

On the Development of Czech Gothic Sculpture about 1400

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Albert Kotal has shown us that one of the fundamental conditions for the appearance of the so-called "Beautiful Style" about the year 1400 (which, according to Kotal's own words, can be regarded as the "Czech version" of the International Style) was the synthesis of Parler's sculpture in Prague with native wood-carving, and, especially, with the romantic movement of the eighties of the 14th century. The main representative of this movement, and the artist who contributed most to the formulation of the new style was, according to Kotal, the master of the altar-piece of Třeboň (Wittingau).¹⁾ From Kotal's conclusions we should like to draw attention to one feature of this synthesis — the return to the older type of religious statue of the Middle Ages, which is connected inseparably with the renewed interest in linear calligraphy (also studied in detail by Kotal). This can be seen in wood-carving, if we compare the seated Madonnas of the seventies (where the traditional type of composition has been altered due to the Italianate tendencies of Bohemian book illumination) with such statues of the eighties as the torso of St. John the Evangelist from Třeboň and the Madonna of Kozojedy, or the later works of the St. Vitus Cathedral sculpture workshop. The best known examples of this last group are the figures of the Bohemian saints on the East side of the Old Town bridge-tower in Prague, and they also illustrate the development away from Parler's monumental realism. The growth in religious intensity, expressed by the dialectic tension between subjectivism, advanced realism and sensuality can also be confirmed by the reliefs in the Týn Church tympanum, especially the scene under the Cross.

This trend had already appeared in the seated Madonnas of the seventies and in some panel-paintings, such as the votive panel of Jan Očko of Vlašim. We have tried to show elsewhere the special characteristics of this new subjectivism and its connection with the times. The return to the traditional type of religious statue is expressed in the sculpture of the "Beautiful Style" by the revival of constant typology; the sculptors who formulated the style created several types of Madonnas, Pietas and so on, and any further developments were based on replicas, copies and variants of these prototypes.²⁾ Thus the artists' activities, personal feelings and thoughts moved only in a limited area. This resulted in the suppression of any radical change. Both by the adherence to the traditional type of religious statue, and by the idea of a constant composition of typology, the works produced in the eighties of the 14th century, although progressive, nonetheless returned to the traditions of conventional sculpture.³⁾ It will be necessary to draw attention to this more conventional sculpture — which has so far been overshadowed by major works of art — not only because it probably represents the most extensive production of that time, and is therefore of historical importance, but also because many interesting relationships existed between it and the well-known masterpieces. Through the interpenetration of these great spheres of Bohemian sculpture in the second half of the 14th century, a broad foundation was laid for further native development, which differs from the preceding period in its deeper and more subjective religious trend.

There were two external elements which contributed

