

Horní náměstí (Upper Square) – The Town Hall
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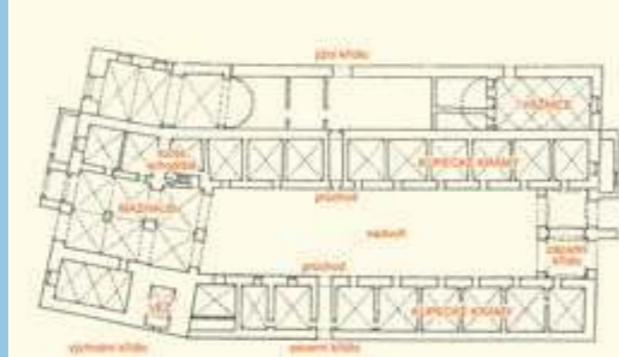
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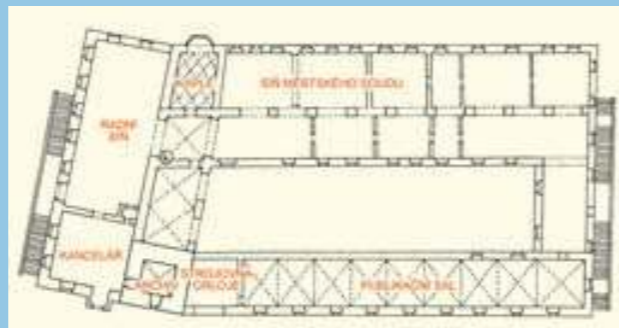
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The Olomouc Town Hall at the end of the 16th century. Plan of the ground floor.



The Olomouc Town Hall at the end of the 16th century. Ground plan of the first floor.

a slow decline from its former glory, mainly when in the year 1849, the Town Hall became home to the newly established district court for the next fifty years. Prior to the expiration of this rental agreement, the town council succeeded in sensitively restoring the St. Jerome Chapel. On the negative side, however, the later established society for the restoration of the astronomical clock carried out a complete Neo-Gothic 'renovation' which from the year 1898 irreversibly damaged it not only

Fresco of a scene from the Last Judgement. Part of the wall painting decoration of the Town Hall chapel from the years 1488–1491, commissioned by the Olomouc canon Zikmund Kalivoda from Švábenice.



artistically, but also destroyed the historical and technical value of the unique work. The following year 1899 saw the beginning of considerations as to overall restoration of the building, which counted on opulent reconstruction in the Romantic historical spirit. These adaptations, completed in the year 1904, immediately became the target of justified criticism by building experts. The 20th century only contributed small details to the construction history of the Olomouc Town Hall, one of these being the infamous reconstruction of the astronomical clock in the spirit of Socialist realism by Karel Svolinský. The 1990s finally brought about gradual reconstruction to the roofs and façades, a newly accessible ground floor eastern wing thanks to the opening of the gallery and café/restaurant Caesar, and finally the commendable restoration of the oriel window of the Town Hall chapel. The Town Hall stepped into the new millennium with the praiseworthy reconstruction of the cobblestones around the Upper Square and construction of the nearby Arion Fountain, the work of Olomouc native Ivan Theimer.

Text and drawings: Marek Perůtka
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 archives of the City of Olomouc

The Renaissance portal of the council chamber from the period ca. 1530. According to the secondary year on the shield in the middle of the frieze it was dismantled and newly assembled in the second half of the 16th century.



The Town Hall





Late Gothic helical vaulted ceiling of the presbytery in the Town Hall chapel.

