was finished by the end of August 2001.

During the ceremony the Mayor of Olomouc, Mr. Martin Tesarik, was presented with the Decree about the inscription on to the list. Together, he and the Minister of Culture for the Czech Republic, Mr. Pavel Dostal, unveiled the memorial plaque. Then the Archbishop of Olomouc, Jan Graubner, gave a blessing to the Trinity chapel inside the column. During the second part of the evening the Moravian Phiharmonic orchestra performed the cantata *Carmina Burana* by Karl Orff.

This open-air performance was accompanied by an impressive light show and crowned by a firework display. The programme lasted three hours and was admired by more than ten thousand visitors, who crowded into the square in Olomouc to witness the event with which the cultural heritage of the city of Olomouc entered the 21st century.

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