The building of the Olomouc Town Hall which presides over the Upper Square represents an over six hundred year-old symbol of the economic and political importance of this former royal capital town of Moravia. At the present time it is a rare structural monument of Olomouc secular architecture and along with the Archbishop's Palace and the six ancient churches, it is also the only monument with a public or institutional function which still serves its original purpose. Today it is the seat of the elected city government and its administrative offices. Olomouc was granted a privilege to construct the Town Hall along with a mercantile building by the Moravian Margrave Jost Luxemburg in the year 1378. This was originally a wooden structure and was ready for use in the period around the years 1410 – 1411, but was soon after destroyed in a fire about the year 1417. New construction was begun at the beginning of the 1420s, this time, however, using quarried stone and with a ground plan which has been preserved up until the present day. This extensive building with three wings surrounding a rectangular courtyard served both basic functions – a Town Hall and a market – which the Luxemburg privilege had granted. The ground floor of the luxurious eastern wing was dominated by a two-aisled entrance hall with vaulted ceilings (the 'mazhaus') adjoining which in the interior of the structure was a spiral staircase leading to the next floor. From these stairs one could enter the town council chamber and the town offices connected to the local archives on the floor of the Town Hall tower. The ground floor of the northern and southern wings of the structure served as shops for Olomouc merchants. It was consequently divided into sales shops and individually-accessible display stalls. Located in approximately the eastern third of both wings were passageways connecting the courtyard with the area in front of the Town Hall. This construction stage came to an end in the year 1443 with the final roofing of the Town Hall tower.



The Town Hall experienced a major transformation into a royal seat during the twenty-year period when Moravia was ruled by the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus and when the foundations for the future flourishing of Olomouc were laid in the 16th century. Starting in the year 1474 reconstruction firstly transformed both wings of the original mercantile building, increasing their height to two storeys. A significant part of the first floor of the southern wing was taken up by a two-aisled vaulted hall for the town courthouse. On the first floor of the northern wing a newly-built hall known as the 'Publishing Hall' came into being. Both longitudinal wings of the Town Hall were newly connected to the western wing where the town council placed the office of the administration of town property. On its ground floor emerged an externally accessible room for the town scales and the neighbouring shop stalls under the court hall were transformed into an armoury, guard house, prison and torture chamber. The significance of the disciplinary authority of the town government was later in evidence in front of this wing with prominent stocks, placed here at some point around the year 1500 in connection with new orders which were introduced into the kingdom by Vladislav Jagiello.



Late Gothic hall on the first floor of the northern wing of the Town Hall earlier called the 'Publishing Hall'. Originally a public meeting place and reception hall where village serfs would pay homage. Today it serves as the Ceremonial Hall.

The Town Hall presented a more pleasant appearance to the North, where during the period of this late Gothic reconstruction a monumental wall alcove vaulted with a pointed arch and housing an astronomical clock came into existence in close proximity to the Town Hall tower. The first concrete reference to the Olomouc astronomical clock is found in sources at a later point, however, in a humanistic composition by Štěpán Taurin in the year 1519. On the opposite side of the eastern Town Hall wing, attention was focused on the Chapel of St. Jerome on the first floor, completed in the year 1488 and consecrated three years later. The ribbed 'web' vaulting of its nave is made up of irregularly displayed cells and the presbytery juts out from the body of the Town Hall structure in the form of a three-sided oriel window, vaulted with an early circular arch, the first of its kind north of the Danube River. On the exterior the weight of the oriel window rests on a figural console – the torso of a man, supposedly the likeness of the author of the structure. The only part of the Town Hall which evidently was not significantly altered by the late Gothic adaptations was the eastern façade which remained up until the end of the 15th century.

The first recorded year of change in its form is not until the year 1529 when the council chamber was first reconstructed and then newly vaulted. Part of the changes made to the hall was the placement of a Renaissance portal, inspired by the model of the Town Hall chapel of St. Salvatore in Vienna. The crowning touch to this part of the structure became the mannerist loggia, constructed in the year 1591 by the stonemason Hans Jost. In addition to ceremonial entrance into the council chamber, the loggia served for general ceremonial purposes. The symbolic culmination of the second century of existence of the Olomouc Town Hall was the raising in height of the Town Hall tower to its present 75 metres over the years 1601–1607. The roof over the stone gallery was furnished with a typical high helmeted spire with four lower needle spires. The 18th century mainly recorded itself on the history of the Town Hall with the Baroque adaptations to the façade during the 1720s. The following 19th century, however, brought about

Presbytery of the Town Hall chapel of St. Jerome from the year 1488. The architecture of the vaults and the window tracery is reminiscent of the work of Jacob of Lanshut, one of the creators of the Strasbourg Cathedral.

